

## The Role of Educational Periodicals in Spreading Western Laboring Education Theory During the Period of the Republic of China

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### Abstract

In the early period of the Republic of China, lots of western educational thoughts were introduced into China. Educational periodicals were the main medium of communication, and have introduced advanced foreign educational theory into China through wide distribution and circulation. It made great contributions to the development of modern education in China. According to the historical data analysis, this article discusses the important role of education periodicals played in the process of spreading laboring education theory in the Republic of China.

**Key words:** Laboring education; Educational periodicals; Scale of communication; Laboring education in primary and secondary schools

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### INTRODUCTION

“The strength of a country, depending on whether it is obstructed or not. If blood is obstructed, people will be sick. And if there is no exchange in academic, we will lag behind comparing with other countries.” “There are many ways to open up, and exchanging by the press is the most important way”, said by Liang Qichao in the article “*The Newspaper Press is Beneficial to China*”. Because of the

traffic inconvenience and information blocking, traditional educational concept had been unable to meet the needs of education development in modern China. In many modern education theories, laboring education theory is the most comprehensive one, and also the most suitable one for Chinese educational field, which is in urgent need for reform at that time. Therefore, in order to change the education situation at that time, the intellectuals who pay close attention to the development of China’s education tried to introduce the concept of laboring education to the Chinese people through various means, such as, inviting foreign educators to visit China, studying abroad directly, writing books and so on. And one of the most important means of communication is the issue of educational periodicals. As a medium of theory exchange between Chinese and foreign laboring education theories, education journals actively participate in and promote the modernization process of China’s education.

### 1. ENLARGING THE SPREADING SCALE OF LABORING EDUCATION

In multiple educational trends of the twentieth century, laboring education theory is the most comprehensive one and universal implementation. In western educational history, since ancient times, the conflicts between divergent ideas are all focused on the opposition between idealism and realism, socialism and individualism. Up to modern times, although there are many attempts to reconcile this contradiction, the attempts all failed at last.

Since the emergence of laboring education, idealism and realism, socialism and individualism are all reconciled. Thus, the opposition of the two ideas gradually tended to unify (Zhang, 1942). During the time when labor education theory spread into China, Many educational journals have participated in the process and promoted it in different degrees. Magazines “*Journal of Education*”

and “*Chinese Education Field*” played important roles in this process with their characteristics of large circulation and wide influence. From 1914, “*Journal of Education*” began to publish the theory of labor education, its teaching methods and its implementation in laboring schools etc. According to the statistics, In “*Journal of Education*”, a person who used “Tin Min” as his pseudonym published laboring education theory for six consecutive editions in the sixth volume in 1914, which described the theory in details. In the 1820s, “*Journal of Education*” began to pay attention to the development and implementation of laboring education across the world. Yang Xianjiang used three issues to publish articles that introduced the implementation of laboring education in Europe, America, the United Kingdom and Germany. At the beginning of 1930s, “*Journal of Education*” and “*Chinese Education Field*” started to shift their attention to how to effectively implement domestic laboring education. “*Chinese Education Field*” also spared no efforts in publishing articles. It published detailed introduction to the implementation and achievements exhibition in Chinese normal colleges and universities within six consecutive editions. They also described the teaching materials, procedures and methods of laboring schools and elementary education system in detail. It provided reliable information for the research of education theory in China. Meanwhile, it also expanded the scale and influence of laboring educational theories. In addition to the “*Journal of Education*” and “*Chinese Education Field*”, other educational journals, which was hosted by the local governments, also played their parts in the spread of laboring education, such as “*Education Journal of Henan*”, “*Education Journal of Fujian*”, “*Education Journal of Jiangxi*”, “*Education Journal of Jiangsu*” etc.. These educational journals set the discussion of educational issues, spreading of western educational theories and educational practice methods guiding as tasks. Therefore, modern scholars in educational field were gathered in one place to speak freely, and benefited through mutual discussion. They have enhanced spreading speed and scale of the laboring education theory in China.

## 2. REFINE THE SPREAD CONTENT OF LABORING EDUCATION THEORY

In order to adapt to the needs of social development, the German educator, Georg·Kerschensteiner, created “Laboring Schools”, to cultivate students’ character, vocational interest, and help students prepare for future careers through the labor practice. “Laboring School” had not only been spread throughout Europe, the United States and Japan, but also attracted the attention of the Chinese educators. For this new trend around the world, Chinese domestic educators held a very cautious attitude. Regard

to the new trend of “Eastward Spread of Western Culture”. Wang Fengjie said:

We must know that the education system can not imitate, but it can come from thinking and practice. Western education cannot be completely copied to China; we must consider China’s domestic conditions, and then make the appropriate choices. So my conclusion is that new educational theory must be guided by science, its theory should have scientific basis and proof, its practice should abide by the scientific methods, and the results should have scientific statistical basis. (Wang, 1928)

In order to adapt to the situation of China, modern education periodicals comply with the model of “discard the dross and select the essential” in the spread process of labor education theory, as an attempt to promote the development of laboring education scientifically in China.

### 2.1 Emphasized in Introducing and Discussing the Origin, Value and Content of Laboring Education Theory

George·Kerschensteiner is a famous German education theorist, education reformer, and one of the founders in the German occupational education; he is also the main representative who advocated national education in western education history. At the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth Century, he devoted himself to study and carried out the work of school education, the theory of national education, reformed elementary schools and supplementary schools, and explored the theoretical research, educational practice. His theory has had a profound influence on education not only in Germany, but also in other countries (Ma, 2009) “*Journal of Education*” introduced his Laboring Education Theory in the early years of the Republic China, it published some articles about “*Keischensteiner’s Educational Doctrine*”, “*the Theory of Laboring Education*”, “*Laboring Education Explanation*” and so on. Li Yune published “*Pestalozzi’s Laboring Education Theory*” in “*Education Journal of Jiangxi*” in 1936, and this article introduced the Swiss educator Pestalozzi’s laboring thought. And the “*Chinese Education Field*” has published the “*Keischensteiner’s doctrine*”, “*Laboring Education Theory and Practice*”, “*Laboring Education and Status of School Organization*” and other articles in the 1930s. They had detailed discussion on the origin, value, scope of implementation and specific practices of laboring education. They summed up the theory gist for the advocacy of national education and industrious doctrine. It is said that this is a good strategy to save modern education. And Keischensteiner’s masterpiece—“*Laboring Schools’ Essence*” was officially published by the commercial press in 1935 (Cui, 2009).

### 2.2 Expound the Promotion and Implementation of Laboring Education in Various Countries

At the end of nineteenth Century, there is a rapid development in industry around western countries. In the educational theory field, the traditional concept of education has been challenged. People think there should

be some new educational concepts that concern more about the needs of the state and society. Keischensteiner's theory of laboring education conforms to the requirements of social development at that time. Starting from the interests of the state, he put forward the idea of citizenship education and laboring schools, in order to achieve the goal of cultivating loyal and useful citizens for state needs in the new era. Along with the change of demand from economic life to school life, western laboring schools were set up based on the concept of Keischensteiner. The combination of education and labor is equivalent to the combination of education and life. Labor is the basis of life, and there is no life without laboring. The combination of life and education, has promoted the development of manual education in school. The background of schools' establishment has some similarity with the background of early Republic of China who was in unrest. Education journals have captured this point in time. "Journal of Education" has issued the "Central Labor Education Situation", "Japanese Labor Movement", "Recent German Labor Education Theory and Labor Schools' Organization" and other articles in the 1920s. These papers expound the implementation of laboring education and laboring schools in other countries. Targeting at the old culture and education from the aspects of thinking and thinking logic, it is a kind of identification to the western advanced culture and education, and it also is a kind of active learning. In 1933, Qi Chun, a laboring education researcher, published "History of Laboring Education" in "Independent Review". The article briefly introduced the historical origin and development of Western labor education, and provides the historical basis for the research of laboring education. With the help of these journals, Chinese people tried to absorb the nutrition of the world's latest educational theory, and explore the connotation of the difference between Chinese and Western Education in the process of various educational thoughts integration. It provides the model for general education to learn how to reform, how to set up the labor course, and how to make it more suitable for modern educational theory.

### **2.3 Highlight the Necessity of the Implementation of Labor Education in China**

In the early Republic of China, social turmoil, domestic trouble and foreign invasion lead to national economy increasingly collapse. China urgently needs to develop economy, promote production, protect people's livelihood, and revive the nation. To achieve these goals, in addition to the development of bourgeois political power, the support of educational development should also be relied on. In 1932, Cao Chu published an article entitled "What Knowledge Should Be Taught in Primary Schools" in "Chinese Education Field". The article pointed out the disadvantages of the primary school education, and proposed what kind of educational knowledge

should be taught in primary schools, including laboring education. "Journal of Education" also published many articles, including "The Implementation of Labor Education", "Introduction of Several Labor Materials", "How to Increase Labor Efficiency" and so on in the late 1930s. Inside them, "The Laboring Life of the Mentally Handicapped Children" involves laboring education for special children. These articles reflect the importance of implementing labor education to the development of China in the society at that time. The general education was required to be productive, living and working, and laboring education is the most suitable to reflect the characteristics of those subjects. Arts and crafts in previous primary and secondary schools are hands-on subject, with skills and practicability, so they had been close to life. But the scope of the teaching content is still relatively narrow, the teaching purpose is short of productive, living and working, so it is not corresponding to the actual life in that period. Keischensteiner's theory of labor education focused on free laboring, personal experience, and thus constitute a precise and practical concept. So as to solve the disadvantages of imbuing with knowledge, and get rid of the diaphragm between school education and the actual life. At the same time, it can cultivate the ability of production. Therefore, the implementation of labor education in China is imperative.

## **3. PROMOTING THE PRACTICES OF LABORING EDUCATION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Modern educational journals are not only the venues for competing educational theories, a tool that was influenced by all kinds of social forces, and it is also an important driving force and indicator of education modernization in China at the same time. As the products of "eastward spread of western culture", educational journals come into being with the appearance of new education system after the Hundred Days of Reform. Since the publication of the "Education World", which was compiled by the Chinese in 1901, till the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, China's modern educational journals have reached more than one thousand kinds. The number of the main provincial educational journals and those established by universities is more than four hundred (Gu, 1992). These educational journals play extremely important roles in promoting the development of primary and secondary education. Any other media and measures cannot substitute it.

### **3.1 Providing Scientific Theoretical Guidance for the Development of Labor Education in Primary and Secondary Schools**

The salient features of the educational journals are the universality, timeliness and frontier. Learning materials

and information which are needed to carry out laboring education in primary and secondary schools can be found in educational journals, that is to say, if people want to learn about the latest research achievements and progress in the field of laboring education at home and abroad, they need to get it through the educational journals. Yang Xianjiang published “*The Current Situation of Laboring Education in Europe and America*” in “*Journal of Education*”, it introduced the Education movement, which involved movements progressed by student workers across Europe and the United States. Then he also published the “*British Labor Education*”, a detailed introduction to the development of the British Labor education across the nineteenth century. He also made a detailed description about accessorial facilities, which was used for increasing the knowledge of workers. In his article “*The Facility of Workshop Education in the United States*”. The researcher Ren Baitao published “*Labor Education in Europe and the United States*” from the aspects of relationship between labor and education. The article also briefly described educators’ attitudes and opinions to the labor education in different countries, and simply described the essence of labor education: a) People should rely on their own strength to do their own errands without other’s help, no matter what kind of trivial things; b) Because children’s nature tends to labor, we should comply with their nature to practice labor, to prevent them of becoming corrupted when they grow up. Laboring education is a kind of mission to accomplish the essence of human being, it starts from the ideal of the society, and aspires to accomplish the spirit of the ideal. There were some other scholars who introduced the development of the labor education in Britain and the United States, from the labor education’s meaning, its importance, and its types etc.. This educational information provides abundant resources for the primary and secondary school education.

### **3.2 Providing Operational Templates for the Practice of Labor Education in Primary and Secondary Schools**

Through the timely study of the latest laboring education theory, the latest educational means and methods, the practitioners in primary and secondary schools start to carry out their laboring practice. These new educational theories, means and methods are mostly spread in the form of publication in educational journals. Ren Baitao in his article “*An Example of the Chinese Language Teaching in the Primary Schools of Berlin*”, introduced labor education in a public elementary school in Berlin, and recorded its subject of teaching concept, methods and management methods. At home, the implementation of the labor education in Hubei Province is relatively better; the school has developed detailed standards, of teaching objectives, categories of homework, or equipment and teaching points. This content was

published in the “*Monthly Education of Hubei*”, which was sponsored by Education Department of Hubei Province, so as to provide reference for other provinces. In addition to the teaching, the Ministry of Education also issued information about exhibition to achieve the communication and offer reference on National Laboring Works in Vocational, primary and secondary schools. These attempts leave extremely important reference function and values for laboring education implementation in primary and secondary schools, and offered operational models.

### **3.3 Guiding for Laboring Education to Sinicize Laboring Education**

Educational journals are important sources for studying laboring education in primary and secondary schools. The implementation of the labor curriculum requires the correct theoretical guidance and scientific methods. All these information needed to be sought from educational journals. The labor subject in China’s schools started from “manual” in 1903, and then changed from “art” to “work”, to “labor” finally. The scope of the course gradually expanded, so did the objectives. The position of Labor Subject in all subjects became more and more important. The significance of the laboring in primary and secondary schools is to develop the habit of working, and achieve the unity of teaching, studying and working. Its value lies in the training of children’s character, so that children can understand the meaning of labor. However, the early implementation period in primary and secondary schools is not very developed. In this regard, “*Education Journal of Jiangxi*” published “*Value of Labor Education and Improvement Strategies*” to explore the reasons: a) It has not been implemented for a long time; b) In primary and secondary education, imitators are much more than inventors in China, no matter in content or method. At the same time, affected by the traditional Elegant Education, the lack of teaching skills, equipment, materials and methods are not appropriate for children’s interests and needs, the society and families do not understand the true value of “labor”, are all reasons for its not advanced implementation. This article also gave the corresponding solutions; it believed that changing people’s attitude to laboring education is the key. The solutions can be explicitly concluded: set labor guidance and teaching meetings, design child-centered teaching materials and methods, pay attention to children’s creativity, make most of use for local materials etc.. (Deng, 1935) Other educational journals were also concerned about the development of labor education in China. For example: “*Journal of Culture and Education*” published “*The Problem of Labor Education in China*”, “*How to Fully Realize the Value of Labor Curriculum*” and so on. These articles have explored how to make laboring education better in China, and guide labor educators to think about how to Sinicize laboring education.

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## CONCLUSION

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According to the view of communication, as a communicator of laboring education theory, educational journals are the first link of propagating chain; it also is the initiator and issuer of communication activities. Therefore, educational periodicals not only determined the existence and development of communication activities of laboring education, but also the quality and quantity of content; it even determined the role and influence in the educational field and society in the period of the Republic of China. At the same time, as an important medium of public communication, educational journals promoted the spreading and practice of western theories by grasping the laboring education's dynamic developments from domestic and international fields; it also promoted the transformation of modern laboring teaching thoughts, content, methods and organization forms. It made great contributions to the development of laboring education in China during the period of the Republic of China. It can be said that the educational periodicals in the Republic

of China has injected fresh blood into the traditional education of the Republic of China, and accelerated the process of educational modernization.

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