

# The Educational Philosophy of Minoru Wada and Chen He-Qin: Two Pioneers in Early Childhood Education in Japan and China

竹 内 通 夫

Michio TAKEUCHI, Ph.D.

With the dawn of the 21st Century, various projects in educational reforms have been raised. However, when it comes to the philosophies promulgated in Early Childhood Education, there are few controversies.

This paper will introduce the notions that have characterized the educational philosophies of Minoru Wada and Chen He-Qin, two pioneers in Early Childhood Education in Japan and China.

Though both of them have exerted much influence on educational researchers, kindergarten and day care center teachers from 1910 until the present, they have been virtually forgotten in the field of Early Childhood Education for many years. I would like to highlight the commonality and differences of their philosophies on education.

## I. Introduction

Minoru Wada, one of the leading preschool education scholars, contributed significantly towards the development of early childhood education in Japan. Of note are his publications listed below. Wada emphasized the developmental and educational meaning of children and main-

tained that preschool education should be based upon the child's developmental needs.

Wada felt that the aim of Early Childhood Education should accentuate a liberal education through free play rather than rigid instruction. Early Childhood Education should be amazing, playful, and contain individualized instruction.

### Minoru Wada: His Career and Contributions (1876-1954)

- 1876 Born in Tokyo, Japan
- 1897 Graduated from the Normal School in Kanagawa Prefecture
- 1904 Elementary school teacher in Kanagawa
- 1906 Associate professor at Tokyo Women's Higher Normal School
- 1908 Published the volume "Aims and Methods of Early Childhood Education" (Youji-kyouiku-Ho) with Goroku Nakamura.
- 1913 Published the volume "Early Childhood Education and Care" (Yoji-hoiku-ho)
- 1915 Established Mejiro Kindergarten in Tokyo and became the director
- 1930 Established Mejiro Kindergarten

- Teachers Training School (presently Tokyo Education Teachers School) in Tokyo and became the principal
- 1932 Published the volume "Scientific Early Childhood Education" (Jikken Hoiku-gaku)
- 1943 Published the volume "Early Childhood Education" (Hoiku-gaku)
- 1954 Died in Tokyo

Chen He-Qin was one of the leading scholars and educators in modern China. He studied at Johns Hopkins University and Columbia University Teachers College in the United States from 1914 to 1919. He was influenced by the educational theory of John Dewey, William Kilpatrick, Harold Rugg and so forth.

After returning home, he became a professor at Nanjing Higher Normal School in 1923 and established a private kindergarten (Nanjing Drum Tower Kindergarten) in 1925. He emphasized the importance of the development of a kindergarten curriculum, teaching materials, educational toys, facilities, and the developmental characteristics of the child in Early Childhood Education.

Chen's main theory of education goes by the nomenclature "Living Education".

**Chen He-Qin: His Career and Contributions**

- 1882 Born in Zhejiang Providence, China
- 1914 Graduated from National Tsinghua University in Beijing and enrolled in John Hopkins University and then Columbia University Teachers College; received a Master's Degree from Columbia University Teachers College
- 1922 Published the book "A Practical Guide to Child Study"
- 1925 Published the books "Child Psycho-

- logy" and "Home Education"
- 1927 Edited the journal "Early Childhood Education"
- 1934-1935 Made study tour of 11 European countries including the U.K., France & Germany
- 1943 Published the volume "Theory and Practice of Living Education"
- 1946 Became principal of the National Normal School of Early Childhood Education
- 1953 Principal of Nanjing Normal School
- 1982 Died from illness

**II. Educational Philosophy**

**A. Wada's Educational Philosophy**

Wada's philosophy reflects the views that are also expressed in the writings of Locke, Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Spencer, Herbart, Groose, Baldwin, Freud Decroly and Mencius (a Chinese Confucian).

His theory of "Yudo-Hoiku" (a liberal education through free play) emphasized the following goals:

- 1) to expand the child's interests in new experiences
- 2) to use profitably "pretend play behavior" of the child
- 3) to use fighting and conflicts among children as educational tools
- 4) to use a child's habitual behavior to foster learning in other areas

Wada studied the educational philosophies of educators from other countries in the early part of the Meiji Period; a time when it was very difficult to obtain books from abroad. Wada based his ideas of education upon the educational ideal of liberalism in Western Europe. He also made much of the child's point of view from the Old Times in Japan and the natural education by child's

spontaneous activities.

This resulted in his philosophy being termed "Naturalism". He also emphasized the importance of the scientific characteristics of Early Childhood Education derived from educational sciences, psychology, and physiology.

#### **B. Chen's Educational Philosophy**

Chen mainly believed the scientific study of Early Childhood Education and development based upon the theories of Dewey and Kilpatrick.

The driving force of their theories are that a child is not "a little adult" but "a whole person" and that a child has unique stages of physical and mental development different from that of an adult.

### **III. The Aims of Early Childhood Education**

#### **A. Wada's Viewpoint**

Wada pointed out that formal discipline focused upon the whole life of the child is the aim of Early Childhood Education. He rejected the notion of the child's life being viewed in separate parts. He also felt that the teacher should view and understand the child as a whole individual in the daily life of the kindergarten.

He emphasized the differences between preschool education and elementary school education. He also advocated the integration of intellectual, moral, and physical education in preschool education.

#### **B. Chen's Viewpoint**

Like Wada, Chen also accentuated the intellectual, moral, and physical development of the child in his theory of Living Education. This theory includes the following three fundamentals:

1) Be a Man

Be a Chinese

Be a Modern Chinese

- 2) Take great nature and great society as the chief sources of knowledge
- 3) Learn by doing, teach through doing, and make improvement in the course of doing

### **IV. Methodological Principles**

#### **A. Wada's Methodology**

Wada classifies the everyday life of the child into two parts. The former part is the passive self-activity; that is sleep, rest, and everyday habitual behavior. The latter is the active self-activity; that is the "play of the child".

Play is the only true spontaneous activity of the child. Play activity is the origins of the physical and mental development in the child's various abilities.

Wada's theory on play development is very similar to Piaget's developmental theory. Wada emphasizes the uniqueness and continuity of each developmental stage and the totality of the development from a newborn child to adulthood.

His teaching method is "leading or guiding the child through free play". This theory has become the mainstream of kindergarten education in the 20th century in Japan.

#### **B. Chen's Methodology**

Chen pointed out the purpose of "Learning by Doing" in contrast with Dewey's "Learning by Doing and Four Steps of Learning" as follows:

- 1) Observation and Experiment
- 2) Extensive Reading and Using References
- 3) Expression and Creation
- 4) Criticism and Research

**V. Child's Play**

**A. Wada's Viewpoint**

Wada perceived child's play as a spontaneous activity enabling children to develop sound bodies and minds. Wada described play as a pleasant feeling or as ecstasy satisfying various interests. Satisfactory feelings derive from interesting play. Freedom was based on pleasant feelings and interests. If a child is forced to play, it is not viewed as play but as a task or as labor.

Play is thus viewed as fostering abilities for social interaction and facilitating the development of artistic, musical, and language expression.

Table 1 below presents Wada's typology of child's play. For various modes of play, Wada emphasized their role in the development of the child's different and integrated abilities; cognitive, social, moral, emotional, and physical. His philosophy of child-centered education based on Yudo-Hoiku was later adopted and elaborated upon by Sozo Kurahashi.

**TABLE 1 Wada's Classification on Children's Play**

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- 1) Experienced Play
    - a. Intuitive play (observation, experimentation, appreciation, collaboration)
    - b. Reflective play (listening to a story)

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  - 2) Imitative and Expressive Play
    - a. Imitative play
    - b. Constructive play

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  - 3) Exercising and Expressive Play
    - a. Musical play (songs, dances)
    - b. technical play (handicrafts, drawing,

- hand play)
- c. Cognitive play (storytelling, discussions, riddles, and twenty questions)
- d. Play with little labor (natural collection, fishing, gardening, breeding of insects, fish, birds, and block constructions)
- e. Physical play (tag, jogging, jumping, sumo wrestling, swinging, seesawing, and chin ups)

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**B. Chen's Viewpoint**

Chen states that the child likes "play" very much as an innate attribute, this is very similar to Wada's theory of play. Chen criticized most people and educators who regarded child's play as a trick or a practical joke.

However, child's play needs the assistance and encouragement from the teacher's aides-"the Assistant Teacher". Chen emphasizes the following four educational values:

- 1) Physical development
- 2) Brain activity
- 3) Rest
- 4) Fostering an individual's character as a nation

**VI. On the Curriculum**

**A. Wada's Theory**

Wada's curriculum theory is based upon child's play in kindergarten life, so he stresses a non-structured and flexible curriculum. The child is not forced to learn his task, but learns it through free play.

The main characteristics of the curriculum is that it be fluid and flexible to cope with the social circumstances, the seasons, the group make up of the class and so forth. Autonomy and creativity blossoms

and matures through "free play".

### B. Chen's Theory

Chen learned the Project Method from Kilpatrick. It derived from the four seasons, the natural environment, home and social life. His curriculum is based upon the child's experiences, the child's psychological development and the child's daily life. The theory is also very similar to Wada's.

## VII. Conclusion

### A. Wada's Theory

The innovative educational theory of Wada was not so valued by his contemporaries. However, his theory of a liberal education through free play (yudo-hoiku) has become the mainstream of educational theory, curriculum development, and teaching methods in the Japanese pre-school education after World War II.

Wada published his theory of "liberal education through free play" more than 20 years before those of Sozo Kurahashi. Furthermore, one main point of Wada's theory was incorporated into Article 1 and 77 of the School Education Law just after World War II in 1947.

That point was Wada's emphasis on the independency of kindergarten education as an educational institution, not as a compensatory institution of home education. This point is also different from Kurahashi's theory.

### B. Chen's Theory

Chen's theory is summarized as education through free play like Wada's theory. Perhaps they were not acquainted with each other.

However, both of these pioneers in Japanese and Chinese Early Childhood

Education based their theories upon a child-centered education theory under the hardships of World War I and World War II.

Wada created his educational theory and adapted it to the child and preschool education in Japan. Chen also identified his theory and applied it to the child and pre-school education in modern China.

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Michio TAKEUCHI, Ph.D.  
Professor of Graduate School of Human  
Ecology and School of Human Sciences,  
Kinjo Gakuin University, Japan  
(Address)

Michio TAKEUCHI  
C/O KINJO GAKUIN UNIVERSITY  
2-1723 OMORI, MORIYAMA, NAGOYA  
463-8521 JAPAN  
E-mail; takeuchi@kinjo-u.ac.jp