

The Dissemination and Influence of Paulo Freire's Educational Philosophy in China

A disseminação e influência da filosofia educacional de Paulo Freire na China



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ABSTRACT:

In the 1980s, a Chinese scholar pursuing overseas studies in Chile was attracted to Paulo Freire's educational philosophy when reading his works through graduate courses and thereafter became an admirer of Freire. In 1997, during his academic visit to Mexico, the scholar attended Paulo Freire's memorial service after his passing. The profound admiration displayed by Latin American scholars toward Freire at this event profoundly touched him, igniting his passion to disseminate Freire's educational philosophy in China and become a propagator of his educational ideology. Ever since then, the Chinese scholar has introduced Paulo Freire's educational thought and concepts to Chinese educators by publishing books and academic articles. He has disseminated Freire's ideas on school education reform through classroom instruction at teacher education universities and in-service training for primary and secondary school teachers and administrators. Furthermore, by engaging in national curriculum reforms, he has facilitated the integration of Freire's curriculum and instructional ideas into the curriculum and instructional reforms in Chinese primary and secondary schools. From an admirer of Paulo Freire to a propagator of his educational ideas, the scholar himself constitutes a testament to the fact that Freire's educational philosophy has been spread in China and will continue to exert an influence on the evolution and transformation of China's education.

KEYWORDS:

Paulo Freire, Freire in China, dissemination of Freire's philosophy, Freire's influence

RESUMO:

Na década de 1980, um acadêmico chinês que realizava estudos no exterior no Chile foi atraído pela filosofia educacional de Paulo Freire ao ler suas obras em seus cursos de pós-graduação e, posteriormente, tornou-se fã de Freire. Em 1997, durante sua visita acadêmica ao México, o acadêmico compareceu ao serviço memorial de Paulo Freire após seu falecimento. A profunda admiração demonstrada por acadêmicos latino-americanos por Freire neste evento o tocou profundamente, acendendo sua paixão por disseminar a filosofia educacional de Freire na China e se tornar um propagador de sua ideologia educacional. Desde então, o acadêmico chinês tem apresentado os pensamentos e conceitos educacionais de Paulo Freire a educadores chineses por meio da publicação de livros e artigos acadêmicos. Ele disseminou as ideias de Freire sobre a reforma da educação escolar por meio de aulas em universidades de formação de professores e treinamento em serviço para professores e administradores do ensino primário e secundário. Além disso, ao se envolver em reformas curriculares nacionais, ele facilitou a integração do currículo e das ideias instrucionais de Freire ao currículo e às reformas educacionais nas escolas chinesas de ensino fundamental e médio. De fã de Paulo Freire a propagador de suas ideias educacionais, o próprio acadêmico constitui uma prova de que a filosofia educacional de Freire foi difundida na China e continuará a exercer influência na evolução e transformação da educação chinesa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Paulo Freire, Freire na China, disseminação da filosofia de Freire, influência de Freire.

1. FROM A FAN OF FREIRE TO A PROPAGATOR OF HIS EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

1.1. Becoming a fan of Freire in the 1980s

Although Paulo Freire had already become a world-renowned educator in the 1960s and 1970s, he was not well known in China at that time. In 1986, a Chinese scholar (a professor from the Institute of International and Comparative Education at East China Normal University in Shanghai) received a scholarship under the Chile-China Cultural Exchange Program to study in Chile. While pursuing his graduate studies there, he read Freire's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and was immediately captivated by Freire's profound thoughts. Hence, he developed a great interest in Freire's educational theories and practices.

Unlike the pedagogy taught in Chinese universities, Paulo Freire, in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, advocated educational theories and a pedagogy tailored for the oppressed, with the goal of fostering critical consciousness. From a cultural anthropological standpoint, he delved into the relationship between education and awareness, emphasizing that education should be linked to human conscientization. Beginning with literacy education, he emphasized the integration of education with social reality, arguing that education is not merely to *learn the word*, but more importantly, to *learn the world*. He proposed a teaching method based on situational dialogue, inspiring students to comprehend and transform the society. Freire's educational ideas profoundly captivated the Chinese scholar, who became a fan of his work.

As we all know, China's reform and opening-up policy started in the 1980s. Prior to that, China had limited knowledge of foreign countries (apart from the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other socialist countries), and even less knowledge of distant Latin American countries.

After the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, it began to quickly build a socialist country and took the Soviet Union as its long-term model for development. However, in the 1960s, tensions arose in Sino-Soviet relations. As a result, the Chinese government began to shift its focus towards the development of Western capitalist countries. In 1964, the State Council of China instructed key universities to establish research institutions to study foreign affairs and approved the establishment of Foreign Education Research Institute (later renamed the "Institute of International and Comparative Education") at East China Normal University. Unfortunately, just over a year after the establishment of these research institutions, the *Cultural Revolution* erupted in 1966, bringing research on foreign education to a halt. Following the end of the decade-long *Cultural Revolution* and subsequent restructuring, the original foreign research institutions were reinstated. From the 1980s onwards, China entered a period of reform and opening, during which it intensified its efforts to understand and study foreign issues, thereby promoting the development of research on foreign education.

Shanghai is the largest city in China. Since the 1840s, it has served as a port open to foreign trade and has gradually developed into the most prosperous port, as well as an economic and financial center in the Far East, earning its reputation as an international metropolis in Asia. Shanghai's unique geographical location and cultural traits have made it a pivotal city in China for introducing and integrating foreign ideas and cultures, facilitating exchanges between the East and the West. Owing to Shanghai's historical tradition of early opening-up and its high level of internationalization, the Institute of International and Comparative Education at East China Normal University has, from the very beginning, undertaken the important task of researching education in Western European and North American countries, with a focus on understanding, learning from, and introducing advanced educational concepts and practices from developed nations. Initially, the research focused on six developed countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Soviet Union (later Russia), and Japan. Subsequently, the scope of research expanded to include Australia, Canada, and the Nordic countries. It was not until the 1990s that the institute began to focus on education research in developing countries.

The study of education in Latin American countries, among other developing nations, represents a new domain in China's comparative education research. Since the 1990s, Chinese researchers in comparative education have come to recognize that there are many aspects of education in developing countries that can offer valuable lessons and inspirations for China, which is also a developing country. As a result, they have begun to intensify their research efforts on education in developing countries.

Almost all researchers at the Institute of International and Comparative Education at East China Normal University have overseas study experiences and are proficient in one or two foreign languages, such as English, German, French, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish. Zhicheng Huang, a researcher who masters Spanish (having graduated from Shanghai International Studies University with a degree in Spanish Language and Literature), naturally assumed the responsibility of researching education in Latin American countries. Professor Huang has studied at the University of Chile for three years in the 1980s, served as a visiting scholar at the National Autonomous University of Mexico for one year in the 1990s, and was a senior visiting scholar at the Autonomous University of Madrid in Spain for one year in 2005. While studying in Chile, Huang delved into the major works of Paulo Freire as part of his curriculum. Freire's ideas and theories made a deep impression on him, sparking his interest in further researching Freire's educational philosophy.

Professor Huang Zhicheng's visit to the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1997 coincided with the passing of Paulo Freire. The university held a grand memorial ceremony to honor Freire. Professor Huang attended the event and was deeply moved by the admiration and respect expressed by the Mexican educational community and educational scholars from other Latin American countries towards Freire. The atmosphere of the ceremony was solemn, with a large portrait of Freire, featuring his distinctive beard, hanging on the backdrop. As speakers recalled their memories, they frequently turned to gaze at Freire's portrait, sometimes as if engaging in an intimate conversation

with him, and other times as if passionately pledging their commitment to his ideas. Their devotion was truly touching (ZHICHENG, 2003, p. 227).

What was it that stirred such emotion in Latin American scholars? What was the source of Freire's charm? Professor Zhicheng Huang began collecting data and conducting research in Mexico, initiating a systematic study of Freire's ideas, theories, and practices. He subsequently introduced Freire to China, effectively promoting the dissemination of Freire's educational thoughts in the country. This introduction allowed Chinese educators to become familiar with Freire and his educational philosophy, which in turn has played a significant role in promoting China's educational reform and development.

1.2 The dissemination of Freire's philosophy in China

After the 1990s, Freire's thoughts and ideas continued to spread in China, primarily through three channels:

- I. Publication of books and academic papers, making Freire's educational philosophy accessible to a wider audience for study and understanding;
- II. University lectures and in-service training for primary and secondary school teachers and administrators, spreading Freire's ideas on school reform;
- III. Curriculum reform, facilitating the application of Freire's liberationist educational philosophy in the reform of primary and secondary school curricula.

1.2.1 Publication of books and academic papers

In China, although there were occasional articles introducing Freire prior to the 1990s, it was Professor Zhicheng Huang, from the Institute of International and Comparative Education at East China Normal University who first undertook a comprehensive and systematic study of Freire.

In 1997, Zhicheng Huang authored four articles on Freire which were published in the *Foreign Education* journal by East China Normal University (this journal is one of the premier academic publications on foreign education in China and is now renamed *Global Education*).

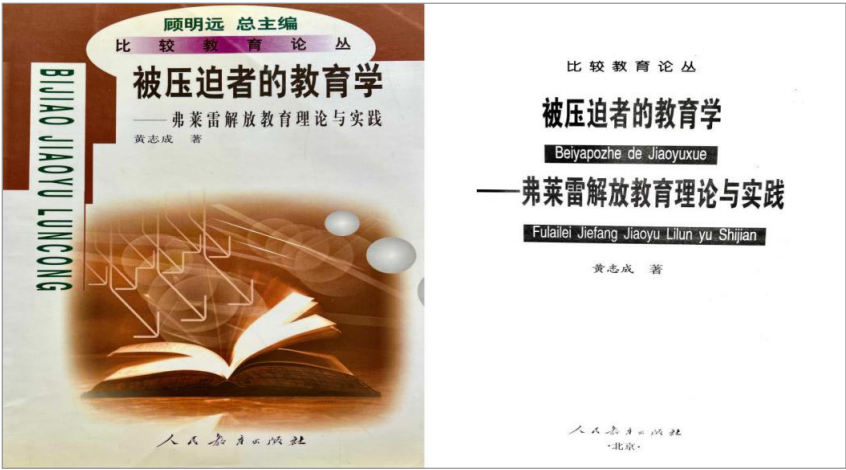
The titles of these four articles are:

- *The Background of Paulo Freire's Educational Philosophy*, Foreign Education, Volume 3, 1997;
- *Paulo Freire's Early Liberation Education Practices in Brazil*, Foreign Education, Volume 4, 1997;
- *Paulo Freire's Theory of Liberation Education*, Foreign Education, Volume 5, 1997;
- *Paulo Freire's Educational Practices in Africa and Recent Developments*, Foreign Education, Volume 6, 1997.

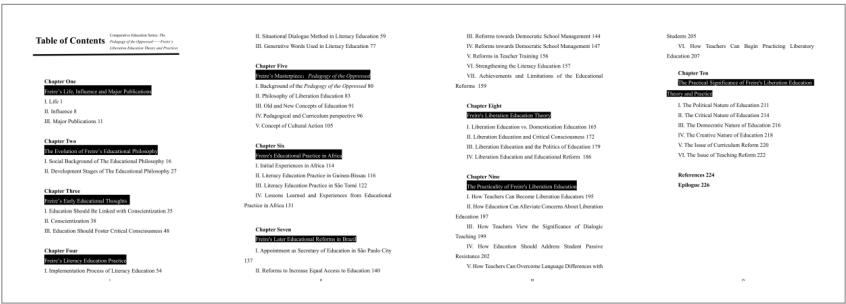
Since 2003, Professor Zhicheng Huang has published five books on Paulo Freire in China:

In 2003, Professor Zhicheng Huang published the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed – Freire's Liberation Education Theory and Practice* (Beijing, People's Education Press). This was the earliest and groundbreaking work in China on the study of Freire's educational philosophy and practices.

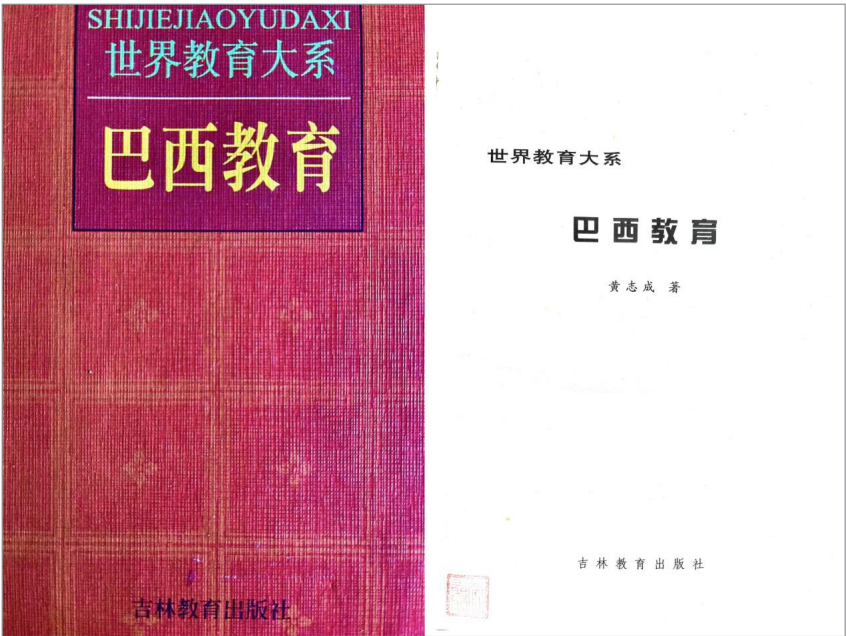
Source: The cover of the book scanned by the author and used with permission.



The table of contents of the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: Freire's Liberation Education Theory and Practice*, authored by Zhicheng Huang (translated from Chinese). **Source:** Scanned by the author and used with permission.



In his published books, Professor Zhicheng Wang devoted chapters to Paulo Freire's educational theories, i.e. "The Theory and Practice of Freire's Education", Chapter 11 in the book *Education in Brazil* (Jilin Education Press, 2000). Source: The cover of the book scanned by the author and used with permission.



The table of contents of the book *Brazil Education*, published by Professor Zhicheng Huang (translated from Chinese). **Source:** Image provided by the author and used with permission.



FIGURA 5.

"Thoughts and Trends in Liberation Education", Chapter 12, in the book *The Trajectory of Western Educational Thoughts: An Overview of International Educational Trends*, edited by Zhicheng Huang (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2008). Source: The cover of the book and Chapter 12 provided by the author and used with permission.

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"Liberation Education", Chapter 7, in *New Thoughts and Trends of International Education*, edited by Zhicheng Huang (Shanghai: Shanghai Educational Publishing House, 2009). Source: Image provided by the author and used with permission.

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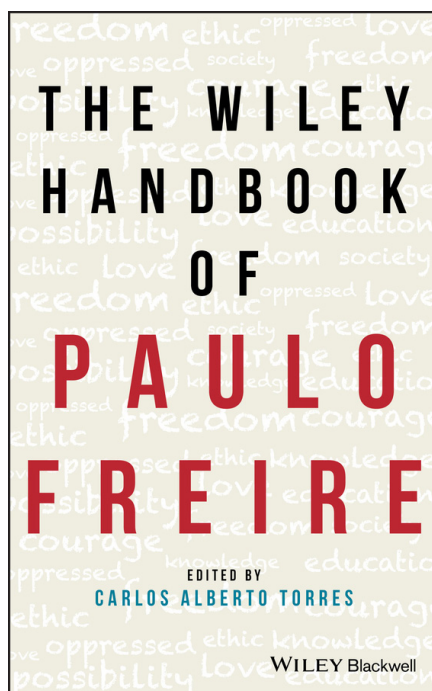
FIGURA 7.

"Thoughts and Trends of Liberation Education" (Chapter 9) in the book *A Critique of Contemporary Educational Thoughts and Trends*, compiled by the Critique of Contemporary Educational Trends Compilation Group (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2021). Source: Image provided by the author and used with permission.

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FIGURA 8.

In addition, Professor Zhicheng Huang wrote Chapter 10, "Paulo Freire in China", for the book *The Wiley Handbook of Paulo Freire*, edited by Professor Carlos Alberto Torres. Source: Image provided by the author and used with permission.



Professor Zhicheng Huang has also published several academic papers on Paulo Freire in varied Chinese journals and magazines:

- *Freire's Dialogic Teaching*, Global Education, Volume 6, 2001.
- *The Construction of Freire's Liberation Education Curriculum*, Global Education, Volume 2, 2003.
- *A Curriculum Constructed through Interdisciplinary Approaches with Generative Themes: Freire's New Interdisciplinary Curriculum Plan*, Global Education, Volume 3, 2003.
- *On the Practical Significance of Freire's Liberation Education Theory*, Studies in Foreign Education, Volume 7, 2003.
- *Liberation Education: The Path of Education in Latin America*, Ethnic Education of China, Volume 3, 2005.

It can be said that Professor Zhicheng Huang from East China Normal University has played a significant role in introducing and disseminating Paulo Freire's philosophy in China. Through his published research papers and books, his instruction of graduate students and training of in-service teachers, and his participation in academic conferences both domestically and internationally, including those held in Shanghai, Professor Huang has greatly expanded the influence of Freire's thought in China.

To date, there have been 2 books published in China dedicated solely to the study of Paulo Freire, 3 Chinese translations of Freire's original works, 5 books that include a chapter on Freire's ideas, 2 doctoral dissertations and 31 master's theses on the research of Freire, and 189 articles related to Freire in various academic journals. Furthermore, numerous articles mentioning

Freire have been published in various Chinese magazines, the exact number of which is difficult to tally. This clearly indicates that Freire's ideas have been widely disseminated and accepted in China.

1.2.2 Course arrangement and teacher training

East China Normal University has traditionally been an institution dedicated to cultivating teachers, engaging not only in pre-service teacher education but also in-service teacher training. Additionally, it houses the *National Training Center for Secondary School Principals* under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

Freire's ideas have been widely disseminated among graduate students and in teacher training programs through the regular graduate course *International Trends in Education* offered annually at the university, and the in-service training course *Thoughts and Trends of Liberation Education* tailored for teachers and principals.

1.2.3 Domestic and international conferences

In 2015, the conference *The First International Conference on Critical Pedagogy* was held by Northeast Normal University in Changchun, China. At the conference, Professor Zhicheng Huang presented a report entitled "The Practical Implications of Freire's Critical Pedagogy for the Educational Reform in China".

FIGURA 9/10.

Professor Zhicheng Huang attending the conference "The First International Conference on Critical Pedagogy" held by Northeast Normal University in China in 2015. Source: Images provided by Huang Zhicheng.



In 2016, Professor Zhicheng Huang attended the conference “International Conference on Comparative Education in the 21st Century” held in Mexico. At the conference, Professor Huang delivered a presentation entitled “The Achievements of Shanghai’s Educational Reform”, in which he explored the impact of Freire’s dialogic education and generative thematic curriculum on Shanghai’s educational reform.

FIGURA 11/12.

In 2016, Professor Zhicheng Huang participated in the “International Conference on Comparative Education in the 21st Century” held by the McLaren Institute of Critical Pedagogy (Instituto McLaren de Pedagogía Crítica in Ensenada), Mexico. **Source:** Images provided by Huang Zhicheng.



2. THE INFLUENCE OF FREIRE ON CHINA’S EDUCATIONAL REFORM

After Freire’s educational thought were introduced and disseminated in China, their influence has steadily grown. The impact of Freire’s ideas on China’s educational reform is mainly manifested in three aspects:

- I. The influence on educational thought;
- II. The influence on curriculum reform;
- III. The influence on teaching reform.

2.1 The influence on educational thoughts

China has a history of 5,000 years and a long-standing tradition in education. Traditional Chinese educational ideas are deeply ingrained. Even today, Confucius’ educational philosophy still exerts a profound influence on modern Chinese education.

China possesses many excellent educational traditions, yet there are also some shortcomings in its traditional education system. Throughout the process of educational reform in China, continuous efforts have been made to eliminate these defects, with “exam-focused education” being the most significant one. This approach to education prioritizes exams, where teachers teach and students learn solely for the purpose of passing exams, and the number of students admitted to key universities is regarded as the standard for measuring educational quality.

Under China’s one-child policy which allows only one child per family, parents of Chinese students all place great hopes on their only child attending

college, and ideally, a top-tier university. The sole purpose of students' studying becomes to enter reputable primary and secondary schools, and ultimately, to gain admission to key national universities. As such, competition among students starts from elementary school. From an early age, on top of their school studies, parents also insist that their children attend various extra tutorial classes after school and on weekends. As a result, the learning burden on students is exceedingly heavy.

In fact, teachers mainly impart bookish knowledge stipulated in the curriculum syllabus in the classroom, and much of what students learn is also confined to this syllabus-prescribed content. Exams predominantly assess this type of knowledge that relies on rote memorization. Schools tend to prioritize the main subjects that are crucial for further studies (such as math, Chinese, and foreign languages), while neglecting other subjects. This approach is not conducive to students' overall development, nor does it facilitate the cultivation of their independent thinking or critical thinking skills.

Paulo Freire's educational philosophy is profound and extensive, with many viewpoints that are highly worthy of consideration in China. Freire advocated that education should aim to foster critical consciousness. He believed that education should relate to liberation and the cultivation of critical consciousness. Freire revealed to the world the nature of traditional education under the dominance of mainstream culture in Brazil at that time. He argued that traditional education is a form of domestication, designed to shape individuals into conformity with the existing system and culture, rendering them devoid of critical consciousness and creativity (TORRES, 1978, pp. 114-119). Moreover, Freire criticized the concept of "banking education" and "lecture-based teaching" in traditional education and proposed instead "liberation education" and "dialogic teaching" approaches (FREIRE, 1970, p.73). Freire's educational thoughts have prompted Chinese educational scholars to rethink and critique traditional education.

In China's long-term education process, a fundamental feature of school education has been the emphasis on imparting bookish knowledge. Teachers serve as the primary conveyors of knowledge, while students passively receive it. Academic outcomes are judged solely by exam scores, resulting in an education system that is exam-oriented. This form of education discourages students from questioning the knowledge imparted by their teachers and fails to nurture their critical thinking. Traditional teaching primarily relies on the teacher-centered lecture method, where teachers dominate the classroom without considering the varied learning styles of individual students. The situation of education in China, as vividly portrayed by Paulo Freire, is one where "teachers are the subjects and students are the objects. There is no dialogue or interaction between teachers and students. This type of education is akin to a banking system, where students are the accounts and teachers are the depositors. The more deposits (knowledge) are made into students' accounts, the less their critical consciousness develops". (*Ibid.*, p. 74)

Examining traditional Chinese education through the lens of Paulo Freire's liberation education has aroused extensive reflection and discussion among

Chinese teachers. The ability to think critically is now widely recognized as a fundamental skill in the international education community in the 21st century. Despite Chinese students repeated top performances in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), they will lack the capacity for sustained development if they do not possess critical consciousness and innovative spirit. In the outline for the development of Chinese education following the educational reforms, cultivating critical thinking has been included as one of the essential abilities for students.

The debate on whether school education should focus on teachers or students continues. Internationally, student-centered education is more prevalent nowadays, whereas traditional Chinese education has been teacher-centered. Paulo Freire, however, believed that both teachers and students are subjects, with the world being the object that needs to be understood and transformed (*Ibid.*, p. 75). This viewpoint of Freire has made Chinese teachers realize that the relationship between teachers and students should be equal in the teaching process, and that attention should be paid to the significance of students' subjectivity in learning. Consequently, the concept of "dual subjects" has gradually taken shape, which holds that both teachers and students are subjects in the school teaching process. However, within this dual-subject teaching approach, Chinese teachers still emphasize the importance of the teachers' guiding role.

2.2 The influence on curriculum reform

Since 2000, China has undertaken a new round of curriculum reform. Previously, all school curricula in China were uniformly arranged and developed by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, with one-size-fits-all textbooks used nationwide, without considering for diverse conditions of different regions and schools.

To accommodate the varying contexts of different regions and schools, the new curriculum reform policy has redefined the curricula for primary and secondary schools nationwide into three levels: national, local, and school-based. The national curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education with unified standards nationwide. The local curriculum is formulated by each province based on its unique characteristics. And the school-based curriculum is developed by each school according to its own specific conditions. The aim of this curriculum reform is to decentralize the power of curriculum development to better suit and benefit the diverse situations of different regions and schools.

In the process of developing school-based curricula, the concept of the "generative theme" (Tema generator) put forward by Paulo Freire has gained appreciation among Chinese teachers. Freire argues that educational content originates from the real-world environment in which people live, and curriculum content can be built upon this foundation. The design of educational curriculum content should start from situations that are current, realistic, concrete, and reflective of people's aspirations. These situations are then presented as problems to individuals, challenging them and prompting them to respond (*Ibid.*, pp. 108–109).

In their initial foray into designing their own school curricula, many schools in China have drawn inspiration from international cases, including Paulo Freire's idea of the generative theme. The development of school-based curricula in numerous Chinese schools is primarily grounded in the traditions and unique features of the local school, as well as the characteristics of the students. The curriculum content is structured around interdisciplinary generative themes, resulting in distinctive and tailored school-based curricula that cater to the varied developmental needs of students. The application of generative themes in developing curriculum content has become widespread in Chinese schools, marking a notable feature of China's curriculum reform.

2.3 The influence on teaching reform

Influenced by traditional education, teaching in China has long centered around teacher-led instruction. When Paulo Freire's "dialogic teaching" approach was introduced to China, it coincided with a period of major educational reform. The innovative ideas and approaches of "dialogic teaching" quickly captured the attention and sparked deep reflection within the Chinese education community.

Freire's dialogic teaching is conducted through a method of equal exchange between teachers and students. It is a two-way communication between teachers and students, rather than a simple one-way instruction from teachers to students. Dialogic teaching embodies the dissemination of a democratic spirit, which helps cultivate students' critical consciousness and innovative spirit. It emphasizes question posing, dialogues, and interaction, highlighting an educational value orientation: democracy and equality. Questions lead to thinking, thinking leads to dialogue, dialogue leads to interaction, and interaction leads to cooperation. Only through effective cooperation between teachers and students can the task of teaching be accomplished.

The fundamental distinction between the lecture-based teaching in traditional education and the dialogic teaching in liberation education lies in the fact that the former establishes the teacher's authority by imparting fixed knowledge, whereas the latter encourages teachers and students to engage in discussion, learn together, and collectively comprehend, reveal, critique, and transform the real world (FREIRE & SHOR, 1987, pp. 99–108).

In the effort to reform the traditional lecture-based teaching method, Chinese schools have primarily adopted Freire's dialogic teaching approach. This approach, characterized by democracy, equality, mutual interaction, and shared inspiration, has been widely accepted by Chinese teachers and extensively applied in the teaching, yielding positive results.

3. FREIRE'S EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY WILL CONTINUE TO INFLUENCE CHINA IN THE FUTURE

Freire's life was a life of struggle, devoted to the ideal of a democratic society and education for the broad masses. As Freire himself put it, "I have never ceased to fight, and wherever I may be, I will dedicate myself to the battle for democracy and education for the people." (Freire, 1993, p. 140)

Freire's life was remarkable and unpretentious. When asked to evaluate his own life, Freire said frankly, "I believe that after I pass away, I can be remembered as this: Paulo Freire was a man who lived. He understood life and human existence because he possessed love and a pursuit of knowledge. Paulo Freire lived, loved, and constantly explored. Because of this, he was a man with a strong sense of curiosity. This is how I hope my life will be remembered, even if all my educational writings cease to attract people's attention" (*Ibid.*, p. 136).

Despite the distance between Freire's homeland of Brazil and China, and the fact that Freire never set foot in China during his lifetime, his educational thought has nevertheless made its way to China and received warm welcome and keen interest from the Chinese educational community. Chinese scholars have carried out foundational research on Freire's educational ideas and theories, publishing a range of articles and books on the topic. Chinese schools have also experimented with some of the curriculum and teaching methods inspired by Freire's educational philosophy, achieving remarkable results.

In the future, Freire's educational philosophy will continue to influence educational reform and development in China, as the *Center for Research on Paulo Freire* was established by the Institute of International and Comparative Education at East China Normal University on September 19, 2019, marking the 100th anniversary of Paulo Freire's birth. Professor Zhicheng Huang from the Institute on International and Comparative Education serves as the director of the Center. Currently, it has over 10 researchers from different universities.

This is the first academic institution in China solely dedicated to the study of Paulo Freire. The mission of the Center is to explore Freire's philosophy, theories, and practices, to advance educational reform in China by leveraging Freire's ideas and theories, and to facilitate the exchange of experiences and research outcomes with scholars and educators worldwide.

The Center has now forged connections with several "Paulo Freire Institutes" overseas. Specifically, it has established a collaborative research partnership with the Paulo Freire Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, and invited Professor Carlos Alberto Torres, the director of that institute, to serve as the honorary director of the Paulo Freire Research Center at the Institute of International and Comparative Education, East China Normal University. Additionally, through the educational counselor at the Chinese Embassy in Brazil, the Center established contact with the first Paulo Freire Institute founded in

Brazil. It has also connected with Professor José Eustáquio Romão, Secretary-General of the World Council of Paulo Freire Institutes (Consejo Mundial de los Institutos Paulo Freire), who has invited our Center to participate in the Council's of Paulo Freire Institutes.

In the era of modern information networks, the speed, timeliness, and impact of information dissemination have exceeded people's imagination. Especially amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, with restrictions on gatherings and in-person meetings due to the contagious virus, people's communication has not been hindered. Thanks to the advanced internet technology, online meetings have become a common practice. Despite the inability to hold offline meetings during the pandemic, online meetings have proliferated.

During the three-year pandemic period, the Center for Research on Paulo Freire at the Institute of International and Comparative Education of East China Normal University participated in several international online seminars on Paulo Freire, for example:

1. In October 2021, it participated in the International Conference for the 100th Anniversary of Paulo Freire's Birth, held online by the Pedagogical University of Colombia (Universidad de Pedagogía de Colombia). Professor Zhicheng Huang was invited as a keynote speaker and delivered a presentation entitled "Paulo Freire in China".

FIGURA 13.

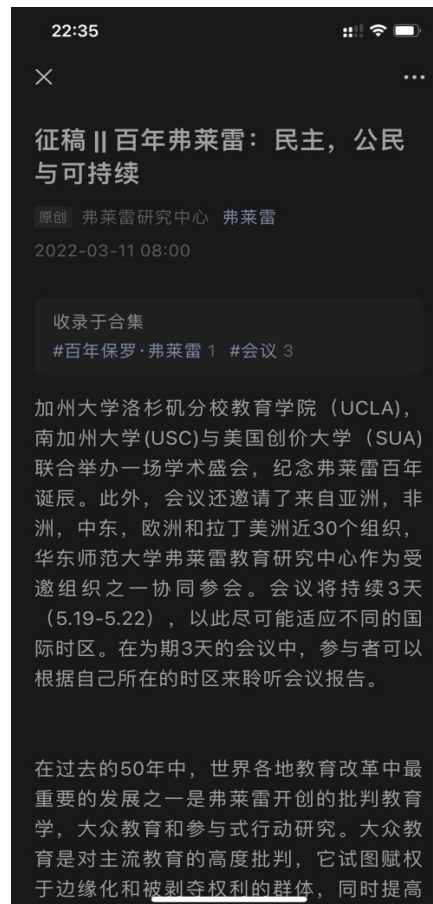
In October 2021, Professor Zhicheng Huang was invited to participate online in the International Conference for the 100th Anniversary of Paulo Freire's Birth, organized by the Pedagogical University of Colombia (Universidad Pedagógica de Colombia). **Source:** Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



2. In May 2022, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), along with several other institutions in the United States, co-hosted the *International Conference for the 100th Anniversary of Paulo Freire's Birth: Democracy, Citizenship, and Sustainability*. The conference welcomed participants from nearly 30 organizations across Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. The Center for Research on Paulo Freire at East China Normal University was among the invited entities and participated online. Six members from the Center formed a sub-session, where they exchanged presentations and insights with peers from around the world.

FIGURA 14.

In May 2022, the Center for Research on Paulo Freire of East China Normal University was invited to participate in the conference online. Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



3. In November 2022, upon invitation from the PhD program at the *College of Education*, Pennsylvania State University in the United States, Professor Zhicheng Huang delivered an online lecture to U.S doctoral students on the topic *The Impact of Paulo Freire on Chinese Education*.
4. In March 2023, Professor Zhicheng Huang attended the *International Conference on Basic Education between Brazil and China*, held online jointly organized by the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil) and Shanghai University. One of the key themes was “Paulo Freire’s Educational Philosophy and Its Influence Worldwide”. Professor Zhicheng Huang delivered a presentation entitled “Paulo Freire’s Educational Philosophy and Its Impact in China”.
5. V. In May 2023, the online conference titled *Dialogue: Paulo Freire and Tao Xingzhi – Comparing Their Educational Philosophies* was co-organized by the Paulo Freire Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the Center for Research on Paulo Freire at the Institute of International and Comparative Education, East China Normal University. Professor Zhicheng Huang gave a presentation entitled “A Comparison of Paulo Freire’s and Tao Xingzhi’s Educational Philosophies”, which, for the first time, drew parallels between Paulo Freire’s ideas on popular education in Brazil and the educational ideas of Tao Xingzhi, a Chinese educator and student of the renowned

American educator John Dewey, who promoted “education for the common people” in China during the 1920s to 1940s.

FIGURA 15.

In May 2023, Professor Zhicheng Huang participated online in a conference comparing the educational thoughts of Paulo Freire and Tao Xingzhi. Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.

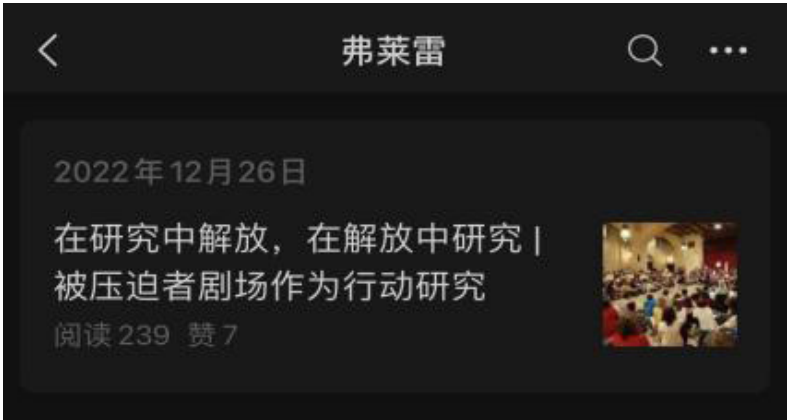


Moreover, the future influence of Paulo Freire in China is not confined to the field of education. It has extended to other disciplines as well. An increasing number of academic fields, such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, literature, ecology, and even the theatrical arts, have begun to engage to and draw upon Freire’s ideas to varying degrees.

Inspired by Paulo Freire’s concept of cultural action, Chinese theater practitioners have established people’s theaters and “theaters for the oppressed”, where performances are integrated with everyday life. Some even encourage members of the public to take the stage and perform their own stories, giving a voice to the underprivileged and advocating for social change.

FIGURA 16.

Drama performers have established the “Theater of the Oppressed”. Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



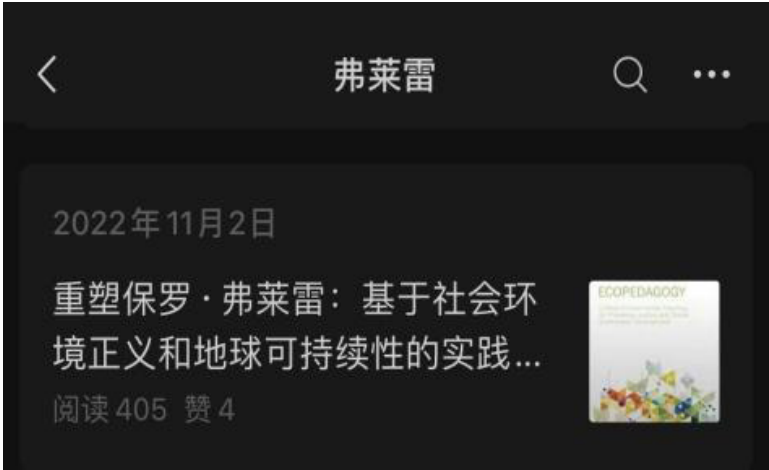
communities. For instance, certain writers voluntarily organize writing workshops for migrant workers, encouraging them to record their personal experiences and awaken their sense of self-awareness and critical thinking.

FIGURA 17.
The practice of writers holding adult writing classes for grassroots migrant workers. Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



In addition, scholars from various academic fields have interpreted and analyzed Paulo Freire’s ideas from diverse perspectives. For instance, ecologists have related Freire’s thought to socio-ecological systems and sustainable development in their research.

FIGURA 18.
Exploring the connection between Paulo Freire's philosophy, the social environment, and sustainable development. Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



With the widespread use of WeChat on smartphones, communication through the app has become a part of daily work. The *Center for Research on Paulo Freire* at East China Normal University has established a WeChat group and organizes several activities through it, including a weekly “Paulo Freire Reading Club.”

FIGURA 19.
Organizing the weekly Paulo Freire book club through a WeChat group on mobile phones.
Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



In addition, the Center for Research on Paulo Freire is preparing to launch an online course on critical pedagogy.

FIGURA 20.
Preparing to develop an online course on critical pedagogy.
Source: Screenshot captured and provided by the author.



Chinese educational scholars introduced Paulo Freire’s educational thoughts and practices to China in the 1990s, thus “bringing” Freire to China. This opened up a new window for Chinese education to view foreign educational approaches, presenting a unique educational philosophy with characteristics of developing countries and promoting further reform and development of the education in China.

It is evident that Paulo Freire has “come” to China, influenced China, and will continue to “live” in China, constantly impacting the reform and development of the education in China.

The establishment of the Center for Research on Paulo Freire at East China Normal University in 2019, coupled with active communication with international peers, will further amplify the impact of China's Paulo Freire research institute, enabling more people to familiarize themselves with the research on Paulo Freire in China and his influence in the country. Additionally, collaboration and exchanges with International Paulo Freire Institutes will further broaden Paulo Freire's global reach. Most importantly, by studying Paulo Freire's work and disseminating his ideas, we strive to foster the development of education in countries around the world towards democracy, equality, high quality, and sustainability. Through the advancement of education, we can nurture future generations to shape and build a better world and society.

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