

Overseas Chinese Education in Nanyang in the First Half of the 20th Century from "the Educational Review"

An Li^{1,a,*}

¹*Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia*

a. lian050712@163.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: Overseas Chinese education in Nanyang is an important part of overseas Chinese education in modern China. *the Educational Review* is the longest-running, most complete, and most influential periodical on education in modern China. It is one of the most important primary sources for studying the history of education in modern China. This article takes the relevant articles about the education of overseas Chinese in Nanyang published in *the Educational Review* as the research object, and explores the status of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century. It analyzes the problems existing in overseas Chinese education in Nanyang at that time in terms of language structure, teacher professionalism, textbook application, student mobility, and division of powers within the school. It further introduces the countermeasures proposed by those who were enthusiastic about overseas Chinese education in Nanyang at that time, such as unifying the Chinese language, selecting teachers, localizing textbooks, flexible learning cycles and limitations on the powers of school boards. Through the exploration of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century, hope it will be helpful to the development of Chinese education in Southeast Asia today.

Keywords: *the Educational Review*, Nanyang, Overseas Chinese Education

1. Introduction

Nanyang refers to the Southeast Asian countries near the South China Sea since the Ming and Qing dynasties of China. Due to its special geographical location, the Nanyang region has become the main gathering place for overseas Chinese in the world, and has virtually formed an "overseas Republic of China". [1] Overseas Chinese education includes two aspects, domestic and foreign. Domestic overseas Chinese education refers to overseas Chinese students returning to China to further their studies and find employment. Preparation and training for Chinese compatriots preparing to immigrate abroad. Foreign overseas Chinese education refers to "the overseas cultivation of the descendants of the Yellow Emperor." [2] The overseas Chinese education discussed in this article refers to foreign overseas Chinese education. Overseas Chinese have a strong sense of localism. In order to solve the "problem of the future of the Republic of China," [3] the Chinese National Government continued to send people to Nanyang for inspections. This became an issue that the overseas Chinese in Nanyang wanted to solve urgently at that time. Therefore, it can be said that the educational issues of overseas Chinese in Nanyang are part of the educational issues of the Republic

of China. "Education, as the main hub of the vitality of overseas Chinese" [2], plays an important role in the Chinese community in Nanyang. This article takes articles about overseas Chinese education in Nanyang published in *the Educational Review* as the research object, trying to analyze the problems encountered in the development process of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century and related suggestions and measures. In order to contribute to the research on overseas Chinese education in Southeast Asia.

2. The founding and characteristics of *the Educational Review*

The Educational Review was founded in the initial stage of modern education in China. *The Educational Review* was published by the Shanghai Commercial Press in February 1909 and ended in December 1948. The publication was suspended twice during this period. The first time was in January 1932 due to the "December 28" war, and it resumed publication in September 1934. For the second time, due to financial constraints after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, publication suspended in December 1941 and resumed publication in July 1947. The magazine has been published for 31 years, with a total of 33 volumes and 382 issues. It is the longest-lasting, most complete and most influential educational special periodical in China since modern times. *The Educational Review* initially only had a Chinese name. Starting from volume 2, issue 1, the English name *the Chinese Educational Review* was added to the front cover copyright page. Starting from the 18th volume, the English name was changed to *the Educational Review*.

The Educational Review aims to "research education and improve academic affairs". [4] It includes many columns, mainly including advocacy, editorials, academics, education administration, surveys, reviews, compilations, literature and art, photos, etc., covering all aspects of Chinese and foreign educational research, and provides important historical clues and detailed information for educational research. It is one of the most important original materials for studying the history of education in modern China.

The Educational Review has introduced Nanyang education through various columns since its inception, publishing articles and photography about Nanyang education, including a total of 33 articles directly related to the education issues of overseas Chinese in Nanyang. In addition, some studies and laws on Chinese education include overseas Chinese education.

By observing the publication years of the articles, we can see that these 33 articles were published from 1914 to 1947, which spans a wide range. The topics of the article include not only the overview and investigation of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang, but also the policies issued by the Chinese government on Nanyang education. The authors of most of the articles have experience teaching in Nanyang overseas Chinese schools or personally went to Nanyang overseas Chinese schools to conduct field investigations. Through their personal experiences, they truly elaborated on the issues related to Nanyang overseas Chinese schools, which added to the depth of the article. For example, the four articles published by Chinese educator Huang Yanpei in this magazine were all written after his inspection in Nanyang. Zhou Tingzhen was the principal of Batavia Chinese School, Lin Yuanzhen lived in Nanyang for many years, etc. The articles on Nanyang education in *the Educational Review* expanded the educational horizons of modern Chinese and contributed to the development of overseas Chinese education in the Nanyang region.

3. Problems of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century

With the influx of large numbers of overseas Chinese into Nanyang, overseas Chinese education in the first half of the 20th century became an important link in inheriting Chinese culture and maintaining the overseas Chinese community. Inevitably, overseas Chinese education in Nanyang faces many challenges during its development. This section will deeply explore the main problems

existing in overseas Chinese education in Nanyang during this period, mainly involving five aspects: language structure, teacher professionalism, textbook application, student mobility, and division of powers within the school.

3.1. Complex language structure

The language structure of the Nanyang Chinese community is complex, the dialects are diverse, and the languages are not unified among each other. This is an important reason for the serious territorial concepts among the Chinese communities in Nanyang. The majority of the overseas Chinese in Nanyang are from Fujian and Guangdong, so it is not an exaggeration to say that it is a "world of people from Fujian and Guangdong". [5] Due to the uniqueness of the languages of Fujian and Guangdong, schools in early British areas were often divided according to their place of origin and were often established in the temples of the local associations. Most of the board members, principals and teachers of these schools come from the same province or county. When schools admissions, they usually admissions based on place of origin. "The proportion of students who are not from the same hometown is only about one to two percent." [5] In terms of teaching language, schools founded by Contones usually use Cantonese, and schools founded by Fujian people use Hokkien. Each school "has its own branch and does not communicate with each other." [6]

When promoting a unified Chinese language (Beijing dialect at the time) in Nanyang, the main difficulties faced were that they had fewer opportunities to be exposed to Chinese in their living environment. At the same time, the overseas Chinese society had complex languages, including Malay, English, Chinese and various local dialects. [7] This has increased the learning difficulty, making the promotion of unified Chinese language in Nanyang slower and to a lesser extent. For example, although there was a movement to promote the Chinese language in the Philippine Overseas Chinese Schools in the 1920s, except for the Manila area, nine out of ten areas still followed the old habits and conducted teaching activities in Xiamen dialect. [8] This has led to the formation of an invisible barrier between various groups within the Chinese community, making it more difficult to unite across regions, thereby hindering the integration within the overseas Chinese community.

3.2. Insufficient professional quality of teachers

Teachers are the main body of education. Teachers' professional abilities and is crucial to the growth of students. Only good teachers can cultivate excellent students. During the development period of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang, although there were many experienced and knowledgeable members of the teaching staff, there were still a large number of teachers who lacked the necessary professional abilities.

Most of the teachers in the private school (*Sishu*) period were old academics who had nothing to do except recite the Four Books and Five Classics every day. [6] The teaching method was mainly recitation, which was relatively backward. As Huang Yanpei [9] said, teachers in Nanyang are mainly from mainland China. Many teachers are not familiar with the place of residence culture and language environment, which creates obstacles to the applicability of teaching content and effective communication between teachers and students.

Insufficient professionalism can lead to job insecurity. When the early days of Nanyang school, the overseas Chinese community gave teachers a high degree of respect, and the Chinese government also promulgated various preferential treatment regulations in the field of education. However, some teachers fail to fully realize their educational mission. According to Lin Yuanzhen's [10] observation, in order to ensure the security of their positions, some teachers who lack professional qualities often visit the homes of powerful school directors and try to obtain benefits by establishing personal

relationships. Their behavior is full of flattery to the powerful. They are not interested in the educational work of the school.

3.3. Textbooks lack localization

As a medium for disseminating knowledge, textbooks are a key tool in shaping students' values. The Chinese textbooks used by Nanyang Overseas Chinese School in the early days were no different from the domestic versions in China. This fundamentally ignored the "educational principle that educational content needs to be adapted according to the local environment." [8]

Huang Yanpei [11] investigated the actual use of Chinese textbooks in Nanyang and pointed out that the content of the textbooks used in Nanyang was significantly different from the actual environment in Nanyang. The plum blossoms, peach blossoms and the changes of the four seasons described in the textbooks cannot be seen in Nanyang. The betel nut and coconut trees that can be seen everywhere in Nanyang are not reflected in the textbooks. The textbooks also do not mention the rich resources such as rubber forests and tin mines in Nanyang. In addition, there are differences in weights and measures, currency systems, etc. Regarding the situation in the Philippines, Wu Hanfang [8] pointed out that the natural environment of the Philippines is tropical, and the social environment is colonial. All conditions are very different from China. Directly using Chinese textbooks is obviously inappropriate for overseas Chinese schools in the Philippines.

Generally speaking, the inapplicability of elementary textbooks in mainland China to Nanyang Overseas Chinese Schools is mainly reflected in three aspects: "climate differences, special products, and different people and customs." Therefore, in order to better reflect the regional characteristics and cultural background of Nanyang, targeted adaptation of textbooks has become an important task. The localization of textbooks is not only an optimization of textbook content, but also a necessary step to improve the quality and effectiveness of education.

3.4. High student mobility

In the Nanyang region, the high mobility of students has become an important challenge for overseas Chinese schools. The main manifestation is that students may enroll at any time or drop out midway, causing considerable difficulties in school management and teaching. Ng Chun Sing, [12] the principal of Penang Chinese School, summarized five main reasons for high student mobility: physiological demands due to tropical climate, responsibilities of family affairs, relocation with the family to other areas, switching to business studies, and transfer to other schools. Zhou Tingzhen [5] further analyzed this phenomenon: First, economic factors have a direct impact on students' mobility. Since tuition fees at Nanyang Chinese school are usually paid monthly, rapid changes in family financial circumstances may result in inability to pay tuition fees on time. Secondly, the migration characteristics of overseas Chinese families also significantly affect student mobility. Since the school does not provide accommodation, younger students must move with their parents. Finally, the frequent international exchanges among members of the overseas Chinese community have made joining and dropping out of classes a norm. In the interaction of these factors, the coherence of school teaching is frustrated, which in turn affects students' academic performance.

3.5. Unclear Powers between the Board of Directors and the School Affairs Department

The board of directors of overseas Chinese schools in Nanyang has great powers. It is the highest body of school administration and can direct everything. However, most of the board members are from the business world, and "not all of them may be experts in education." [8] However, directors often "interfere in the internal administration of the school, and even interfere in the teaching and management of the school" [5] This results in board decisions that do not always meet the needs of

educational development, sometimes hindering the development of overseas Chinese schools, and even causing conflicts. [13]

The authority of the principal of Nanyang Chinese school has been taken away by the school's board of directors. The principal bound by the board of directors. Zhou Tingzhen, the principal of Batavia Chinese School, made suggestions regarding this issue, believing that the principal should have "human rights, economic rights, etc." [14] However, this reasonable request was rejected by the board of directors. The power to recruit teachers in Nanyang schools is controlled by the board of directors. As Wu Hanfang [8] said, in overseas Chinese schools in the Philippines, some school directors rely solely on their own preferences when hiring teachers. Some boards behave like capitalists and treat teachers casually. This has led to some hesitation among some experienced and talented teachers when taking up their posts. In addition, Huang Feiran [14] pointed out that school funding is often strictly controlled by the board of directors, resulting in insufficient teaching resources and facilities, limiting teaching quality and educational effects, and affecting students' learning experience and teachers' teaching effectiveness.

4. Solutions to the educational problems of overseas Chinese in Nanyang

Faced with various challenges encountered in the development of overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century, education experts, Nanyang Chinese school teachers, and intellectuals living in Nanyang all offered their opinions and suggestions to achieve better development of overseas Chinese education.

4.1. Unify Chinese language and combined enrollment

"We all have different dialects in China, but even though we are compatriots, we cannot express our feelings without interpretation." [3] In the early 20th century, the overseas Chinese community in Nanyang faced dialect barriers, which not only hindered communication between Chinese from different origins, but also affected the cohesion and cultural inheritance of the Chinese community. Therefore, unifying the Chinese language has become the key to enhancing the internal cohesion of the Chinese community, connecting overseas Chinese with the culture of the motherland, and inheriting the national identity. It is the "first chapter of the founding" [12].

In order to solve the problem of estrangement between Chinese communities caused by language, the overseas Chinese community in Nanyang adopted the strategy of unifying the Chinese language and combining enrollment. The main reason why the mastery of the Chinese language in the Dutch areas of Nanyang is better than that of the British areas is that "the guild halls in the Dutch areas bring children from different origins together to study." [5] The purpose of this is to transcend the limitations of a single dialect. Therefore, Huang Yanpei [12] suggested that Nanyang Chinese schools should not restrict the place of origin when recruiting students and hiring teachers. In the school, non-Chinese languages are prohibited. Chen Baoquan suggested that "Chinese language should be taught from the first year of national schools" [3] and that Chinese language tutoring courses should be set up in various Chinese schools at night or on holidays. To enhance students' mastery and understanding of Chinese and achieve more effective communication and understanding through the common language of Chinese.

4.2. Recruit outstanding teachers to improve teachers' professional quality

"The goodness of education depends on the person, not on the method." [3] Therefore, it is most important to improve teachers' knowledge level. "Teachers should choose carefully" [9] to ensure that the quality of education and professionalism are guaranteed.

Chen Baoquan suggested cultivating teachers with professional qualities by “sending students to normal schools.” Huang Yanpei advocated breaking provincial boundaries and suggested that normal school graduates should be the first choice for recruiting teachers because “normal schools specialize in teaching people how to be teachers” [9], so their graduates are naturally more suitable to assume the role of teachers. For those candidates with non-teaching background, they should be asked in detail about their teaching experience and historical achievements to ensure their teaching ability. For teachers recommended by institutions, the selection of the recommending institution is also extremely important. It is best to be recommended by “the principal of a normal school or a reliable association” [9] to ensure the quality of teachers. When teaching, teachers should “strictly follow the theories and methods of education.” [10] In this way, teachers’ professional quality will be significantly improved.

4.3. Local adaptation of Nanyang textbooks

In the overseas Chinese education system in Nanyang at the beginning of the 20th century, the compilation and localization of textbooks became a key issue. Through the localization of textbook content, it can greatly promote students’ understanding and learning of the local culture, thus improving the overall educational effect. There are differences between Nanyang and China in terms of climate, products, habits, and systems. The middle schools founded by Americans in the Philippines have two required readings for understanding the local economy and politics, *Philippine Government* and *Economic Conditions in the Philippines*. [8] These contents are not available in overseas Chinese schools, so the adaptive compilation of textbooks is urgent to ensure that their content can help students better understand and integrate into the local society.

To compile new textbooks that adapt to Nanyang society, we can invite teachers who work in overseas Chinese schools and have rich teaching experience to “compile textbooks in daily teaching” [8] through the method of “division of labor and cooperation, guaranteed for three years” [8]. And according to the needs of Nanyang’s natural environment and social environment, the content of the teaching materials is improved through continuous testing and revision. This method not only promotes collaboration among teachers, but also ensures the practicality and timeliness of the teaching material content. It is a practical and forward-looking suggestion.

4.4. Flexible learning circle to solve the problem of high student mobility

The high mobility of Nanyang students poses a challenge to the school’s normal teaching order and management. It not only affects the coherence and stability of teaching plans, but also has a negative impact on teachers’ teaching strategies and students’ learning outcomes. Huang Yanpei suggested that the teaching method should be changed from the traditional “straight forward method to the circular method.” [12] This method emphasizes setting up multiple learning cycles that can be concluded during the teaching process to ensure that even students who join or leave midway can get a complete learning experience and have a basic mastery and application of the knowledge they have learned. This flexible teaching arrangement aims to provide a clear learning path for all students, reduce learning gaps caused by mobility, and thereby improve students’ learning efficiency and effectiveness.

4.5. Limitations on school board power

Nanyang Chinese School has the problem that the board of directors has too much power, the power of the board of directors and the school affairs department are unclear. For the better development of Chinese schools, “school rights and responsibilities should be clearly defined” [9]. Huang Feiran [14] suggested limiting the power of the board of directors in the school charter. The board of directors is responsible for fundraising, approving the annual budget, and appointing the principal. The principal

is responsible for the school's academic affairs, the appointment and dismissal of teachers, and the inspection of teachers' performance. Wu Hanfang also suggested that the board of directors should be reformed and that the authority of the board of directors should be divided into two parts: "fundraising and school affairs guidance" [8]. However, when guiding school affairs, the board of directors can only set general policies and supervise and sponsor from the side. As for all specific matters within the school, the board of directors should not interfere at will. "It is necessary to invite highly skilled education experts to be the principals to take charge." [15] This suggestion is intended to ensure that the school's financial resources and education quality are given equal attention and effective management.

5. Conclusion

The patriotic overseas Chinese leader Tan Kah Kee once said that "promoting education is a national duty." [16] In the first half of the 20th century, overseas Chinese education in Nanyang received widespread attention and achieved certain development. As a professional educational publication, *the Educational Review* provides us with valuable historical information, reflecting the difficulties and challenges faced by overseas Chinese education in Nanyang at that time, as well as the efforts of educators at that time in facing the difficulties. The exploration of *the Educational Review* not only helps us better understand the overseas Chinese education in Nanyang in the first half of the 20th century, but also provides historical reference and inspiration for the development of Chinese education in modern Southeast Asia.

References

- [1] Wang Xiunan. (1947). *The construction of Chinese expatriate education after the war. the Educational Review.* vol.32, no.2, 91-103.
- [2] Zhou Shang. (1947) *Post-war overseas Chinese education. the Educational Review.* vol.32, no.1,96-101.
- [3] Chen Baoquan. (1917). *Opinions on education for overseas Chinese in the Philippines. the Educational Review.* vol.9, no.4, 109-112.
- [4] *Publication words (1909). the Educational Review.* vol.1, no.1.
- [5] Zhou Tingzhen. (1931). *The current situation of education among British and Dutch overseas Chinese in Nanyang. the Educational Review.* vol.23, no.5, 101-112.
- [6] .Wang Jiapai. (1926). *Overview of Overseas Chinese Education in the British Malaya Peninsula. the Educational Review.* vol.18, no.12, 71-73.
- [7] Zhou Tingzhen. (1931). *The current situation of education among British and Dutch overseas Chinese in Nanyang (continued). the Educational Review.* vol.23, no.6,97-109.
- [8] Wu Hanfang. (1929). *Overseas Chinese education in the Philippines. the Educational Review.* vol.20, no.3, 145-147.
- [9] Huang Yanpei. (1917). *Discussion on the Education of Overseas Chinese in Nanyang. the Educational Review.* vol.9, no.11, 110-117.
- [10] Lin Yuanzhen. (1914). *Discussion on South Overseas Chinese Education. the Educational Review.* vol.6, no.12, 109-111.
- [11] Huang Yanpei. (1917). *The grand occasion of the Research Association for Overseas Chinese Education in the Dutch East Indies. the Educational Review.* vol.9, no.10, 91-93.
- [12] Huang Yanpei. (1917). *Essay on the Southern Wind. the Educational Review.* vol.9, no.9, 1-12.
- [13] Xu Yu. (1936). *Siamese education and Siamese overseas Chinese education. the Educational Review.* vol.26, no.1, 213-232.
- [14] Huang Feiran. (1927). *The situation of overseas Chinese schools in Java and its future reform issues. the Educational Review.* vol.19, no.8, 118-122.
- [15] Wu Hanfang. (1927). *How is the Overseas Chinese Education in Nanyang Adapted to the Coexistence of Nations? the Educational Review.* vol.19, no.12, 96-98.
- [16] Tan Kah Kee. (1940). *Speech at the Zhangzhou Jimei Xiamen University Alumni Welcome Meeting.*