

# A Comparative Study on Alternative Education in China and Korea

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## ABSTRACT

Alternative educational practice has something in common that has been raised as an alternative to the crisis of traditional public education, but the causes, like background, and development patterns of alternative education may be different. As an alternative to restore education, various progressive schools or programs have been operated in Korea and China. The purpose of this study was to shed light on the alternative education in Korea and China, and seek to research its development process and practice.

## 1. Introduction

First of all, the characteristics of alternative education were derived through its common denominator, and the limitations of modern education and postmodern education discourse. In the approach to the type of alternative education, it was classified into a complementary type and an innovative type based on the relationship with mainstream education. Next, in order to determine the cause of the emergence of alternative education, the historical background in Korea and China was considered. In addition, how it spread in the process of developing alternative education in Korea and China was divided into practice by the citizen and government. The characteristics of alternative education in Korea and China were analyzed through practice cases, and they were divided into complementary alternative education and innovative alternative education cases. Finally, implications were presented through comparison of practice processes, characteristics of cases on

alternative education in Korea and China.

School education in Korea and China has many problems. Although there are not many common problems with modern education, many of them reflect the historical experiences of Korea and China and the specific of real problems. Standards-centered education, vocational training in education, and teacher in mainstreams are examples of the former, and the latter includes education centered on memorizing knowledge for university entrance exams, educational culture based on parents' children's career, and state-led education. Both countries have been seeking solutions to these educational problems at the private and government levels. The discourse of the crisis of school education and the crisis of public education raised interest in alternative education nationwide. The public education crisis is a global phenomenon that appears not only in Korea but also in China from developing countries to developed countries. In order to overcome this educational crisis, there was a pattern of practicing alternative educa-

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tion at the private and national levels in China.

In this way, all alternative education started from the problem of the limitations of modern education. Therefore, alternative education can be said to be a new and diverse educational method attempted to overcome the limitations of modern education, such as state-led, uniformed, competitive, and instructor-centered.

## **2. The Concept of the Alternative Education in Korea and China**

So far, there is no internationally uniform definition of alternative education. This is because the situation in each country is different, so alternative education is also provided in various forms. American scholar Aron (2003) says that the lack of a generally accepted definition of “alternative education” is related to the following causes. That is, the flexibility of related policies and laws, the diversity of circumstances and environments, and the group of youths who can benefit from alternative education are diverse<sup>[1-3]</sup>.

In Korea, the definition of alternative education has been discussed in the most diverse ways. In the Korean language dictionary, alternative education is defined as ‘education different from conventional school education designed to overcome the problems of the public education system’. According to the dictionary of sociology, it is defined as an “educational movement that moves away from traditional school policies (organizing grades according to age, strict control over learning techniques and curricula) toward an educational form that emphasizes student initiative”. In the dictionary of common sense, it is interpreted as ‘a school that teaches students to get away from the oppressive entrance exam education and to receive a more diverse, free and nature-friendly education’. In addition, the Ministry of Education defines alternative schools as “schools that provide education for students who cannot adapt to regular schools, specializing in nature field learning, experience-oriented, and character education”. According to Lee Jong-tae (2018), alternative education aims to fundamentally innovate the existing education. Therefore, the essence is that it works the same whether inside or outside the school. In other words, alternative education is not only for a specific target, nor is it necessarily possible only in a free space outside the school, but it is an education that can be practiced for everyone and anywhere. This is because the context in which alternative education is required is not a matter of object and space, but is related to the problem of a view of education and a philosophical and educational attitude toward children.

The definition of alternative education in China is as

follows. In China, the term “alternative education” was not directly mentioned, but instead with a term containing the meaning and characteristics of alternative education. For example, new education, alternative education, selective education, experimental education, education outside the system education, out-of-school education, non-mainstream education, independent education, Waldorf education, and Montessori education. Theoretically, there is no theoretical discourse on alternative education in China yet. However, in the discourse on practice, it is common to sometimes describe alternative education practice with alternative education or the words listed above. Although there is no unified academic definition, there are definitions in the dictionary. Chinese educator Gu Mingyuan, in *The Dictionary of Education* interpreted as follows. As different from traditional mainstream education, it can also be referred to as “non-mainstream education” and is also called Linglei School (another type of school). These categories include democratic schools, homeschooling, tutoring, social education, and private residence. And education based on a specific educational ideology, such as Waldorf education and Montessori education, also belongs to this category. On the other hand, in China, there are schools for children of migrant workers and schools for delinquent youths, but these are not specifically discussed as an alternative education. However, in the comparing study of such kind of schools between China and other countries, schools were discussed in the category of alternative education. It can be seen that the concept of alternative education has not yet been established in China, and at the same time, there is a possibility that this type of school may be discussed in the category of alternative education<sup>[4]</sup>.

However, although the situation is different and the subjects are diverse, the common characteristics were revealed as a result of collecting definitions of alternative education in each country. Raywid (1994) explained that there may be such a commonality in alternative education because the current alternative education system shares the same philosophy as the previous alternative education system - “One size does not fit all”. The following is the result of deriving common characteristics about the meaning of alternative education in each country.

As an alternative to traditional education, alternative education focuses on learners, provides various and special teaching methods, programs, and activities, and seeks experimental and innovative education that allows knowledge to be acquired through experiential learning. In addition, by accommodating marginalized groups such as dropouts, problem children, or multicultural students in general schools, it plays a complementary role in public

education, respects the freedom of learners and pursues an anarchist open education that is not governed by the state.

The common characteristics of alternative education in each country are summarized as follows. First, alternative education emphasizes humanity. Whereas general schools place importance on knowledge-oriented education and equal evaluation and overlook the most important humanity education, alternative education aims at the value of respect for humanity. In a grade-based society where people are evaluated based on test scores due to fierce test wars, alternative schools are insisting on the restoration of humanity. Second, alternative education allows freedom. Alternative education pursues a free form of education that can meet the characteristics and needs of learners. Whereas public education does not fully reflect individual freedom needs, alternative education can have basic demands for their freedom and rights. Third, alternative education emphasizes respect for life and restoration of nature-friendly ecosystems. By recognizing the essence of the crisis represented by ecological destruction and forming a community to solve the problem, we focus on how to make a life in which humans and humans, groups and groups, and humans and nature live together as a way of daily life. In other words, it is to normalize community values. Fourth, alternative education emphasizes experience. In alternative schools, emotional education through various experiences is more important than subject knowledge. Students develop their potential and creativity through experiences. In general education, reading, writing, and arithmetic are the mainstream and labor is neglected, whereas in alternative education, experience and life are emphasized, and experience and life itself become education<sup>[5]</sup>.

### **3. Historical Background of the Alternative Education in Korea and China**

The occurrence and development of alternative education between the two countries were caused by complex causes such as economic growth, introduction of free market economy system to schools, dehumanized education, youth crime and dropout.

In Korea, in the 1990s, problems caused by rigid and uniform education appeared in the form of an increase in the number of students who stopped studying, school violence, and school collapse, revealing the limitations of the existing education system by entrance examination and control. As a result, the accumulation of wills for education that have been dreamed of has begun to appear by educational subjects as an attempt to “alternative education” or “new school”.

Alternative education practiced in Korea included alter-

native education in the form of programs such as seasonal schools, after-school or weekend schools, alternative education specialized schools, entrusted alternative education institutions, various (alternative) schools, and various unauthorized alternative schools.

In the case of China, especially in the 1980s, as the problem of exam-oriented education, or entrance examination education expanded, and educational reform was attempted in various forms as an alternative. Although the term “alternative education” or “alternative school” was not directly used, there were movements to practice “alternative education”. For example, there were new education experiments practiced by teachers, learner-centered experimental education programs practiced by educators, and modern dormitory, village education communities led by the government and the private sector, homeschooling and small schools established by teachers and parents.

Educational reforms were attempted in the private sector along with educational reform at the national level in the 1990s and early 2000s. In particular, in the 2000s, it showed a quantitatively increasing trend. As representative forms of alternative education practiced by the private sector, there are homeschooling, new education experimental school, modern private school, and Waldorf school, which appeared almost around the 2000s. As the first example of homeschooling, there is the case of Zeng Yachi, who attempted homeschooling from the middle school stage in 1997 and the first modern private school Maengmodang established in 2002, and Chengdu Waldorf School established in 2004. However, China’s alternative education is still in the search stage, and the number of implementations is small, and no system or policy has been established to systematically manage and support it.

This practice is in line with alternative education in Korea in that it is a school that practices new and diverse educational methods attempted to overcome the limitations of modern education, such as state-led, uniformed, competitive, and instructor-centered. Furthermore, alternative education in Korea and China was practiced both inside and outside the institutional sphere, and it is also common in that it was a grassroots education reform movement led mainly by the private sector<sup>[6]</sup>.

### **4. Comparing the Practice Process of Alternative Education in Korea and China**

First, it can be seen that the educational movement, which emerged as an alternative to the existing educational problems in Korea and China, was led by the citizen, regardless of complementary or innovative types, and emerged and developed in voluntary experiments and practices below. In other words, it can be said that alter-

native education develops when taking the form of an educational movement practiced from below rather than the educational policy implemented from above. It is necessary for the state to actively prepare support measures so that the practice of alternative education by the citizen can change and develop. Second, the efforts of educational practitioners as key players in the alternative education movement stood out, especially their philosophy of educational reform were noted. It is necessary to secure practices seeking a model for future education. The practice of alternative education is not just limited to alternative education field teachers or educational practitioners, but a task that should be shared by the whole society. The government needs to provide opportunities and environments for the society that can challenge to alternative education practices.

The comparison of practice by the government in alternative education between the two countries resulted in four implications. First, at the time of educational reform, there was a difference in perception and solution to the problem of school interruption. Korea tried to solve the problem of school interruption by supporting alternative schools established by the citizen due to the problem of dropping out student since the 1980s. Since in China the main causes of dropping out were economic reasons, China tried to solve it with economic support to the underprivileged. Both governments need to recognize that alternative education is not only providing educational services to specific students, but also providing to various students. Second, Korea has realized the legalization of alternative education, but China has not yet realized the legalization. China needs to try to legislate alternative education like Korea, and it should be noted that policy authorities and alternative education practitioners should make joint efforts to find the right direction in legislation or policy on alternative education. Third, in the support of alternative education through educational welfare, Korea has been striving and continuously developing in the field of support for the underprivileged since the 1990s, but China has not. China needs to introduce more diverse educational welfare policies like Korea to expand educational opportunities, narrow educational gaps, and solve the problem of educational alienation. Fourth, in the training of teachers in alternative education there was no support from the education authorities. Although China has not been able to cultivate professional teachers at the national level, the government provided opportunities for them to practice alternative education. Both governments should notice the importance of the good environment that teachers can voluntarily and professionally participate in alternative education as well as foster teachers.

The replacement of one education with another was achieved when the voluntary will of educational practitioners was paralleled. In this respect, alternative education implemented by educational practitioners can better reflect the thoughts of students, parents, and teachers through self-directed education practices and enable autonomy in education. And excellent cases in alternative education stimulate public education and help the development and innovation of public education.

## **5. Comparing the Types of Alternative Education in Korea and China**

First, the complementary alternative education curriculum itself took a model of mainstream education, but partially practiced alternative education programs or activities, and accepted the philosophy of alternative education to a certain extent in teaching, teacher-student relations. However, all of them did not escape from maintaining the framework of mainstream education. On the other hand, innovative alternative education in both countries broke the framework of mainstream education and guaranteed autonomy and practiced the philosophy of alternative education in the overall areas of educational life, such as curriculum, teaching method, and relationship between teachers and students. In the case of alternative education between the two countries, educational ideology and educational content were more similar, and as a common feature of educational ideology, the development of independent and holistic individuals within the community was emphasized. As a common characteristic of educational content, it focused on students, placed a high weight on experiential education, emotion, and sociality education rather than knowledge education, and emphasized a nature-friendly life process. However, both countries were weak in flexibility. In order for complementary alternative education and innovative alternative education to develop in both countries, the flexibility of the school system must be realized. Second, both countries were cut off and did not communicate between complementary and innovative alternative education. It is necessary to prepare policy support so that alternative education outside the institutional sphere and inside can communicate and learn from each other. Complementary alternative education should be converted to innovative alternative education, and finally, the publicity of education should be realized<sup>[7,8]</sup>.

## **6. Conclusions**

It cannot be denied that there are still many obstacles in the practice of alternative education. The fundamental factors are the state monopolized school establishment

accreditation system, the national curriculum that enforces the world's highest level of uniform educations, the closed teacher qualification and appointment system, the educational finance system, and the NEIS, a uniform mechanism stronger than laws and regulations. The system can be said to be the factors that make the existence of alternative education difficult.

Although Korea and China were practicing various alternative education, the concept and scope of alternative education were not clear in both countries. In particular, in China, alternative education has not yet been institutionalized or legislated, and policy authorities also have insufficient awareness of alternative education. In addition, both countries currently have limitations in human and material support for alternative education. In terms of financial support, both countries were receiving partial government support for implementing complementary alternative education. On the other hand, most of the innovative alternative education practices were practiced outside the system and thus did not receive government support. Therefore, the cost of alternative education was mostly borne by the parents. As for how to solve this problem, it is necessary to comprehensively review how alternative education in other countries works.

The necessity of alternative education was also revealed in the study of alternative education in both countries. Alternative education was effective for educating the underprivileged, and alternative education was to actually reflect on and take the lead in solving problems in school education. Alternative education was to accept and put into practice various educational values, and alternative education was to stimulate public education and promote development by presenting an alternative model to the ideal school. Alternative education is currently leading efforts as a model for seeking future education. Conflicts and contradictions in the relationship between alternative

education and public education are decreasing. However, alternative education, which is trying to reform public education, should not be allowed to act only as a supplement to public education. Through alternative education, it is necessary to expect innovation in education that transcends the public education. At present, cooperation between institutional education and alternative education is urgently needed in both countries.

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