

# An Analysis of the Views of Changes in China's Curriculum in the “Encounter between Wang and Zhong”

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**Abstract:** This dissertation takes curriculum aims theory and curriculum knowledge views as the clues for the analysis of the two professors' viewpoints and explores the curriculum-teaching structure implied in the two professors' curriculum viewpoints; analyzes the impact of curriculum research on teaching and learning with the two professors' different backgrounds of curriculum theory research; with the orientation of the new curriculum standards in 2022, in responds to the problems disclosed in the current curriculum theory research and the value of curriculum theory research.

**Keywords:** Curriculum Theory of Knowledge; Curriculum Objectives; Curriculum Studies; Curriculum Reform; Curriculum Standards

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The new round of basic education curriculum reform has been accompanied by controversies. In terms of curriculum knowledge theory, the “Wang and Zhong debate” has been carried out with the objectivism and constructivism of knowledge. Prof. Wang Zesan contested the curriculum objectives of the new curriculum reform - such a statement tends to underestimate knowledge<sup>[1]</sup>. Prof. Zhong Qiquan criticized Wang's authoritative and absolute view of knowledge, and gave two explanations for the curriculum objectives of the new curriculum reform: “change” is to change the existing knowledge to be taught; “advocate” is to advocate students' knowledge construction<sup>[2]</sup>. The conflict of thought has gradually subsided with the steady implementation of the new curriculum reform.

In terms of curriculum objectives, Prof. Wang Zesan emphasizes the importance of basic knowledge, and the unequal weighting of each dimension in the “three-dimensional objectives”, the importance of the knowledge dimension and the other two dimensions are not “equal”. The other goals are more like subordinate relationships that will naturally appear or be achieved in the process of imparting knowledge<sup>[3]</sup>. Zhong Qiquan criticizes the “double-foundation theory” that equates training with education, and his view supports the integration of “open objectives” and “closed objectives” in the educational process, making the rationality of the “three-dimensional goal” is argued<sup>[4]</sup>.

## 1. Analysis of two schools of thought on curriculum

### 1.1 Curriculum in the teaching perspective

The knowledge and goals of the curriculum from Prof. Wang Zesan's are based on the pedagogical perspective, in which the curriculum is first independent of the students and takes the form of curriculum document; then the curriculum is realized and constituted by teaching activities in the interaction between teachers and students. In the form of a curriculum document, the curriculum is designed as a “product”, and the “production” and “consumption” of the “product” are dependent on teaching and learning. The process of “production” and “consumption” of the “product” rests on teaching and learning, and in this discourse there is no curriculum in the field of school education that is separate from teaching and learning. He even says that “in the conditions of school education (especially primary and secondary schools), without teaching, there is no curriculum in the full sense of the word and in the true sense of the word”<sup>[5]</sup>. In this view of curriculum and teaching, the meaning and understanding of curriculum is created and answered by teaching. Such a view is influenced by Soviet pedagogy - curriculum theory is placed within pedagogy.

### 1.2 Teaching in a Curriculum Perspective

Against the background of breaking the Soviet educational context, the awareness of Chinese curriculum research has gradually strengthened, and constructivism has added to the frontier of Chinese curriculum research. The connotation of curriculum knowledge in Prof. Zhong Qiquan's viewpoint has increasingly emphasized the active construction of learners, and the view of knowledge has gradually changed from static to dynamic. The “three-dimensional objectives” advocated at the beginning of the eighth basic education curriculum reform have broken the traditional “two-foundation theory” of “education score” orientation; at the later stage of the new round of basic education curriculum reform, in order to make the lifelong development of students and adapt to the accelerated development of the At the later stage of the new round of basic education curriculum reform, the concept of “three-dimensional goals” was deepened and expanded with the introduction of “core literacy” to enable students to develop for life and adapt to the accelerated development of society. Under Zhong's viewpoint, the curriculum knowledge concept gradually highlights the factors of students' individual cognition and experience, and one leap of the curriculum goal theory better coordinates the direction of learning and teaching activities, devotes to students' all-round development, and takes the concept of “three-wide education” as the whole staff and the whole process, changing the past emphasis on objective knowledge input and output of students in teaching goals. In the past, the narrow understanding of curriculum objectives was a static view of objectives. In terms of evaluation, which is governed by goals and influences goal setting, the value orientation has also changed accordingly. In understanding the concept of curriculum evaluation, our understanding should avoid a narrow, static perspective to interpret curriculum evaluation, and should

grasp its connotation from a dynamic, developmental perspective, where dynamic curriculum evaluation generally refers to the evaluation conducted in the course of curriculum implementation. In addition to the (static) evaluation of the text itself, it is crucial to pay attention to how the text is implemented in the actual teaching context, because the text needs to be tested for its rationality and feasibility through the implementation of the curriculum [6]. With the deepening of curriculum reform in basic education, curriculum objectives and evaluation are now increasingly focused on the “human” component, so that static objectives are gradually evolving into dynamic objectives.

## **2. Teaching and Learning in the Perspective of Past and Present Curriculum Studies**

The phenomenon of the Soviet educational model being “unique” in our country will no longer occur, and the modern changes in the field of curriculum research in the Western world have brought “a pluralistic development pattern”, “critical reflection”, and “humanistic values of understanding and dialogue” to our curriculum theory research. “, and “humanistic values of understanding and dialogue”. China’s curriculum and teaching research has developed significantly since the 21st century, and the “establishment and improvement of lifelong education system”, “development of students’ core literacy” and the recent exploration of meta-universe education are no longer the “import” and “import” of foreign theories. Nowadays, China has more autonomy to choose and think about foreign theories, and the innovation in education is in response to the trend of the times and the world.

“The Wang and Zhong debate” has long since subsided, and Prof. Wang Zesan's view is a product of the Soviet education model, while the view of curriculum has changed in the new era.

### **2.1 Focus on instrumental rationality in the era of Soviet pedagogy**

The era of Soviet pedagogy was an era of parallel integration of Marx's principles, communism and pedagogy, and the ideas of Makarenko, Kelov, Babansky and many other 20th century Soviet educators bore traces of “scientific supremacy”. The Keroff theory emphasized the division of the basic stages of the teaching process and the teacher-student relationship, which was the mechanical model of traditional Hurlbutian pedagogy. The most obvious feature of the Soviet educational philosophy is that it ignores the complexity of the teaching process and the dialectical relationship between the teaching activities of teachers and students, whether it is the division of teaching stages or the proposed methodological system, which inevitably makes teaching rigid. Despite the importance attached to “teaching”, Soviet educational theory wanted to provide a set of “templates” to guide teaching, and the theoretical “instrumentality” and “scientificity only” were exposed. The theoretical “instrumentality” and “scientificity” were exposed, but the biggest variable in the teaching process, “people” (teachers and students), was missing from the theory.

### **2.2 Rational emancipation in the context of new curriculum reform**

After entering the 21st century, China’s curriculum research has continued to deepen and differentiate with the eighth basic education curriculum reform, the constructivist concept of focusing on teaching subjects in curriculum research has gradually come to the foreground, and new teaching models and curriculum research paradigms have tried to abandon the external control of the instrumental theory of the teaching process in the past research, and gradually emerged to study education from the human perspective. A postmodernist view of curriculum emerged in which “the separation between ideal and reality involved only a rational-empirical separation, rather than the Aristotelian division between heaven and earth. This separation continues today, with the mathematical and theoretical taking precedence over the observational and practical. As Joseph Schwab (1970) and Donald Schon pointed out, in this separation the practical and empirical are not seen as viable beings, but as applications of theory. Various techno-rational professionalisms support this separation by devaluing individual self-efficacy and favoring the imitation or application of the results of others' designs.” [8] The “linear” assembly-line process of teaching and learning was rejected, and the teaching and learning process moved from being directed in the past to being autonomous. William•E. Doll in his book 《Postmodern Perspectives on Curriculum》 proposed to integrate the concept of non-linear pattern system and self-organization generated by chaotic order into curriculum research.

However, it is the constructivist and postmodernist philosophy of advocacy that has led to an emphasis on practical factors and humanistic tendencies that has pushed curriculum research away from pedagogical practice. The “core literacies” have reoriented the curriculum goal groups; the concept of curriculum knowledge has too much knowledge relativism under social constructivism and conceptual reconstructionism [9]; and the new trend of “assessment of learning opportunities” as curriculum assessment. In terms of curriculum theory of knowledge, objectivism and constructivism are indistinguishable from each other in the “Wang and Zhong encounter,” and after the encounter cools down, curriculum theory of knowledge is rekindled in 2021, and many scholars in the 《Peking University Education Review》 (the journal name) published in October are discussing knowledge constructivism and the objectivity and sociality of knowledge again. In this new round of controversy, objectivism and constructivism of knowledge are no longer irreconcilable opposites, and M. F. D. Young advocates a “practical orientation to curricular knowledge” and his book 《Bringing Knowledge Back in》. The dual properties of objectivity and sociality of knowledge are reaffirmed, reaffirming the danger of constructivist expansion on the one hand, and reasserting the objectivity of knowledge on the other. In the process of actual curriculum reform implementation, the problems of “too much” are infinitely magnified, while the problems of “promotion” (active learning attitude, multifaceted connection of curriculum contents, and students’ learning ability) are infinitely magnified. The problem of “too much” has been infinitely magnified, while the pursuit of “promotion” has been simplified [10]. The result is frustrating, as curriculum theory research seems to be a one-man show for researchers, despite the emphasis on teaching practices and subjects.

## **3. The return of the value of curriculum research**

The incorporation of sociological, theological, and aesthetic theories in postmodernist curriculum theories in English-speaking countries today has shifted the mission of curriculum studies away from advancing the work of schooling and toward a mission of providing a communal utopia for teachers and schools [11]. William G. Wraga also criticized the conceptual reconstruction of curriculum theory research that does not contribute to the improvement of curriculum scholarship and school curriculum practice,

distancing theory from practice<sup>[12]</sup>. There is an urgent need for the value of curriculum research to liberate itself - to return to practice.

The new curriculum standards promulgated by the Ministry of Education in April 2022 clarify the way and direction of human education, and propose to lead teaching practice with curriculum structure, among other adjustments that bring stronger orientation and operability to teaching practice. The “instrumentality” of curriculum theory research has been re-enforced again. In the new round of curriculum reform, China actively strives to make the “theory hanging in the air touch the ground”, which can be summarized in four aspects: starting, carrying, transferring and combining.

Start--Take the eighth basic curriculum reform as the starting point to carry out a comprehensive and thorough reform of basic education, and innovate the basic education curriculum system with the core concept of reform.

Undertake - The revision of curriculum standards and teaching materials is the thread that links the reform. The curriculum documents are constantly revised to make the concept of curriculum objectives more concrete and distinct, and the implementation of the curriculum more targeted.

Transformation - the change of teaching practice is led by the structure of the curriculum, and the change of teaching practice is “literacy-oriented” to ensure the direction of education, based on discipline practice, to build a practical way to educate people and realize the all-round penetration of the concept.

Combined - the curriculum theory and the implementation of the curriculum are aligned, and the school teaching should follow the new standards and the signals of the program to make changes. The focus of teaching returns to the process, and the value of the curriculum needs to be liberated back into practice.

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