

The History, Value and Realizable Path of Corporation Childcare in China

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Abstract: Under the background of low fertility rate in China in recent 8 years, this paper reviews the development course of corporation childcare in China, and discusses the role of corporation childcare service in improving fertility rate from the angle of historical development and contemporary practice. This paper discusses the value and influence of corporation childcare on society and government, employees and families, and corporation itself. Based on the dilemma of corporation childcare in China, combined with the practice of other developed countries and first-tier cities in China, this paper puts forward some suggestions from the aspects of policy, law, supervision and teachers, aiming at improving the willingness of corporations to undertake childcare services and eliminating the concerns of employees' families.

Keywords: China, Corporation childcare, Employee family, Action measures, Childcare, Value.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the decrease of fertility rate in recent years, China attaches importance to corporation childcare service again. However, due to the lack of mature experience in the past, the current corporation childcare model in China is still being explored, and the relevant literature is still insufficient. The value, dilemma and future promotion ideas explored in this paper will help improve the existing corporation childcare model in China and popularize it nationwide, so as to maximize its influence.

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, China had 9.54 million births in 2024, with a birth rate of 6.77‰. From 12.43‰ in 2017 to 6.39‰ in 2023, after seven years of continuous decline, China's birth population and birth rate have seen a small recovery in 2024. However, the birth rate remains at a very low level, and compared with the population mortality rate, the natural population growth rate in 2024 is -0.99‰, which is still negative.

Looking back at China's history, Chinese government has taken several rounds of phased measures to control population. To ease the pressure caused by the population boom in the late 1970s, China introduced the "one-child policy" [1] in 1979, which aimed to ease social pressure by controlling population growth. Family planning was subsequently incorporated into the Constitution in 1982, and the government strictly enforced this policy in same year [2]. Facts have proved that the one-child policy has effectively curbed the phenomenon of excessive

population growth at this specific historical stage, but with the change of social and economic development, the transformation of women's social roles, and the aging of the population, severe challenges have followed [1]. Since then, China has embarked on a new phase of fertility policy reform. In 2013, the "selective two-child policy" was liberalized [3, 4]. Followed two years later by a universal two-child policy (Zeng and Hesketh, 2016) [3]. This policy liberalization encouraged people's willingness to have children to a certain extent, and set off a baby boom in a short period of time. However, this baby boom stopped in 2017. Even in May 2021, the state shifted to the three-child policy and gave many incentives. Since 2017, the fertility rate and the number of births have fallen sharply or remained at a relatively low level, and the level of "very low fertility" will pose a serious threat to the sustainability and balance of population development [5].

Fertility willingness is the main predictor of fertility behavior [6], with strong, positive, independent effects on actual fertility [7]. Population policy alone may therefore be weak. In-depth discussion and promotion of fertility intentions among child-bearing age groups, while eliminating the negative effects of fertility considerations, can fundamentally alleviate the current low fertility dilemma. China's history of population policy change and development suggests that in order to promote population growth and increase public concern about the negative impact of fertility, the focus at this stage is to increase confidence and willingness to have children by providing more favorable public services. For example, the government can provide child care support to help increase fertility rates [8].

Studies have pointed out that lack of quality childcare services is the main reason why families are

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reluctant to have multiple children [9], and parenting issues are the main obstacle [10]. In order to meet the childcare needs of families and improve fertility, the central government of China launched a large-scale childcare service reform in 2019. Therefore, 2019 is called the first year of childcare [11].

In the policies related to childcare, the modes and subjects of service provision are diverse. The urgent task in the context of "comprehensive three-child" is to "expand multi-participation and multi-mode service supply", among which the first choice is to encourage social capital to participate in childcare service supply under the guidance of the government [12]. Corporation is an important organ of society, its value and purpose exist in society [13], and it is the key supporter of national economic development [14].

Corporation childcare refers to a specific form of childcare services sponsored or provided by corporations [15]. Against the background of China's current unsatisfactory fertility rate, China corporations have the mission to respond to the call of the state and jointly meet the challenges brought by low fertility rate [14].

Since childcare began to receive attention and development in 2019 [11]. Up to now, the research on corporation childcare and its development needs to be continuously supplemented, especially the articles about enterprise as the main force to promote childcare service mostly focus on the history, development problems or single level value of enterprise childcare under a single background, and there are still some shortcomings in the articles that combine the historical development path of enterprise childcare to discuss the value brought by it.

2. DEVELOPMENT COURSE AND CURRENT SITUATION

2.1. The Origin of China's early Childhood Thought

China attaches great importance to early childhood education, which can be traced back to the ideological concept of "Jiyou" and "Ciyou" in the Pre-Qin period [16]. Confucius and Mencius put forward the famous ideas of "young people become natural, habit becomes natural" in the ChunQiu Period and the ZhanGuo Period respectively, which had great influence at that time and later generations. They constructed the social concept of benevolence beyond family and extending oneself to others, which became an important part of Confucian benevolence and laid the foundation for China's childhood education. During the Western Han Dynasty, the trend of attaching importance to early education prevailed in society, and specific education

contents for children's life skills and behavior norms were formed. In the XiHan Dynasties, Yan Family Instructions put forward "Early education should not miss the opportunity", emphasizing to seize the key period of infant education. In the Song and Ming Dynasties, Zhu Xi, Wang Shouren and other famous educators put forward specific education rules on children's behavior, labor and other aspects, pointing out the importance of "conforming to nature".

Throughout ancient history, "early education" is a consistent idea, emphasizing the importance of early education for children. At that time, while advocating early childhood, the state also provided early childhood services and targeted assistance to vulnerable groups of children, providing economic and care assistance, aiming at realizing the ruling class's "benevolent government" and "rule by virtue" [16]. It was the foundation of ancient ancestors' ideas that made China attach importance to early childhood education in modern times and formed the rudiment of the initial early childhood education thought.

2.2. Development Course of China Corporation Trust

Childcare service has been on the historical stage since the Republic of China and realized its socialization during the May 4th Movement [16]. Modern childcare service can be divided into various childcare modes through the service providers, among which corporation childcare appeared in the Republic of China [11] and was strengthened in the early days of the founding of New China. It has experienced many rounds of ups and downs and continues to this day.

During the Republic of China period, the demand for childcare services for laborers became increasingly apparent, and the public voice and demand were high. The National Government issued relevant policies to form support, and factory nurseries became a typical form of childcare at that time [11]. With the prevalence of factory nurseries, employees can work with peace of mind, which helps the nurseries still have problems such as small space and insufficient equipment [11], and have not yet had a systematic and standardized form.

Up to now, corporation childcare in China has experienced ups and downs due to the changes of national conditions. In 1949, corporation childcare reached its first peak in history under the background of attaching importance to production and labor shortage in the early days of New China. In the early days of New China, vigorously developing productive forces was the first factor, and the government shifted its attention to housewives. In traditional thinking,

women are responsible for "internal affairs" and their main functions revolve around the family. Therefore, how to let women put down pots and pans and "liberate" them from the "stove" side is the primary issue in building socialism [16]. During this period, in order to encourage women to actively participate in labor, liberate and develop productive forces, the China government issued a number of policies on corporation childcare services. On the eve of the founding of New China, the "March 8th" commemorative symposium clearly expressed the need to vigorously mobilize women to participate in production and attach importance to the difficulties of women's childcare [17]. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government has repeatedly clarified the standards of childcare services, promulgated the Labor Insurance Regulations, the Revised Draft of the Labor Insurance Regulations and other policies that stipulate the responsibilities of corporations in childcare [16], encouraging corporations and institutions to build and develop nurseries to meet the needs of employees. Many departments such as the Ministry of Education immediately responded, actively invested and provided multi-support for corporations in childcare. In 1979, in response to national policies and child-rearing guidelines, and in order to further explore child-care cooperation mechanisms, 13 units, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, jointly held a national child-care work conference [16]. The Ministry of Education simultaneously issued a number of policies to push corporation childcare to a climax. In this period, corporation nurseries were mostly located in cities, mainly reflecting the welfare nature of the unit [17]. Although the quality of corporation childcare was uneven due to the fact that the funds were borne by each unit itself [17], the two-way promotion of corporations and institutions and the national government made corporation childcare normalized and gradually reached its peak, becoming popular nowadays. However, this peak was not sustained and bottomed out in a short period of time.

With the gradual improvement of national productivity and its maintenance at a stable level, "rejuvenating the country through science and education" has been put on the agenda. Liberation of women and their productivity is no longer the core theme. On the contrary, corporations undertaking childcare services are considered to be the inducement to lower production efficiency [18] and the manifestation of waste of resources, which brings about the substantial reduction of corporation childcare services. In 1982, the Resolution on Institutional Reform of the State Council proposed that the National Leading Group for childcare Work and its offices should be abolished, even though they were established less

than three years ago [16]. Since then, due to the change of policy direction, the social trend has also changed greatly. The purpose of childcare is no longer to liberate women and improve productivity, but to better develop children [16]. The responsibility of women has gradually shifted to the family again. During this period, various policies explicitly proposed the return of child-rearing responsibilities to the family [19], childcare has been divided, kindergartens are still developing in various forms, and child-care services are decreasing. Public childcare institutions such as corporation childcare have disappeared from public view [16]. In 1989, corporation childcare accounted for more than 90% of the number of childcare institutions in China, but in 2010, this proportion has dropped to zero [20].

In recent years, with the "low birth rate, low mortality rate, low natural growth rate" maintained for many years and continuously strengthened [18], the model of corporation childcare has reappeared. Due to the change of women's role, more and more professional women enter the market. Although the state has repeatedly liberalized the population policy, from the one-child policy to the selective two-child policy and then to the universal two-child or even three-child policy, the birth rate will not rise but fall from 2017 to 2023, and the natural population growth rate will show a negative level. The underlying reason is that female workers who need to be relieved are unwilling to give birth or dare not give birth due to work-family conflicts. Common phenomenon. In order to solve this demand, in 2019, the Guiding Opinions pointed out that it is necessary to mobilize social forces such as corporations to carry out childcare [14], and policies of all parties began to emphasize inclusive childcare, and corporation childcare is one of the important links in the development of inclusive childcare [21]. Corporations are encouraged by government policies such as finance and talent. In this process, corporations can also retain talents by providing childcare services, enhance employees' sense of belonging [14], and improve their own brand value and corporate culture.

2.3. Current Situation of China Corporations' Trusteeship

In 2019, the General Office of the State Council issued the Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Development of Infant Care Services under the Age of 3, proposing: "Support employers to provide welfare infant care services for employees in the workplace by means of individual or joint organization of relevant units" [22], indicating another wave of corporation childcare. In 2019, due to the importance of childcare services, it was praised as the first year of childcare [17]. In the same year, in the Implementation Plan of

Special Action to Support Social Forces to Develop Inclusive Childcare Services, childcare services for children aged 0-3 were called "government affairs", and the state strongly encouraged corporations to provide childcare services [14]. Since then, the government has issued Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting the Healthy Development of Pension Care Services, Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Optimizing Fertility Policies to Promote Long-term Balanced Population Development, and Guiding Opinions on Further Improving and Implementing Active Fertility Support Measures [11] and many other policies regard corporation childcare as one of the important means of fertility support, reflecting the high attention paid by the state to corporation childcare, including including subsidies for corporation childcare funds and support for site construction, so as to enhance the enthusiasm of corporations in childcare [14].

In this context, in the past two years, corporations in major cities have taken action, and first-tier cities have played an exemplary role. In Beijing, corporations such as the First Research Institute of Beijing Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation Co., Ltd. and Beijing Jindi Business Association Co., Ltd. have become the first echelon of corporation trust, and have been awarded the title of caring corporation [11]. In addition, Shenzhen and Hangzhou also have corporations from all walks of life, led by the government, education bureau and other administrative departments, according to the actual situation and needs of the corporations themselves and employees to set up classes [23], indicating the full return of domestic corporations. The internal motivation of this corporation childcare return is quite different from that of the corporation childcare in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Its basic purpose is to change the subjective factors of women's low fertility desire and the objective phenomenon of low fertility rate, and realize the long-term goal of socialism and national development through population reproduction [16]. Under the background of comprehensive three-child, it is worth exploring what positive role corporation childcare can play and its lasting impact on China's construction and population.

3. MULTI-LEVEL VALUE OF CORPORATION CHILDCARE IN CHINA

The existence of corporation childcare has multi-level value in every era of China, besides conforming to the development of policies and trends, in social government, employee families and corporations themselves. Although the responsibility of

corporations to provide childcare services is constantly evolving under different policies and historical background [14], it is undeniable that the value of this service and the corporation childcare itself support each other, promoting the in-depth development of China's 0-3-year-old childcare cause and realizing a win-win situation for all parties.

3.1. Social and Governmental

Corporation childcare is often carried out legally and in compliance with regulations after approval under the support and guidance of the government [12]. The government is a key supporter in providing childcare services to corporations. At the same time, corporations, as supporters, are responding to the encouragement and requirements of the government and playing a role in promoting child development and promoting the comprehensive three-child policy.

First, it contributes to employment. corporations devote themselves to the construction of childcare service system, radiating childcare services with corporations as the center, which also helps the employment market [14]. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 epidemic, the domestic employment environment is not optimistic, while corporation childcare can meet the public demand while providing jobs and stimulating employment.

Second, enterprise childcare has a positive impact on alleviating family-work conflict faced by contemporary young people. Accessibility of childcare services is an important dimension considered by many parents when choosing childcare services [24, 11]. As an important measure in the three-child supporting policy, qualified employers provide childcare services for children aged 0-3 years in the workplace [21], which can improve the accessibility of childcare services and exert positive influence on the audience of all employees. Corporation childcare can greatly alleviate the family-work conflict faced by contemporary young people, improve the work participation rate and investment degree of female employees, embody the spirit of multi-subject multi-welfare responsibility sharing, thus highlighting the awareness of independent responsibility of corporations and having greater social benefits [21].

Finally, the most universal impact of enterprise childcare is that under the model of enterprise childcare, enterprises can form benign cooperation with society, community and other multi-subjects, contributing to the construction of child-friendly society, alleviating low birth rate, child-raising difficulties and other problems [23].

Therefore, corporation childcare can play an exemplary and leading role in society, and has positive value in responding to national policies and independently undertaking social responsibilities.

3.2. Employees and Their Families

Although there are diversified childcare models in the current society, such as community childcare, public childcare and so on, corporation childcare is still valued because of its unique advantages [21], which is the convenience and direct influence of unique days at the employee level.

As a direct relative of the corporation, it is the most practical for the corporation employees to be influenced by the corporation nurseries. Infant nurseries and services can liberate the corporation employees from the rearing activities [25], and thus devote themselves to the work with full spirit. Corporate childcare was first introduced in the 1960s by Western countries such as the United States to ease conflicts between employees working overtime and not caring for children [23]. As a form of employee welfare, it is one of the family-friendly programs [23]. Successful experience in western countries shows that corporation childcare can indeed play a good role in helping and comforting employees at the employee level, and at the same time, it can ensure that children receive care and solve work-family conflicts among employees [21].

In addition, from the perspective of female workers. With the improvement of national quality in China, women's social role and consciousness have gradually awakened and changed. As women's education level increases, the proportion of women with high academic qualifications increases [21], more and more women go out to work and have the ability to obtain achievements and good rewards. Some scholars have pointed out that work-family conflict prevents women from balancing career success and multiple births [26], and that the negative impact of childbearing on women's careers tends to make women tend to have fewer children to compensate for their disadvantaged position in the labor market [27]. Studies have shown that people with higher socioeconomic status are less likely to have children [28], many families choose not to have children because the challenges of balancing work and childcare are difficult to balance. China used extensive intergenerational communication as its main child-rearing model [29-31]. Parental support from elders had a positive impact on fertility, transmission of reproductive behavior between generations, and support from family networks [32, 33]. With the implementation of delayed retirement policies, parents of employees no longer have sufficient time to care for their children, and the burden of infant rearing cannot

be fully transferred to the elderly [34]. Therefore, exploring corporation childcare, which has advantages in time benefit and economic benefit, can significantly improve the current situation of women's work conflict, thus improving women's fertility willingness and fertility rate, and enabling the implementation of the three-child policy.

Focus on children, 0-3 years old stage has its special physical and mental development characteristics [35], the characteristics formed by early education at this age will have an impact on children's future life. While keeping the close connection between children and parents (corporation employees), corporation childcare can provide scientific and high-quality childcare services. It can also realize the combination of production and education by giving full play to its own technology, fulfilling multiple social responsibilities for children and their families, equal employment of men and women, which can not only improve the happiness of employees, but also contribute to building a child-friendly society [23].

3.3. Corporation

The value of corporation childcare is far more than the influence of corporations on the outside world, and there are many benefits for corporations themselves.

First of all, corporate culture is the key to corporation development and an important value for employees. Normalization of high-quality and customized corporation childcare services, integration of child-friendly into corporate culture, and harmonious integration of early childhood education [14] will help establish a unique culture and brand image of the corporation, expand brand effect, and attract more excellent talents.

Second, corporation childcare can retain outstanding talents and core cadres for corporations. Most employees in contemporary high-tech corporations have reached the child-bearing age, and they have high demand and willingness for childcare services [11]. Solving childcare problems for them can relieve employees' pressure, improve job happiness and sense of belonging, enhance employees' loyalty to employers [14], and reduce the risk of staff turnover.

Finally, corporation childcare can indirectly improve the operating efficiency of the corporation. Corporations help employees solve conflicts outside work and worries about childcare. Employees who originally need to spend more time on infant rearing can devote more time to work, devote more energy and even spare time to their posts, and generate more value, thus improving the overall productivity of the

corporation [11, 36], helping corporations to operate efficiently and develop in the long run.

4. DILEMMA AND THINKING OF CORPORATION NURTURING

Although corporation childcare has revived and returned to public view in recent years, there are still many challenges and difficulties in its wide implementation and implementation.

4.1. The Current Dilemma

In contemporary society, the dilemma faced by corporation childcare can be divided into two categories: economic resources and human resources.

Economy and cost are the biggest problems hindering the popularization and vigorous development of corporation childcare [21]. Although there are policies to subsidize the trust units, the overall policy content is relatively general and there is no clear agreement on the responsibility sharing of each subject [21]. If corporations want to carry out childcare, it means that they will bear most of the costs, generate additional economic burdens, and also need to bear the risk responsibility for childcare. Generally speaking, corporations undertaking childcare responsibility may be a project with high costs and high risks, which is difficult to stimulate corporations' willingness to participate.

The standardization in childcare is another obstacle for corporations, which is reflected in the shortage of human resources and professional problems in supervision. Although there are many high-tech talents in corporations, there are professional talents in childcare and child education. It is lacking. When corporations recruit childcare teachers from the society, it is difficult to judge and define the professional aspects such as job standards and teacher qualifications, and it is easy to have normative deficiencies [11]. Teachers are the focus of parents when choosing childcare services. If more parents want to choose childcare services, then the specialization of teachers and reasonable teacher-student ratio structure are undoubtedly the keys to attracting students [12].

4.2. Reflections on the Future Realizable Path

In view of the above-mentioned difficulties, combined with past research and actual situation, we can consider improving and widely expanding corporation childcare services from these directions in the future.

First of all, provide financial support. Learning from the experience of developed countries such as Japan

and Sweden, various financial support methods can be considered to increase the enthusiasm of corporations for childcare. For example, the governments of Japan and Sweden will give high subsidies to corporations that set up childcare and bear more than 50% of the operating expenses of institutions [12]. This is similar to the successful experience of vigorously developing enterprise nurseries during the Republic of China, that is, it is necessary to increase the financial support for nursery services (Hong Xiumin, 2024). In addition to direct financial support, policies and laws should be revised simultaneously. For example, in terms of taxation, tax reduction or appropriate tax exemption shall be provided for corporations providing childcare services, and subsidies of different degrees shall be provided according to the number and scale of corporations enrolled in childcare services [12]. to promote the development of corporation trust. In addition, consideration should be given to eliminating the singularity of corporation risk bearing, providing high-quality childcare ecological network, integrating education bureau, construction bureau and other departments to provide coordinated support under the leadership of the government [23], and a cost-sharing mechanism similar to that entrusted by enterprises and institutions in the Republic of China is established (Hong Xiumin, 2024), so that costs and risks can be shared by many parties.

Secondly, supervision needs to be strengthened urgently. Strong supervision can greatly improve the quality of corporation childcare, such as establishing rules for admission and exit of corporation childcare [23]. Encourage high-quality care corporations, order correction for corporations that fail to meet regulatory standards, and enforce withdrawal for corporations that violate relevant laws and regulations, so that corporations can carefully care for children, pay more attention to childcare services, and assume corresponding responsibilities. At the same time, improving supervision can also make employees' families feel at ease to send children to childcare and carry out personal work more confidently.

In addition, the government and the education bureau can also provide assistance in the field of teachers. For example, providing other professional childcare brands to form linkages with corporations providing childcare services can help increase the resources of childcare teachers. At the same time, since the professional development of childcare teachers can be improved through coaching and training, the quality of education can be improved by developing teachers' ability to interact with children [11]. Therefore, teacher training can be provided for childcare teachers who have already joined the

profession to improve their professionalism, reduce parents' worry about teachers, and make corporation childcare more popular.

5. CONCLUSION

The contribution of this literature review lies in sorting out the past literature at home and abroad in the form of review, providing more theoretical support and practical guidance for the field of enterprise childcare when the literature related to enterprise childcare in China is not sufficient. This paper discusses that under the contradictory phenomenon of three children liberalization in an all-round way, but the fertility rate in China is still low, enterprise childcare can eliminate the child-rearing burden of employees, alleviate the work-family conflict of women, and improve the fertility willingness of employees of appropriate age, thus alleviating the problem of low fertility rate.

However, there are still some shortcomings in this paper, such as the number of international cases adopted and sorted out is not large, and most of them are concentrated in developed countries such as Japan. Follow-up research can consider incorporating the process and current situation of enterprise care in other developing countries, which may have more reference value in the level and form of national economic and social development.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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