

# Achievements and Difficulties - Review Ten Years of Media Literacy Education in China<sup>1</sup>

## RÉUSSITES ET DIFFICULTÉS- RÉVISION DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SECONDAIRE PENDANT DIX ANS EN CHINE

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**Abstract:** Relevant research and practices of China's media literacy education have a history of ten years. It achieved rapid development through the efforts from all walks of life. Combined with the experience of developed countries in the world, this article elaborates on the achievement of media literacy education as well as analyzes the difficulties faced with China's media literacy education from theoretical research, mass base, government support, teacher training and other aspects. It also tries to offer some suggestion and opinions.

**Key words:** Media literacy education, China, achievements, difficulties

**Résumé:** La recherche et les pratiques en question de l'enseignement secondaire en Chine ont une histoire de dix ans. Elles ont accompli le développement rapide par les efforts de toutes les démarches de la vie. Combinée avec les expériences des pays développés dans le monde, cette mémoire s'étend sur les réussites de l'enseignement secondaire ainsi que analyse les difficultés faites face à l'enseignement secondaire en Chine de la recherche théorique, la masse de base, les soutiens gouvernementaux, la formation pour les professeurs et d'autres aspects. Elle essaie aussi de proposer des conseils et des opinions.

**Mots-Clés:** enseignement secondaire, Chine, réussites, difficultés

In 1997, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences associate researcher Buwei published China's first paper about media literacy education - "*On the Significance · Content and Methods of Media Education*". It recalls the development of the concept "media education" in western countries, which marks the prelude of China's media literacy education movement. After nearly 10 years of efforts, media literacy education has developed relatively fast and

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the "China" mainly refers to the Chinese mainland, the People's Republic of China except Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.

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made some progress. However, just like other developed countries, China is gradually entering an era of confusion after the initial boom. People began to doubt the necessity and effectiveness of media literacy education in China. In the specific practice, because of the differences in interests and goals of different groups and individual, different individuals have their own points of view in the education purpose, activity way, specific strategies, and other aspects. China's media literacy education is at a crossroad and urgently need clarify its development process, unify thinking and form a joint force.

Along with a 10-year development, we can conscientiously sum up experience from the following aspects and discuss and consider existing problems and deficiency, all of which can make sure a smooth development of Chinese media literacy education in the future.

## **1. THEORETICAL RESEARCH**

Chinese early research stayed on such superficial levels as media coverage and audio-visual rate survey, general public opinion survey, communicated effect investigation of major news events. From the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century, the relevant theoretical exploration popularized rapidly. According to Chinese Journal Net Search (1997-2007): collection contains 193 articles about "media literacy", and 420 articles about "media education".<sup>3</sup>

The gradually resourceful results of theoretical research in Chinese media literacy education lay a foundation for its practice. Thanks to the objective and subjective differences, there are differences in relevant concepts, in the understanding of aim functions of China's media literacy education. Research levels are widely divergent on this matter. Therefore, David Buckingham explained in China's first international seminar on media literacy education held in October 2004 Beijing: "From the aspect of education ideology, media literacy education could have more than one definitions, not only from the perspective of knowledge systems but also from a comprehensive perspective on the skills."<sup>4</sup> UNESCO also expressed the respect and the understanding to this kind of difference, and the attitude of maintaining this difference worldwide. Although the differences among various schools on the theoretical level could be beneficial to media literacy education and developed fully and freely at an early stage. However, with the further study and popularization of education practice, the negative impacts of such differences have gradually appeared. The differences in basic theories directly hindered our communication and blurred public awareness. The most typical case is the Chinese statement of "media literacy education". There are multiple versions from the domestic communication and education research field. Many groups and individuals, for the sake of their own position and purposes, hold different opinions to the specific connotation of media literacy, its main content and objects. Media literacy education ranges over two major areas of education and communication. So we should grasp the core concept of media literacy from the perspective of education and use mass communication term to define media education.

It is regrettable that there be no good exchange in communication and education field , people go their own ways. Media scholars believe that education scholars do not understand what "the media" is. On the other hand, education scholars believe that communication scholars do not know what "education" is. They do not have necessary mutual understanding

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<sup>3</sup> Chinese Journal Net Search(2008). <http://lsg.cnki.net/grid20/>.

<sup>4</sup> Zhang Kai(2006) *An Introduction to Media Literacy*. Beijing, Communication University of China Press:195.

on basic issues and lack of cooperation as well. Chinese media literacy education has passed the enthusiastic phase of the precursors, and gradually returned to reason. When education practice has been put on the agenda, the first step is to form a clear and relatively consistent point of view on the theoretical level.

## **2. MASS BASE**

The expert of international media literacy, John Pungente, CEO of the Jesuit Communications Project and president of the Canadian Association of Media literacy education Organizations (CAMEO), firstly emphasized "Media literacy education, like other reform movements, is a grass-roots movement",<sup>5</sup> when summing up the Canadian media literacy education successful experience. It is a life-long bottom-up education campaign oriented spontaneously from the society, which must have the broad mass base. Because media literacy education includes various techniques and professional knowledge, it requires a full cooperation of teachers, parents, researchers and media professionals. The real driving force to the development of media education involves improving the recognition degree and full participation of the whole people.

China's public awareness of the media has gradually increased, however, compared to the increasingly significant media influence to the community, people's understanding to media literacy education is still very weak and relative concepts are unknown to the public. People tend to mix up the media literacy education study with media research and education technology study. Facing with the severe pressure of entering the next higher schools, media literacy education generally is limited to the academic field, without wide recognition and public attention. Up to now especially, the main community of domestic media literacy education researchers are scholars of media communication and some education communication and technical researchers. Yet in Western countries, English teachers are the main promoters and executants. A small number of educational researchers and media researchers give some theoretical guidance. This situation has resulted in the lack of human resources for Chinese media literacy education in practice. The real development of media literacy education needs a broad social support, the active participation of the domestic front-line education worker in particular.

China has the wide land and lots of population. The development of economic and education is very unbalance. The difference in culture is huge too. So it is unrealistic to popularize the media education rapidly and simultaneously. We can learn from the grass-roots movement of other countries. Firstly, it originated from the media education researchers. Through the theoretical research and spread, that enhances the people's awareness, consolidate the community foundation and form a good atmosphere of social education. Secondly, it should base on school. Through the expansion of school media education, gradually gained the regional and national recognition. More importantly, the status of media education in school education should be established through the formation of policies and regulations. Eventually bring them into the formal education system and then promote them all over the country.

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<sup>5</sup> John Pungente(2005) *Nine Factors that Make Media Literacy Flourish*.  
[http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching\\_backgrounders/media\\_literacy/9\\_factors.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/educational/teaching_backgrounders/media_literacy/9_factors.cfm).

### 3. GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

In China, the support from the government is a key factor to the success of any educational activities. Media literacy education must be on the agenda of each session of the government's work. The government should make relevant policies and regulations to bring media literacy education into the school curriculum system and try to comply and edit curriculum guides and related materials to ensure that the curriculum development with necessary material resources. In recent years, with the rapid development of Chinese science and technology and economy, digital network products established a new media exchange platform for the public. The social problems caused by that have appeared constantly. The Chinese government has implemented a series of documents such as "*National Youth Convention on the Network Civilization*" (2001), "*A Number of Opinions from the CPC Central Committee and State Council on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Moral Construction of Minors*" (2004), etc. These documents stressed the importance of regulating young people's use of the media, correcting the understanding of media information. Under the promulgation and implementation of these regulations, the domestic media education seems ready to come out. In July 2004, the Ministry of Education announced the key bidding project: "*The Theory and Practice of Media Literacy*". Fudan University successfully got it. In October, Communication University of China held the first national media literacy education International Seminar. In December, seven ministries jointly held the "2004 media and the youth forum" in Shanghai. In December 2007, "media and China" forum, with the theme of "media literacy and civic literacy", first held in Fudan University. This shows that the relevant departments of State and Government are increasing the degree of attention on media education. However, it is regrettable that so far, there is no formulation of specific policies and regulations and macro-development planning on media education. Media literacy education development is lack of the guidance and protection of policy. At the same time the support of the current government remains mostly on the "protection" level. Deep level issues such as "public criticizing awareness" and "democratic participation" are rarely mentioned. This has something to do with China's practical political and news system. In a certain sense, "protectionism" is more helpful for the leaders' acceptance for media education. But with China's continuously promoting democratization process, "beyond protectionism" is an unavoidable topic for media education. Government should use the system to support the relevant scientific research institutions in the form of manpower, material and financial resources, strengthen teacher training, and encourage some schools to operate media literacy education curriculum and promote education socialization process.

### 4. MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION ORGANIZATION

Throughout the development history of Canadian and other countries' media literacy education, it is easy to find out that: as a bridge between social communities and the government, many professional associations play a crucial role in promoting the regional development of media education. At present, the Youth Development Research Center in the Institute of Chinese Academy, Fudan University, Communication University of China, South China Normal University, Shanghai Jiaotong University and other academic institutions have formed research groups of media education. But so far, relevant organizations have been mainly centralized in Beijing and Shanghai. There are a small number of cooperative researches and unified

professional media literacy education organizations have not yet set up. This has seriously hampered the further expanding of media literacy education in China. So it is urgent to rapidly establish a national core organization, such as the Media Literacy Education Commission, which can unify leadership, carry out investigations and studies, organize professional forum, propagate related information, develop the curriculum and establish network resources. The full-time organization should surpass the restrictions of schools and regions and carry out supervision and coordination with the involvement of all levels that are interested in the media literacy education. At the same time, local specialized agencies should be established and improved. They are engaged in specific research and practice and perform case study based on regional differences. With the cooperation of local administrative departments, feasibility measures can be launched and implemented.

## 5. COURSE CONSTRUCTION

In order to really promote media education comprehensively, and to obtain recognition of the whole society, media literacy education has to be put into the school curriculum, as part of formal education. Current Chinese education system often has one-sided emphasis on infusing traditional subjects knowledge to the students, and cultivating the basic ability on listening, speaking, reading, writing, counting. In the background of the information society, they also neglect to train students independent critical awareness capability when faced with all kinds of complicated media information. Therefore, a curriculum system aiming at enhancing students' media literacy is urgently needed to be established. School education is a main way to implement media education. In many countries worldwide, primary schools, high schools and universities have all established relevant courses and systematically taught related knowledge about media with the authority of teachers and schools. This enables students to reach a consensus, to communicate with each other, influence each other, master the use of the media skills and learn to access media information and to carry out independent critical thinking. Although the current national curriculum in mainland China contains the purpose of media education, mostly concealed under other themes. No clear media literacy education has been brought forward, which is quite negative to promote it comprehensively and systematically.

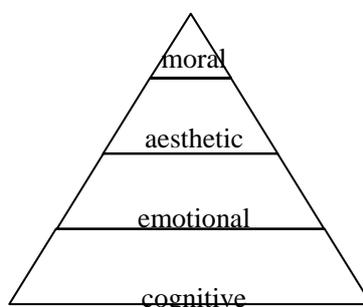
There are four main types in media literacy education courses worldwide: the first one is an independent subject; the second serves as an integral part of certain subject; the third integrates it into all subjects; the fourth is an integrated, interdisciplinary research topic. According to China's current situation, colleges can offer media literacy education as compulsory course, while high schools as elective courses, and elementary and secondary schools can incorporate media literacy education into related courses such as Chinese, History and Politics. In September 2004, Shanghai Jiaotong University firstly set up the media literacy education course available to all the undergraduates. After that, Shanghai Normal University's course trial at the university and high school level and Nanchang, Jiangxi 's at the primary and secondary schools have achieved some success. Education departments should make greater efforts to promote, establish and improve the curriculum for different levels of the education system.

W.James.Potter (2001) believes that the purpose of media literacy education includes four aspects of knowledge and abilities in media "cognitive", "emotional", "aesthetic" and "moral".<sup>6</sup> In four areas of knowledge and abilities, "cognitive" is the basic understanding of

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<sup>6</sup> W. James Potter(2001) *Media Literacy (second edition)*. Lodon, Sage Publication:8.

media-related knowledge, "emotional" is to enable students to understand the impact of media on the level of people's spirit, "aesthetic" is the understanding of the media use of technology and media system code, "moral" is a look at media based on the self-critical spirit. Then ultimately enhance the individual to liberate and empower the media with a steady evolvement of the four links(Figure 1).



**(Figure 1 )**

This is a system process formed in a life-long time, therefore it should be taught according to the education targets' such characteristics as ages and psychologies. The media literacy education in mainland can focus on "cognitive" education in primary schools; "emotional" in junior high school with a combination of "aesthetic" and "moral" understanding. In high schools it focuses on cultivate students' "moral" critical ability on the previous basis. After the adulthood, media literacy education aims at a comprehensive education of above four educations.

Although China has been performing quality education for many years, it is difficult to carry out media literacy education in the formal education system (especially the heavy burdened primary and secondary schools) thanks to the restriction of existing education system. Schools and parents pay more attention to students' enrollment rates and teachers also complain about the additional teaching burden by media education. Despite present universities are the best media literacy education fields, the teachers feel very helpless, because they almost have to teach from the student's "cognitive" education.

## **6. TEACHER TRAINING**

Teacher training must be the first step on the implementation of media education. It is hard to imagine that teacher without media literacy can foster student with spirit of criticism. Teacher training can be divided into two main areas: pre-job training and on-job training. Specific forms of training can be varied. The government, schools, teacher associations and the relevant enterprises and institutions should fully cooperate in this aspect. First, University resources should be made full use of to provide long-term training for teachers. Education departments of universities can provide Media literacy education lessons for pre-job or on-job teachers through systematic learning. Second, various forms of classes, symposium should be provided teachers for short-term training. With the advance of the curriculum reform, more opportunities should be presented to this area of teacher training. Those teachers who commit themselves to bringing media literacy education into the new curriculum can be actively trained by their schools' study classes, experience exchange meetings, media literacy education activity day

and related academic meetings, etc.

At present, the serious shortage of teachers has become a major bottleneck for China media literacy education development. The main reason lies in people's lacking of awareness, unclear government guide and the absence of media literacy education organizations with appeal in this field. In regard to the status quo, China can transfer the training project to colleges of Journalism and Communication in different universities. Short-term and long-term study and various academic exchange meetings, seminars comprehensively enhance pre-job and on-job teachers' media literacy. At the same time, different training requirements are worked out according to different teaching positions. Full-time teachers who teach media literacy education courses in high schools and universities are required to have high educational background majored in media literacy education. In 2003, Communication University of China firstly started to enroll media literacy education graduates in china with the aim to culture experts in media literacy education research area and full time teachers for media literacy education organization. However, only this step is far from enough to push forward media literacy education in china. All pre-job and on-job teachers should possess relevant media awareness through timely relevant trainings. Media literacy education is not only the task of a particular subject teacher. It is not simply to add a new curriculum or part of teaching content. The more important thing is that all teachers can grasp the relevant course teaching with media criticism spirit, be good at interconnecting media literacy and the subject taught by themselves, and be competent in teaching requirements of basic education stage.

## **7. LEARNING RESOURCES**

It is necessary to use modern media to build harmonious society system by providing books and audio-visual materials which are fit for the whole country or local regions. Publication of specialized books and magazines or production of particular can satisfy the public's need for media literacy..

First, relevant materials for school media literacy education and teaching should be revised. This kind of textbooks can introduce media-related knowledge completely and systematically with different emphasis at different age groups. The publication of Xie Jinwen-"News, Media, Media Literacy"(2004), and Zhang kai-"An Introduction to Media Literacy"(2006), have filled in a blank spot in this filed in Mainland China. In recent years, three books including Duan jingsu and Du junfei-"An Introduction to Media Literacy"(2007),Liu yong-"Guide to Modern Media Literacy"(2007),the San xiaohong-"Introduction to Media Literacy"(2008) have been successively published in China. The above books systematically introduce the basic knowledge of news and media, and address the basic theories and significance of media literacy education, which can be used not only by professionals for knowledge- updating and academic study, but also for university students for media literacy- upgrading. However on the whole the books of this kind are still in great lack. A series of textbooks suiting different levels should be composed as soon as possible. Because media literacy education involves relevant knowledge of education, media and sociology, the textbooks can be co-authored by experts and professors of relevant subjects organized by Schools of Journalism or Chinese Association of Communication. These books can be divided into three categories: The first category is relevant teaching materials for training full-time teachers of media education. It should be different from previous media professional teaching materials. It is not only a comprehensive collection of media education, but also a presentation of cultivating students' media literacy from the aspect of pedagogy. The second category is special teaching materials for university

students in compulsory courses and high school students in elective courses. It guides the students how to access and express information, with emphasis on possessing a self-critical awareness of the media "aesthetics" and "moral values". The third category is books suitable for students under middle school education. In this stage, no special teaching materials are written. It can blend the media literacy education content in other subjects' teaching materials as an independent chapter focusing on the interest. Students can establish the acknowledgement and emotions for media literacy education in an entertaining teaching.

The next is to publish relevant materials aiming at improving the media literacy of all the people. A variety of distinctive media literacy books and audio materials are published to cater to people at different age groups. The number of programs involving media literacy education have gradually increased in China since "*A Number of Opinions from the CPC Central Committee and State Council on Further Strengthening and Improving Ideological and Moral Construction of Minors*" was released on February 26, 2004. There has been a steep rise in programs concerning about "net addiction," "violent pornography information" and "adverse impacts of the media information". In 1998, Jinan University Press published a set of "literacy education books", including seven series and 33 volumes, among which, "Media series" includes five volumes of film, television, news, advertising, computer and network. This is the first book about media literacy training in the country. In 2001, Science Popularization Press published a set of popularization books about journalism-communication education for young people, including "*How to Be a Small Journalist*", "*I Also Can Be a Small Editor*", "*Today, I Am Director*", "*To Be a Computer-net Expert*", "*Small Painter for School Newspaper and School Magazine*" etc, which emphasizes on reaching the goal of training media literacy through technical trainings. These publications have enhanced the public's media literacy objectively, but they are generally implied in other themes. There is still a obvious lack in specialized media literacy knowledge popularization books.

In addition, internet will play an increasingly important role in the promotion of media literacy education because of its excellent interactive performance. It can create a rapid and convenient communication platform for all the people who are interested in it. According to China Internet Network Information Center (a government research institutions) official forecast released every six months, in March 2008, the total number of Chinese internet users will reached 225 million, and is expect to become the world's largest network users Groups, surpass that of the United States.<sup>7</sup>This is a challenge as well as an opportunity for Chinese media education. The purpose of media literacy education is teaching about media, but we also can teach through / with media then promote media education. To this end, on October 1, 2004, Lu Ye, Supervisor of PhD Candidates of School of Journalism, Fudan University, with tens of famous scholars、 professors and graduates, has created the first China media literacy website: <http://www.medialiteracy.org.cn>, making a successful step in this field. But compared to China's nearly 1.3 billion populations, there is still much work to do with the network construction.

## 8. PARTNERS

We should strive for the participation of enterprises and government units and other civil societies in media education, and offer corresponding support for them. On the process of

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<sup>7</sup> *The number of china's Internet users over 200 million, ranking first in the world*(2008)  
<http://www.chinafastener.biz/gb/news/5605.htm>.

implementing media education, schools should draw on collective wisdom and absorb all useful ideas by asking for advice from media literacy education experts and media professionals.

Media literacy education is a society-wide systems work, which needs solid financial foundation and powerful technical support. Although many enterprises and non-governmental organizations in mainland China also start to pay attention to the negative impacts caused by media information. Without the guide from the Government and specialized organizations, they have always strayed out of media education, and failed to form a joint force. At the same time, they often bear more complex motives and conflicting feelings. Influenced by the concept of "people can be guided, not to be known", some media and social organizations fear that once the public possess critical thinking ability towards mass media, they will not obey and therefore weaken the influence of the media organizations. Just as the British media literacy education expert Cary Bazalgette mentioned: "From the producer perspective, they even more hope to encourage the audience to understand the professional skills of programming with admiring look, rather than survey their products with critical look."<sup>8</sup>

At present, there are about 367 million minors under the age of 18 in China. Many studies indicate that young people's time spending on daily contact with television, playing computer games, internet accounts for nearly their most leisure time, not including that of the media accessed in school. Mass media has become the most important source of information for the children, teenagers and the general public, playing more and more important guiding role. Therefore promoting media literacy education is essential and urgent. Although the definition, objectives, relevant ideas of media literacy education in the West are already very clear, its implementation and promotion in mainland China still need joint efforts from the whole society, especially the government, members of the educational and academic circles.

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<sup>8</sup> Cary Bazalgette and Zhang Kai(2005) *Media Literacy and Media*, Modern Communication(2):78-83.