

Family education and the development of child models: an example analysis of children in "China's first town of children's clothing" - Zhili Town, China

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the development of child models in Zhili Town, known as "China's First Town of Children's Clothing", and examines the impact of family education on these children.

The study reveals that child models often become the primary income earners in their families, altering family income structures and power dynamics. Additionally, the nature of modeling work complicates the caregiver-child relationship. Due to these factors, child models experience significant changes in their physical, linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. The paper emphasizes the need for improved family education and public intervention to ensure the healthy development of child models.

Key words: child models; family education; child development; caregiver-child

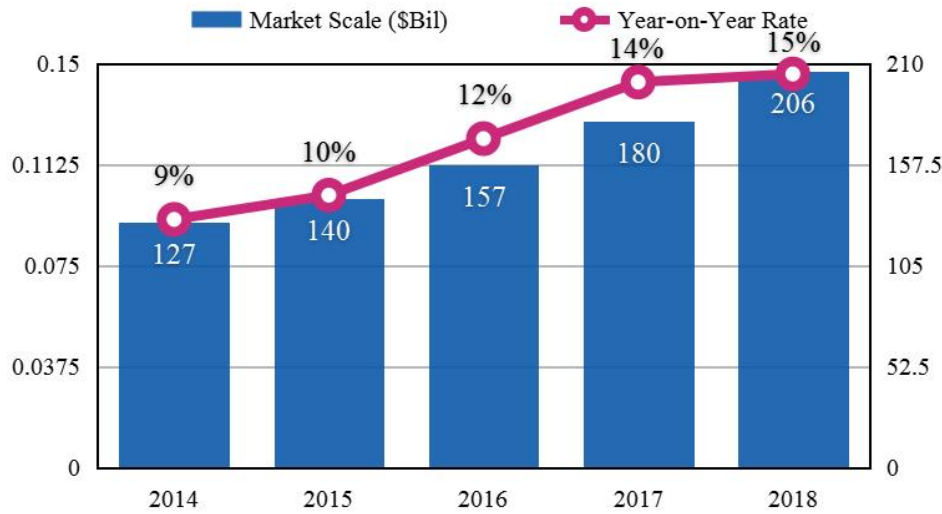
1 Introduction

1.1 Overall picture of the child-model industry in china

Since 2010, China has replaced Japan as the second-biggest economy in the world [1]. The increase in productivity and national income has promoted the expansion of China's domestic consumption market. Simultaneously, after joining the World Trade Organization(WTO) in 2001, China has become the world's largest apparel producer and exporter owing to its advantages in labor cost and raw material supply [2]. Benefiting from increased consumption in both domestic and foreign clothing markets as well as the dividend of China's two-child policy, the child apparel industry has maintained a sustainably high-speed growth trend.

The prosperity of the child apparel market brings about the appearance and development of a new industry - child modeling, resulting in the emergence of photography studios, training agencies, and brokerage companies. Despite the rapid growth of this industry, there has not been any official efforts in regulating its commercial and labor activities. No organization has published statistics on the number of child models in China so far. As there is no relevant law, any Chinese child may become a child model without the approval of institutions or government departments. On Baby Model Website (BMW), one of the child-model brokerage websites, 8,425 registered child models have been providing their

photos and personal information by themselves or their parents on the site. According to statistics in Table 1, more than 80% of child models registered on BMW are between 2 to 10 years old. The period from 2 to 10 years old covers the peak period of synaptic development in the brain of 0-3 years old, preschool education, and part of primary education, which is vital for one's physical, linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.



Graph 1. 2014-2018 market scale and growth of child clothing industry in China [3]

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of BMW child models [4]

Age	A: Total Number	B: Male Number	C: Female Number	B/A	C/A
Under 6 months	17	13	4	76.5%	23.5%
6 months to 12 months	73	41	32	56.2%	43.8%
1 year to 2 years	452	256	196	56.6%	43.4%
2 to 4 years	2,476	1,414	1,062	57.1%	42.9%
4 to 6 years	2,057	945	1,112	45.9%	54.1%
6 to 8 years	1,460	598	862	41.0%	59.0%
8 to 10 years	943	368	575	39.0%	61.0%
10 to 12 years	338	124	214	36.7%	63.3%
12 to 16 years	297	73	224	24.8%	75.2%
More than 16 years	44	7	37	15.9%	84.1%

Due to the characteristics of modeling work and the age limit of children in the child modeling industry, for most child models, parents or other caregivers in the family are the people they are most exposed to. Therefore, the role of family education, primarily including caregiver-child relationship, parental education, and intergenerational interaction within the family, have far more impacts on the development of child models than that of schooling or peer influence does.

1.2 Literature review

Child labor is one of the most longstanding issues socially and academically. Albeit both domestic and abroad academic research on the development of child labor has been widely conducted, few studies are centered around the child model industry. Instead, the sub-category is often overlooked despite its distinctive legal definition and work specification. Additionally, the prosperity of children's clothing and the child modeling industry has not brought about flourishing

attention on the development of child models in academia. Many among the small number of academic works written about child modeling tend to focus on child exploitation or its economic impacts without analyzing the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in this industry, at the same time profound research from the perspective of child development is also missing with limited academic data and resources.

1.3 Research methodology

To further investigate the development of child models and their family education, this paper will investigate 20 children aged 4 to 10 years old through participant and non-participant observation as well as interviews. The centre of this research is conducted in Zhili Town of Huzhou City in China, which is known as "China's First Town of Children's Clothing" because of the impressive amount of children's clothing trading centers. 20 participants, including 10 child models and 10 non-model children, will be divided into two groups according to their professional identity. To ensure the accuracy of conclusion, the two groups of children are basically consistent in age and gender distribution. During the study, two groups of children and their main caregivers will be interviewed. Meanwhile, in order to ensure the authenticity of the interview, each group of caregivers and children will be observed for 1-1.5 hours.

Table 2. Interviewee Information

(Some information was processed to protect children's privacy.)

Group	Name	Gender	Main Caregiver	Age (Years)	Income of Parents (RMB/Year)
Group 1 Child Models	Shi Chenxi	Female	Mother	4	30,000 to 50,000
	Huang Xiaoyi	Male	Mother	4	50,000 to 100,000
	Xiao Yuxi	Male	Mother	4	30,000 to 50,000
	Wu yilong	Male	Father	5	30,000 to 50,000
	Han Er	Female	Grandparents	6	More than 100,000
	Sheng Jiaqi	Male	Father	6	30,000 to 50,000
	Tong Bao	Female	Mother	8	50,000 to 100,000
	Du Tina	Female	Mother	10	50,000 to 100,000
	Wen Yihan	Female	Mother	10	50,000 to 100,000
	Luo Qihang	Male	Mother	10	More than 100,000
Group 2 Non-model Children	Zheng Ruolin	Female	Mother	4	30,000 to 50,000
	Xu Yifan	Male	Grandparents	4	50,000 to 100,000
	Lin Chuyi	Female	Grandparents	5	More than 100,000
	Lian Huan	Male	Mother	5	30,000 to 50,000
	Yu Qing	Female	Father	7	50,000 to 100,000
	Zhang Jiahao	Male	Mother	8	50,000 to 100,000
	Chen Sitong	Male	Grandparents	9	More than 100,000
	Wen Lina	Female	Grandparents	10	50,000 to 100,000
	Li Hongjian	Male	Mother	10	50,000 to 100,000
	Li Meicheng	Female	Mother	10	50,000 to 100,000

Through this comparative study of the development and family education of the two groups of children, this paper attempts to explain the dilemma of child development that child models and their family are presently facing and further identify the impact of family education on child development, finally provide prospective solutions to improve the interactive growth environment from the aspects of society and family.

2 Unbalanced family education for child models

In this article, family education is a concept that exists relative to school education and peer influence. It mainly refers to the education provided by the main caregivers for children, including providing life care, interaction, training for children's linguistic, cognitive, socio-emotional ability, and so on. Many children's occupation as a model has brought changes to their family's income structure, the relationship among family members, and educational perception, thus immensely affecting the development of children.

2.1 Children's changing role: the primary breadwinner

Due to the work and income, the role of child models in the family has changed. From the income of the 10 child models interviewed in Group 1, their annual income all exceeds RMB 100,000. The price of shooting for each set of clothes is about RMB 80-150, and the number of clothing samples photographed by each child model exceeds 1,500 sets per year. Compared with the total income of their parents, child models have become the main bearers of family income. Among the 10 families interviewed, one of the parents in 3 families have been resigned from their main occupations after their children became child models and started working as their personal managers instead.

Changes in the economic income structure have led to changes in the discourse power inside the family. Although parents or main caregivers are still the dominators of family income, child models enjoy more financial freedom and influence over their parents than non-model children do. Child models are inclined to express their demands for non-necessities directly, such as expensive toys and snacks. Besides, from the interview results, compared with the main caregivers of non-model children, the main caregivers of child models are more likely to meet the requirements of children for three reasons: first, according to main caregivers, child models are tired out after work and need to be rewarded; second, satisfying the needs of child models can appease the emotions of children and ensure their productivity; finally, the majority of child models have, at least once, considered having a financial income to be a condition when making demands with their caregivers.

2.2 Complexity of the caregiver-child relationship

Caregivers play a multitasking role of providers, communicators and educators in the daily life of children, although that range of roles and the caregiver-child dynamic have been diversified even more in families with child models. Because child models are minors who are not legally and interpersonally capable of tending to paper works and transactions, their guardians naturally become their business and financial moderators and while doing so, the professional relationship has complicated the caregiver-child dynamic. Main caregivers, primarily parents, play the role of brokers or bosses in the daily work of child models. Main caregivers are further in charge of seeking for suitable job opportunities for their children, deciding whether to sign a contract, and supervising child models during their working hours.

The addition of the business relationship has changed the way and content that caregivers and children interact with each other. According to the results of the interview transcription, parent-to-child imperative mood and threatening words appear more often within families in Group 1 than in the families of Group 2. Violent ways of communication - both verbal and physical - are also conducted at a higher frequency in child-model families. Concurrently, in the development process, children often imitate the behavior of caregivers, which is one of the important ways for them to acquire social skills. When dealing with parental repression or violent communication, child models tend to imitate the parents' behavior in a

similar way to resist the repressive or violent parental communication.. For instance, when a child model failed to tidy up his clothes, his mother accused him and dragged him hard for punishment. After being dragged by his mother, he grabbed her arm vigorously and fought her back with insulting words.

2.3 Increasing dependence on school education

The caregivers of child models and non-model children have similar understanding of school education, in which they think that the main subjects of education should be schools and teachers instead of students, illustrating the inherent "organizational dependence" on the collective in conventional Chinese perception [5]. Since after-school time has been allocated to the maintenance of caregiver-child business relationships, time spent on family education of child models is less than that of non-model children, which has led to their increasing dependence on school education. In the survey, 80% of caregivers in Group 1 believe that they lack sufficient educational knowledge and support the view that school education is most important to child development, while the percentage of such opinion-holders in Group 2 is 50%. Equally important, the average time that caregivers of child models spend in tutoring children's homework is less than 5 hours per week, 7.5 hours less than that parents in Group 2 do. Based on educational perception and tutoring time, child-model families illustrate more dependence on school education.

3 Impact of family education on child model's development

Modeling work has changed the status of children in family education, the relationship between caregivers and children, and the balance between family education and school education. The changes in family education further affect the development of child models.

3.1 Physiological precocity and retardation

As child models have become the breadwinner of their families, their caregivers tend to prioritize economic benefits over the personal development of their children. On the one hand, such a neglect has led many caregivers to overlook the health of children and provide children with a large amount of fast food, which can be easily consumed during their work hours. Simultaneously, a large amount of cosmetics are applied on child models for photogenic effects. Hormones in unhealthy foods and cosmetics may lead to premature development in children. On the other hand, child models have a heavy workload and long working hours. Some child models need to shoot more than 100 sets of clothing a day, resulting in insufficient sleep and rest, which further affects growing children on the physical recovery as well as development and the growth of bones and brain. In addition, due to the seasonal characteristics in the modeling industry, child models often have to pose in clothes that are not suitable for the present time, such as wearing heavy clothes in the summer heat or putting on thin items during the winter, which is detrimental to their physical well-being.

3.2 Adult-like linguistic and cognitive ability

It is normal for children to learn skills from the adults around them as they grow up. During the socialization process of children, the expression of adulthood is mainly displayed through appearance and dressing [6]. In the survey, however, child models have shown excessively adult-like linguistic and cognitive ability deviating from their own logical thinking and adult intervention [7].

The Children's Language Ability Scale by Taiwan National University was introduced to test the interviewed children's vocabulary, sentence making, and language comprehension. The test results demonstrate that the linguistic ability of child models seems generally more developed than that of non-model children. When child models answer questions, their sentence length is also longer than that of other children. Regarding this phenomenon, a reasonable assumption is that child models are exposed to a more diverse category of adults than non-model children of the same age, which helps them with language training during their daily work. On the other hand, some advanced Chinese words, such

as "magnanimous", are also used in the self-introduction of child models. Nevertheless, further inquiry shows that children do not understand the meaning of such words since most of their self-introductions are written by parents.

Meanwhile, child models have a more distinctive perception of the world compared with non-model children of the same age, especially in the concepts of money and responsibility. All the child models interviewed expressed their desire to make money in the interview. When it comes to children's self-identification of role, 40% of child models expressed their identity as the mainstay of family income, and 70% of them mentioned that they had to satisfy their customers. Another difference in the cognitive ability of child models and non-child models is also reflected in disparate perspectives on the same thing. In particular, two child models replaced the word "car" with the expression of the car brand (Benz), adding a comment that cars of this brand are expensive.

3.3 Unidirectional development of socio-emotional ability

According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, each developmental stage on the basis of the preceding stages paves the way for succeeding periods of development so that unresolved emotional conflicts of any period will be reflected in the next period and can turn into personality problems until being solved [8]. For children under the age of 12, not only their socio-emotional development builds on family education, but their ability to establish relationships outside the family could also be affected by the interpersonal interaction provided by the family.

Table 3. Erikson's stage of psychosocial development [9]

Approximate Age	Psychosocial Crisis	Significant Relationship	Virtues
Infancy Under 2 years	Trust vs. Mistrust	Mother	Hope
Toddlerhood 2-4 years	Autonomy vs. Shame	Parents	Will
Early Childhood 5-8 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Family	Purpose
Middle Childhood 9-12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority	Neighbors, School	Competence
Adolescence 13-19 years	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Peers, Role Model	Fidelity
Early Adulthood 20-39 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Friends, Partners	Love
Middle Adulthood 40-59 years	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Household, Workmates	Care
Late Adulthood Above 60 years	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Mankind	Wisdom

Despite the confidence shown by child models in front of the camera, their mental state and psychosocial development suffer from unbalanced family education. Due to their work, child models basically stay with their caregivers all the time and lack the opportunity to communicate or get along with peers. When it comes to friends, the average number of friends listed by child models from Group 1 is less than Group 2. Some child models indicate that they do not need friends or think that other children of the same age are too naive, while non-model children are willing to make friends with classmates and neighbors. The lack of peer influence exacerbates the impact of family education. Socio-emotional skills of child models are limited to communicating with caregivers and other working adults. According to the general pedagogy theory, children who are spoiled or consistently satisfied are more likely to show anger or violence in the absence of proper emotional guidance [10]. Insufficient investment in socio-emotional development in family education of child models leads to emotional burdens for both the children and their caregivers. A vicious circle has been formed -

family education lacks the cultivation of socio-emotional abilities, resulting in children being unable to get along well with their peers, which contributes to further lag in socio-emotional abilities.

4 Challenges and prospective solutions on family education

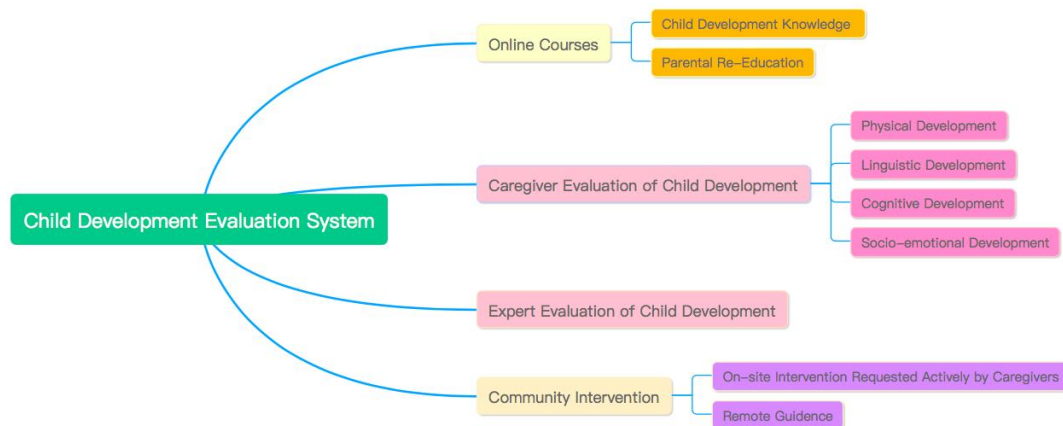
The promotion of proper family education for child models demands both self-enhancement within the family and supervision from public sectors. Considering the current shortage of research in related fields in China, the solution draws on and attempts to localize existing projects and regulations of other countries.

4.1 Case study: family education mechanism in South Korea

South Korea and China have similar historical and cultural backgrounds and are geographically close. Unlike the fast-growing child model industry in China, the South Korean child model market is smaller and less crowded with professional agencies. In order to ensure the healthy development of children, the Korean government has issued comprehensive laws and regulations, a monitoring mechanism, and the parental re-education system. The core policy of child protection in South Korea is the *Child Welfare Law*, which specifies the preventive measures for physical and psychological abuse of children with the safety standards for child development. Moreover, South Korea has formed an all-round supervision mechanism from the central government to local civil organizations in addition to establishing a child service network in the community. Last but not least, South Korea has also invented a unique parental re-education system. Parents have to participate in educational programs about nutrition, psychological and physiological health, emotion handling, and so on. At the same time, certain professional personnel from the education sector are assigned to guide and supervise parents to improve family education. The Korean example of implementing a child protection system that incorporates both the authority and the caregivers can be used for reference in China. Nonetheless, considering the population size, executive power, and other social backgrounds, China needs to enrich the content of family education and engage more stakeholders to participate in supervision based on the experience of South Korea.

4.2 Self-evaluation system in family education

After the implementation of the two-child policy, children's education has been increasingly discussed and concerned by the public. However, in contrast to a large number of families in need, China has been facing the absence of effective social work or community intervention due to the late start of domestic social work and the lack of institutions. Most institutions that provide services relevant to family education have fixed focus on problem children with behavioral disorders or serious medical conditions. In consequence, self-examination and re-education within the family should play a vital role in family education, especially in the field of child development. Both family education and child development should cover multidisciplinary expertise in psychology, pedagogy, neurology, and so on. Yet China currently lacks a localized home self-test system that emphasizes the importance of family education and provides a professional evaluation program.



Content design drawing 1. Child development evaluation system

In April 2020, the number of Internet users in China exceeds 904 million, of which users aged 20 to 59 - the age range that most caregivers are in - account for 72.3% [11]. Thus, self-learning online courses for parents and a child development assessment system can be established through online platforms and mobile devices, which can effectively provide educational knowledge for parents. The specific content design is shown in Content Design Drawing 1. Caregivers can learn about child development through curriculum learning and the Standard of Child Development Assessment Scale. In the meantime, in order to ensure that individual differences and particularities are respected as well as context-based difficulties are efficiently solved, the online platforms should also incorporate experts from relevant fields to act as professional consultants.

4.3 Intervention: legislation, policies, social media

One of the main reasons behind the frequent occurrence of violence against child models is the lack of public intervention, including a specific set of prerequisite requirements to be a child model and procedural regulations fully applicable to their contracts.

In China, the reality that any child can become a child model should be changed. Each aspiring child model's family background and developmental conditions of child models should be reviewed regularly and certified by relevant institutions before children enter the industry. The mental and emotional state, economic income, family structure of the caregivers should also be considered for obtaining permits. With reference to the requirements of application for child models and performances permit in New York State, the United States, caregivers are required to submit trust accounts, physical fitness proof, education status [12]. During the screening procedure, children's personal opinions should also be inquired in the absence of their parents to make sure that they are not being forced against their will. The establishment of the child-model censorship can fundamentally supervise the behaviors of caregivers, reducing the number of unwilling child models and increasing attention to family education.

Apart from an application process and the pre-work censorship, there is also an urgent need for strengthened protection and a clear set of legally-clarified regulatory responsibilities. Both *China's Law on the Protection of Minors* and the *Labor Law* merely stipulate that no organization or individual may employ minors under the age of 16. Whereas, due to the particularity of child model work, existing laws cannot provide protection for the development of child models. In addition to the detailed regulations on the working hours and content of child models, legislatures, and governments at all levels should carry out more explicit regulations based on the responsibilities and obligations of caregivers. To prevent the

unsupervised influence of family education on the development of child models, children's clothing companies, modeling agencies, and photography studios should also be jointly and severally responsible for supervising parental behavior in the workplace.

Last but not least, as news dissemination emphasizes timeliness and effectiveness, public attention to unethical issues in the child model industry is only provoked when the damage has already been done, thus it hardly contributes to the overall improvement of family education of child models. To improve the development of child models, the media should conduct long-term observation and create follow-up reports, at the same time well-known key opinion leaders in the education field also have the responsibility to call for the public's attention. Reports of mass media, on the other hand, can be instructive and influential to the direction of social development. In this sense, focus on child models and their families can enhance social attention and public awareness, further improving the quality of child model family education. However, it is worth noting that special attention should be paid to the protection of children's privacy when they are exposed to the media.

5 Conclusion

This paper deals with the analysis of developmental dilemmas impacted by family education of child models in Zhili Town. Through interviews and observations with two groups of children as well as their parents, it can be inferred that unbalanced family education caused by children's occupations as models has an essential impact on their physical, linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. To make cogent analysis and increase the accuracy of this argument, this paper needs to conduct further research through long-time immersive observation and communication because of the incongruity of children and a certain level of dishonesty displayed by caregivers during the interviews. Another missing factor that might weaken the argument is the lack of diversity in interviewed objectives. The sample lacked single-parent, intergenerational parenting, and non-relative raising families, which should be discussed in further study.

Family is the sheltering harbor where children learn the proper values, attitudes, and behaviors that help them to cultivate personal growth, whereas school and the classroom are where they acquire interpersonal skills through interaction with their teachers and peers. For child models who are exposed to work at an early age and thus considerably unfamiliar to social interaction at school, family education has a significant role in familiarizing them with cooperative learning and social interaction, all of which are crucial to their well-rounded development.

With the continuous prosperity of the Internet economy in China, more and more children may become child models in the future. Without the guidance of correct and effective family education, it is doubtful whether these children can develop healthily and happily. The main participants of family education should attach importance to the role of family education in child development, and give the priority to the healthy development of children instead of economic benefits. Likewise, family education has always been regarded as a private and individual problem given the historical backgrounds and social circumstances that most Chinese caregivers experienced in the previous century. In the modern society, the social aspect of family education should be recognized. To solve this problem, public sectors should assume responsibility and make reasonable and effective intervention when the poor family education affects the development of children negatively. The progress would not be easy or come overnight. It is about time that all circles of the entire society stress the importance of home education and improve the living environment for children so that the next generation can maximize their potentials and thrive without limitations.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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