

# The History Changes in Family Childcare Responsibilities of 0-3 Years Infants in New China After 1949

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## ABSTRACT

Family is the genetic unit to understand China's 5000-year civilization history and also an important symbol to witness China's social changes. The process of human socialization begins with family, which bears the main responsibility for the care of infants and young children. Based on the framework of historical institutionalism analysis, with time development as a vertical sequence and historical facts as a horizontal basis, this article summarizes the changes in family responsibility for childcare and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 since the founding of New China. This process can be divided into three stages: de-familization, re-familization, and shared responsibility. In addition, it also delves into the multiple driving factors behind each stage, such as politics, economy, and population, in order to reflect and keep an eye on reality through historical experience, and provide useful references for alleviating current family parenting pressure, enhancing family fertility willingness, and standardizing and promoting the development of infants and young children childcare and care.

**Keywords:** *The New China, Childcare and care, Family responsibility, Historical change.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Family is the genetic unit to understand China's 5000-year civilization history, an important symbol to witness China's social changes, and it also largely affects the logical path of the future development of China's society.[1] In May 2019, the General Office of the State Council issued the Guideline on Promoting the Development of Care Service for Infants Under 3 Years Old (hereinafter referred to as the Guideline), marking the "first year" of China's childcare service industry in the new era. The childcare and care infants and young children are related to their healthy growth, the well-being of thousands of households, and the sustainable development of the future society and economy. The childcare and care services for infants and young children are not a new phenomenon at present. The Party and government of China have always attached great importance to the work of childcare services for infants and young children. In the early days of the founding of New

China, China began to establish a welfare-oriented public service childcare system with the main purpose of helping families solve parenting difficulties. With the changes in social and economic systems, population policies, and other factors, the childcare and care service system is constantly changing, playing a leading role in China's livelihood and infant and young children families. In the new era, in response to the increasingly serious problems of fewer children, aging population, and low fertility structure in China, the country issued and implemented the "Universal Two-child Policy" in 2016, and the "Three-child Policy" in 2021. With the implementation of policies, care services for infants and young children aged 0-3 and family responsibilities have received unprecedented attention from society as key factors affecting fertility willingness and the smooth implementation of population policies. Currently, childcare and care for infants and young children is both a "family matter" and a "national affair". It is theoretically

necessary and important to redivide and define the family responsibility of childcare and care for infants and young children.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China and the changes in relevant policies have influenced the family responsibility of childcare and care. Through extensive literature review, it has been found that there have been few studies on the historical changes in family responsibility for infants and young children care. Based on the path dependence of family care on childcare policies, this study summarizes the relevant policies and historical changes of infants and young children childcare and care in China since the establishment of New China. Liu Zhongyi combined social and economic

changes with the introduction of infant care policies to sort out the historical process of four expansions and three reductions in childcare services after the establishment of New China. Li Yufei and others sorted out the development of childcare institutions in China since 1949 based on historical materials and policy analysis, and divided them into five stages according to the changes in the number of childcare institutions. In order to present the results of literature review and analysis more clearly, more scholars' relevant research is presented in tabular form, as shown in "Table 1". The analysis of the historical evolution of the policy on childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 in New China through existing research is an important window for opening up the construction of childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 and analyzing family responsibility in the new era in China.

Table 1. Historical stage division of childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 by Chinese scholars

Author	Literature sources	Number of stages	Specific stages
Liu Zhongyi	The History, Status Quo and Future of Childcare Services in China [J]. Economic and Social Development, 2018,16	4 peaks and 3 valleys	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.The first peak period: around the 1950s</li> <li>2.The first reduction: 10 years of the Cultural Revolution</li> <li>3.The second peak period: the 1970s</li> <li>4.The second reduction after the implementation of the family planning policy</li> <li>5.In the early 1980s, the third peak period appeared</li> <li>6.Starting from 1988, the third reduction appeared</li> <li>7.Strictly speaking, the fourth peak didn't occur, but with the implementation of policies, it can be forecasted[2]</li> </ol>
Li Yufei Ma Wenshu Wang Ling	A study on the changes of the numbers and function of 0-3-year-old childcare institutions in China since 1949 [J]. Research in Educational Development, September 24, 2019	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.In the early days of the founding of New China, an explosive growth occurred</li> <li>2.During the Cultural Revolution, it almost disappeared</li> <li>3.In the early stages of reform and opening up, it gradually recovered slowly</li> <li>4.After deepening the reform, it shrank again</li> <li>5.Since the implementation of the Universal Two-child Policy, it has rebounded once again [3]</li> </ol>
Guo Jie	Tracing the History and Development of Preschool Education in China [C]. Proceedings of Chinese Conferences, 2019:8	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.The first peak occurred in the 1950s</li> <li>2.The second peak was in the 1970s</li> <li>3.The third peak was in the 1980s [4]</li> </ol>

Author	Literature sources	Number of stages	Specific stages
Luo Jiaxin Zuo Ruiyong	The Development Course and Future Prospects of China's 0-3 Year Old Infant Care Service Policy over the Past 70 Years [J]. Early Education (Education and Teaching), 2020(01).	3	1. From 1949 to the mid-and-late 1980s, the country attached great importance with the public welfare supply model 2. From the mid-and-late 1980s to 2010, with the country retreating and the public advancing, the supply main body shifted from single to diversified 3. Since 2010, a comprehensive childcare service system based on diverse supply main bodies has gradually formed [5]
Hu Ximeng	A Study on the Policy Changes of 0-3 Year Old Infant Care Services in China from the Perspective of Multiple-stream Theory [D]. Central China Normal University, 2020.	3	1. Welfare period from 1949 to 1978 2. Economic period from 1979 to 1999 3. New development period from 2000 to present [6]
Hu Malin	Institutional Changes of 0-3 Years Old Infant Care Service in China: Trajectory, Logic and Trend [J]. Theory Monthly, 2022 (06): 127-135.	3	1. Welfare care for infants and young children from 1949 to 1977 2. Marketization of care for infants and young children from 1949 to 2018 3. Inclusive care for infants and young children from 2019 to present [7]

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

Since the 1980s, the paradigm of historical institutionalism has emerged in Western political history. Historical institutionalism is based on historical facts and is not limited to a given assumption, using time series to analyze the dynamic impact of historical institutional changes and the characteristics of the institutional and behavioral patterns it exhibits. [8] It builds a bridge between macro and micro research within political and historical scientific research, forming a specific analytical framework with its own characteristics. Its three key steps include: first, the analysis of macro factors that affect historical institutions, second, the path dependence analysis of historical institutional evolution, and third, the dynamic mechanism analysis of historical institutional changes.

In 2019, the Guideline of the General Office of the State Council clearly pointed out that the basic principle of giving priority to family care for infants and young children and supplementing with childcare. Family bears the main responsibility for the care of infants and young children, but there are few studies that view the development of infant childcare and the effectiveness of policies from the perspective of family responsibility. The process of

human socialization begins with family, and the guardianship and upbringing of children are the legal responsibilities and obligations of parents. The responsibility of family care relies on the changes in the history of childcare and the continuous changes in childcare policies, which affect fertility willingness, population structure, and social development. Therefore, based on the framework of historical institutionalism analysis, with time development as a vertical sequence and historical facts as a horizontal basis, this article summarizes the changes in family responsibility for childcare and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 since the founding of New China, in order to reflect and keep an eye on reality through historical experience, and provide useful references for alleviating current family parenting pressure, enhancing family fertility willingness, and standardizing and promoting the development of infants and young children childcare and care.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the establishment of New China, due to multiple driving factors such as politics, economy, and population, as well as the changes in China's 0-3 years old infants and young children childcare service system, the family responsibility of infants and young children aged 0-3 in China has also been

constantly evolving. After summarizing the changes in family responsibility for childcare and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 since the founding of New China, this process can be divided into three stages: de-familization, re-familization, and shared responsibility. "Familization" refers to the primary responsibility of the family for the care of infants and young children, while "de-familization" refers to the government's efforts to reduce the burden on families in the care of infants and young children by providing more childcare services. The term "shared responsibility" refers to the shared responsibility of families, governments, and others for the care of infants and young children aged 0-3. This concept can be used to measure the degree of division of responsibilities between the family and the country in terms of the childcare and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 in China. In other words, there is a positive correlation between familization and family responsibility for childcare and care for infants and young children. The higher the degree of familization, the greater the dependence of childcare and care for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China on the family, and the higher the degree of "de-familization", the less the dependence of childcare and care for infants and young children on the family, meaning that the country, market, and society bear more responsibility for childcare and care for infants and young children aged 0-3.

#### ***4.1 1949 to the Mid-1980s: Familization***

At the beginning of the founding of New China, economic development required a large amount of labor input. Women were an important labor force and there was a need to address the concerns of caring for children for working women. During this period, the country began to implement childcare services with a welfare system, mainly using units as channels to support public childcare services through a "patriarchal welfare community". China's childcare and care responsibilities for infants and young children aged 0-3 showed a de-familization state.

##### ***4.1.1 1950s to 1970s: Welfare Community***

In August 1950, at the First National Female Workers Working Conference, Cai Chang, the Chairman of the All-China Women's Federation, proposed that the funding for childcare and care for infants and young children aged 0-3 should be jointly borne by three parties, mainly including the

factories, mothers of infants and young children, and welfare payments of workers, managed by dedicated personnel, to "ensure that at least one person looks after the child, there is food and water, food hygiene is important, and diseases are avoided". In rural areas, mutual aid groups for childcare could be established, with elderly people taking care of them, and women returning home at designated times to breastfeed their infants and young children. During this period, a large number of public welfare nurseries emerged in China, aimed at addressing women's concerns about caring for infants and young children. From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, influenced by the "Great Leap Forward", daycare institutions began to advance rapidly. A large number of childcare organizations were established in various regions.[9] According to the People's Daily, in 1952, the number of nurseries in various parts of the country reached 2,738, and by the end of 1956, the number of nurseries continued to grow, reaching 5,775. [10] And this measure also gradually reduced the responsibility of families for infants and children childcare and care, mainly borne by the government.

##### ***4.1.2 Early 1970s and 1980s: the Childcare Industry Rebounded***

In the 1970s, the Political Program of the Third Plenary Session of the 13th Central Committee pointed out to bring order out of chaos and adhere to economic development as the center. As the socio-economic recovery began, China's childcare services for infants and young children once again rebounded. In the early stages of reform and opening up, the country once again declared that the childcare service industry is a social undertaking. Encouraged by various policies, the enthusiasm of grassroots units to establish childcare institutions has been mobilized again, and an inclusive public childcare system established for the vast number of workers has rapidly developed. In 1980, according to incomplete statistics, the overall enrollment rate of infants and young children in urban and rural areas in 22 regions of the country reached 28.2%. In 1988, the enrollment rate of urban infants and young children increased to 38.9%. [11]

#### ***4.2 The Mid-1980s to 2010: Re-familization***

In the mid-1980s, due to economic reforms, most nurseries began to be resold or closed down, and the early childhood education system began to

be established. The country set new requirements for the main body of childcare and care responsibility for infants and young children aged 0-3. The childcare and care responsibility for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China once again returned to familization, and the early childhood education system for children aged 3-6 was preliminarily established.

In 1988, the Opinions on Strengthening Early Childhood Education jointly formulated by the former State Education Commission mentioned that the field of compulsory education doesn't include preschool education. [12]

In 1997, the former State Education Commission issued the Implementation Opinions on the Development Goals of National Early Childhood Education during the Ninth Five-Year Plan, which stated that the scope of compulsory education doesn't include preschool education. The development of early childhood education began to rely on various channels such as government subsidies, parents' payment of education fees, and kindergarten self-financing. [13]

In 2003, the General Office of the State Council forwarded the Guiding Opinions on the Reform and Development of Early Childhood Education, which set requirements for the overall goal of early childhood education and determined that by 2007, the three-year preschool education rate for young children in China should basically reach 55%, and basic popularization of preschool education for young children in large and medium-sized cities should be achieved, and the scientific and educational abilities of parents and caregivers of children aged 0-6 should be improved. [14]

### **4.3 2010-Present: Shared Responsibility**

Since 2010, a large number of early childhood education brands have begun to pour into China, and with the implementation of the two-child and three-child policies, the fertility number of infants and young children has rebounded, making it more urgent for families to have diverse needs for infants and young children care. In this regard, the country attaches great importance to the healthy development of childcare and care services and has successively introduced various relevant documents to clearly define the main responsible parties for childcare and care for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China. In 2019, the Guideline of the General Office of the State Council pointed out that childcare and care services for infants and young

children aged 0-3 should be mainly provided by families, and be supplemented by childcare institutions. The family bears the primary responsibility, with the country and society revealing all the details, that is, the responsibility for childcare and care for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China is jointly borne by the family, government, society, and enterprises.

#### **4.3.1 2010-2017: Rise of Early Childhood Education**

The first early childhood education institution in China was established in Beijing in 1998, and then the early childhood education industry began to develop rapidly. A large number of early childhood education brands emerged, arousing parents' awareness of early childhood education for infants and young children. [15]

#### **4.3.2 2018-2020: Regulation and Adjustment**

In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, for the first time, China proposed to solve the livelihood problem of "education for young children". The early development of infants and young children has further received high attention from the Party and the country. In 2019, Premier Li Keqiang put forward in the Government Work Report that "We should accelerate the development of various forms of infants and young children childcare services based on the new situation after the implementation of the Universal Two-child Policy." In the 2019 Guideline of the General Office of the State Council, requirements were put forward for the development of more abundant, diverse, scientific, and high-quality parenting and childcare services. The National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China has subsequently issued a series of related documents such as the Standards for Childcare Settings (Trial) and the Management Standards for Childcare (Trial). On December 31, 2020, the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Promoting the Healthy Development of Elderly Care and Childcare Services, which clearly stated that provincial-level people's governments should integrate elderly care into the overall promotion of national economic and social development plans, and should formulate the "14th Five-Year Plan" special plan or implementation plan for elderly care. At the same time, it's needed to coordinate and promote the

development of elderly care in urban and rural areas, strengthen the government's bottom function of ensuring basic living standards, and guide various entities to provide inclusive services [16].

#### 4.3.3 2021-Present: Support and Development

In January 2021, the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China issued the "On Issuing the Guidelines for Childcare in Nursery Institutions (Trial)", which set detailed requirements for the care and guidance of infants and young children. In the 14th Five-Year Plan of China in March 2021, the number of nursery places for infants and young children was considered as one of the new indicators for people's livelihood. In September of the same year, the State Council issued the Outline for the Development of Children in China (2021-2030), which clearly pointed out the need to accelerate the construction of an inclusive childcare service system and continuously increase the number of childcare institutions and nursery places. [17]

## 5. CONCLUSION

In traditional society, the care of infants and young children has always belonged to the private sphere of the family, and the responsibility for care is mostly borne by the mother and family members. With the transformation of the social system since the modern industrial revolution, the increase in female employment rate and the prominent pressure of double-pay families on childcare, the lack of care for infants and young children and the continuous decrease in family fertility willingness have become important issues in the new era. Based on the framework of historical institutionalism analysis, with time development as a vertical sequence and historical facts as a horizontal basis, this article summarizes the changes in family responsibility for childcare and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 since the founding of New China. This process can be divided into three stages: de-familization, re-familization, and shared responsibility. In addition, looking back at the historical changes of each stage, it also delves into the multiple driving factors behind each stage, such as politics, economy, and population, especially the practical needs of families and supporting policies for childcare services, which are the key influencing factors.

At present, in order to better alleviate the burden of parenting on families, increase support for childcare and care services for infants and young children, unleash family fertility potential, and alleviate population structure issues, the country should effectively understand the actual needs and difficulties of families, reflect and keep an eye on them based on historical experience, adhere to the system concept of putting children first, break through the path dependence of childcare and care service system changes, and clarify the role positioning and reasonable division of responsibilities between the government and families in the care of infants and young children. It's also needed to combine top-down and bottom-up linkages to improve the top-level design and supporting measures of infant and young child care services from a long-term strategic perspective. Efforts should be made to adhere to the direction of inclusive childcare services with a public welfare nature, provide effective supply of diversified childcare services, standardize industry standards, and strengthen financial support and quality supervision, so that the beautiful expectation of "childcare for infants and young children, and education for infants and young children" of the people will be realized as soon as possible.

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