CHAPTER NINE

INFLUENCES ON CHINESE EDUCATION EXERTED BY SOVIET EDUCATION

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, education can be divided into three periods as far as its cultural and ideological roots are concerned: the first stage of learning from U.S.S.R. (1949–1958), the second stage of leftist education (1958–1978) and the third stage of reform and opening-up (1978–present). The second stage can be sub-divided into three periods: the first period spans from 1958 to 1966, with the events of the education revolution and the three-year adjustment and class struggle; the second period is the period of Cultural revolution, spanning from 1966 to 1976; and the third period covers from 1976 to 1978, a period called “bringing order out of chaos.” These periods fit within the second stage because there are no significant differences in terms of their cultural and ideological foundations. Left-wing politics and philosophy began in 1958 and eventually became very dominant in the Cultural Revolution; during the two years before the third stage of reform and opening-up, political ideas swung back to towards the center, although left-wing politics did not disappear and only after the third stage was in place did ideology swing towards the right again. Since this is not a book about education history, we will not talk about each of three stages systematically; instead, we will only focus on cultural and ideological foundations of the first and the third stage. In the first stage, influences were exerted mainly by education in USSR; in the third stage, a new wave of importation of Western educational theories and philosophies wielded a great deal of influence. In both stages, the different educational philosophies have tremendously shaped the new Chinese education tradition. The second stage of leftist education, was a cultural phenomenon which did not emerge by happenstance; it was closely related to traditional Chinese culture, with a foundation of the feudal cult of personality and a lack of democratic spirit, exerting strong negative influences on education. As a result, a generation of Chinese youth was ruined and some of misconceptions still have influences today.
1. THE SPREADING OF SOVIET EDUCATION THEORIES IN CHINA

Making the Policy of Learning from the Soviet Union in All Aspects

The introduction of Soviet education theories into China can be traced back to immediately before the May Fourth Movement. The victory of the October Revolution in Russia brought hope to progressive Chinese intellectuals. When early Marxists introduced the revolution in Russia, they also brought Soviet educational thoughts and experiences into China. However, these were soon overshadowed and replaced by American pragmatism, especially after Dewey’s visit to China in 1919. Dewey’s influence was so strong that Pragmatism dominated Chinese education for quite a while. The large-scale spread of Soviet educational thoughts began in the second half of the civil war in liberated areas in the northeast China.

In the fall of 1948, most parts of northern and northeastern China were liberated and national liberation was just around the corner. Education was needed not only to supply more leaders for the war, but also to cultivate leaders who would oversee the economic redevelopment and nation-building after the war. Many educational conferences were held by the Northeast China Administrative Committee in liberated areas in order to discuss the formalization of secondary education and higher education reforms within that region.

Because of historical reasons, many Russians lived in Luda (Lushun and Dalian) of Liaoning Province—these Russians started Soviet middle schools. In October 1948, Lushun Middle School established a formal relationship with a Soviet middle school in order to learn education experiences from the Soviet Union. During this time, the previous “cramming” or memorization practice was changed by introducing Soviet teaching methods and the five-point scoring scale. The leaders of Lushun Middle School designed a Soviet education research team to promote the cooperation between the two nations and learn Soviet educational content, ideological education, and theories of school management.

In September 1948, the fourth educational conference was held by the Northeast China Administrative Committee and policy of Learning Educational Experiences from the Soviet Union formally created. On December 5, 1949, Dong Chuncai, Vice Minister of Education of the People’s Government of Northeast China, published “Learning from the Soviet Union so as to Reform Our Education” in the journal Education in Northeast China. Under the direct leadership of Dong Chuncai, there were 89 articles about Soviet educational experiences and 53 articles introducing