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Development and Contents of Family Policy in Finland and Their Implications for China

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Abstract: In order to guarantee the development and advancement of early childhood education and care in Finland, and to coordinate the contradictions between children's development and parents' work, Finland has developed a better family policy system to support families and promote the development of children. China can draw lessons from Finland's family policies and its experience from the following five aspects: (1) The government is the main body and supervisor to provide children teaching and family services; (2) Financial support and taking vacations are main forms to support families ; (3) Reconciling the conflicts between parents' career and childhood care is the main purpose, (4) child welfare is the foothold in family policies, and (5) establishing an effective system with clear responsibilities and monitoring the implementation mechanism.

Keywords: Family policy, Early childhood education, Child welfare policy, Finland

Introduction

Families play a crucial role in early childhood education. Especially the families of 0-3 year olds are responsible for almost all aspects of their care and education. In order to promote the healthy physical and mental development of children aged 0-3, the government and society should provide the necessary policies and financial support for families and parents of children aged 0-3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child also emphasizes that "the family is the basic unit of society, and the environment in which family members, especially children, grow up happily, should be protected and supported as necessary to ensure that families play their full role in society." Therefore, in the formulation of early childhood education policy, the family becomes the core of micro-intervention in the macro-level early childhood education policy, and family policy is an essential component of the early childhood education policy.

The early childhood education policy is a code of conduct formulated by political parties and the government to regulate the social life in early childhood education in accordance with the interests of the whole society and their own interests. The early childhood education policy means that the government has the authority to allocate the benefits of the social resources in early childhood education, and that the government performs the adjustment, synthesis, and gaming of complex relationships according to its needs of interests(Jiaxiong Zhu.et.al.,2016). Family policy addresses family benefits and affects family resources or family behavior (Guangzong Mu.et.al.,2016) . The current scope of early childhood education policies in China mainly involves nine areas: regulations on the protection of children's rights, the protection of kindergarten teachers' rights and interests, the safety and health care of daily kindergarten activities, health care and education activities in kindergartens, kindergarten classroom management, the physical environment and building facilities of kindergartens, external communication and cooperation of kindergartens, kindergarten operation and

management, kindergarten property management and government financial support(Yingqi Cai,2014). The regulations on family policy are not yet mature or developed into a system.

The Finnish Government has established a range of policies and regulations to provide policy and financial support to families and parents of children from the cradle to ensure that children receive quality early education from birth. Equity in family policy and parental education time play an important role in early childhood education, especially for children aged 0-3. Thus, the government should create policy conditions for a family environment where young children can grow up with parental care and physical and mental health during the cradle period, which is particularly evident in Finland's family policy. Therefore, the analysis of the development and changes of Finland's family policy, its main contents and characteristics is crucial to establishing the family policy in China's early childhood education policy and promoting the development of early childhood care and education.

1.The Development and Changes of Family Policy in Finland

Historically, there have been many changes in Finnish family policy, including the introduction and development of child benefits, the establishment and improvement of the child health clinic system, the expansion and completion of day care services, and the development and improvement of family holiday policy(Yingqi Cai,2016).

1.1 The Introduction and Development of Child Benefits

In 1902, Finland's first child benefits committee was established, which believed that children without upbringing should be separated from their parents and placed in separate homes. In 1904, the first children's home was established to foster and care for children. In 1918, the second child benefits committee was established in Finland. Unlike the first child benefits committee, the second committee proposed "protective guardianship" measures to support and supplement the parents' ability to care for their children. "Protective guardians" are responsible for urging parents to fulfill their obligations to raise and care for their children, and for counseling parents in the care of their children(Xiping Yi, Jin Yi,2016). In 1920, the Mannerheim League, the largest child benefits organization in Finland, was founded and set up offices all over Finland to safeguard the rights of children and families and to promote family bonding and mutual support(Chuying Jian,2004). To address the problem of malnutrition among poor children, The Finnish Government stipulated in 1943 that schools shall provide free school meals to students, and introduced a child allowance policy in 1948 to provide financial assistance to families with children. In 1964, a maternity allowance was introduced, and in 1969, a home care allowance was introduced for parents who cared for their children at home or hired someone to care for their children. In 1970, an allowance for disabled children was established for sick and disabled children, and in 1978, families who adopted children were entitled to maternity benefits. In 1984, the family policy supporting child benefits was introduced in Finland.

The Finnish government addresses child and family problems by shifting from separating children from their families to supporting parents' knowledge and abilities, to financial support, and then to calling on the families and society to pay attention to child benefits and implementing the family policy supporting child

benefits. These initiatives reflect the shift in the Finnish view of the child as an individual to one in which the child and the family are inseparable. Child benefits are integrated with the family policy, and the family policy is implemented and supported through a range of child benefits measures.

1.2 Establishment and Improvement of the Child Health Clinic System

In addition to tackling the economic problems of disadvantaged children and families through child benefits, the Finnish government also supports the health care of families with children and their members through various measures, especially from the perspective of child health protection. In 1922, the first child health clinic was founded in Finland. In the 1920s, the Mannerheim League worked to introduce school health care systems in elementary schools. In 1944, the establishment of child health clinics was made a statutory duty of local governments, and by 1949, a nationwide network of municipal maternity clinics and child health clinics had been established.

In Finland, child health care started from private and civil societies, and then attracted the attention of the state and government, followed by the development of relevant policies and their nationwide expansion.

1.3 Expansion and Completion of Day Care Services

As with child health care, day care services in Finland were initiated by private individuals, thus drawing the attention of local governments and the state to day care services for children. In 1888, the first modern kindergarten was built in Finland, and in 1907, the first mother and child home was established for unmarried mothers. In 1916, The Finnish Government started to subsidize kindergartens, and in 1927, an act on state subsidies for kindergartens was adopted and the government started to take full responsibility for kindergartens. Since then, the term of day care center has gradually replaced kindergarten in Finnish laws and regulations, indicating that the task of early childhood education and care in Finland is to support families and serve all children(Feng Ma, Ping Lv,2011). In 1973, The Finnish Government adopted the Act on Children's Day Care, which obliged local governments to provide day care services for all preschool children. In 1997, the government established a private day care allowance, which families could apply for to send their children to private day care centers. In 2001, the local governments were obliged to provide free early childhood education for children under 6 years old. In addition, in order to ensure the quality of education and teachers in day care centers, the Finnish government issued the Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in 2000 and 2003, which gradually built up the early childhood education and care system in Finland(HELENA GRIERSON,2016).

The Finnish day care centers are designed, first, to meet the day care needs of all families for their preschool children, relieve families of the stress of child care, and reconcile the conflicts between parents' work and child care in their families. Second, they provide early education for many children and guarantee the children's access to education. For these two purposes, the Finnish government has encouraged and supervised the establishment of a comprehensive system of child care and services both in rural and urban areas.

1.4 Development and Improvement of Family Holiday Policy

After the economic and health problems of Finnish children and families have been gradually solved, another social reality has been highlighted. As society evolves, parents have to work longer and more stressfully at the expense of time and energy devoted to their children. In order to solve this problem, The Finnish Government gradually established a system of family leave. Originally, only mothers were entitled to maternity leave, but in 1978, fathers were also entitled to paternity leave, and in 1989, parental leave was introduced for parents of children under 3. In 1991, fathers were entitled to paternity leave while the mothers were entitled to maternity or parental allowances, and in 2007, fathers of adopted children were entitled to paternity leave and paternity leave allowances on the same basis as biological fathers. In addition, the state also provides a leave subsidy for each type of leave to ensure the possibility of leave for economically disadvantaged families, which greatly enhances the fairness and effectiveness of the policy. The development of the family holiday policy shows that the Finnish government has repositioned the role of parents in the family system, and both of them should have equal status in the family as nurturers. Fathers should have the same access to all kinds of holidays as mothers, and actively take responsibility for caring for and educating their children.

2. Key Components of Finland's Family Policy

In this paper, the main components of the Finnish family policy are described in three sections: financial assistance policy for families, family holiday policy and early childhood education and care services.

2.1 Financial Assistance Policy for Families

The Finnish Government particularly emphasizes that it is the shared responsibility of the community to nurture children and create the prerequisites for their healthy and happy development. In order to help and support families in raising their children, the Finnish Government integrates the efforts of the whole society to provide families with various forms of financial subsidies and services for children.

No.	Type of funding	Responsible organization	Application requirements and service recipients	Main content
1	Maternity allowance	Kela	Pregnant women are entitled to maternity allowances if they have reached 154 days of gestation and have undergone a health check before the end of the fourth month of pregnancy. In addition, maternity allowances are also available to families who have adopted a child from abroad or from within Finland, as long as the adoption is approved by the Finnish Adoption Association. However, parents who adopt a child illegally from abroad will not be eligible for maternity allowances.	Maternity allowances are available in the form of a maternity package and a cash allowance. If a pregnant woman does not want a maternity package, she can exchange the package for a cash allowance.

2	Child benefit	Kela	Every child who has Finnish citizenship and is under 17 years old is entitled to child allowance.	Child benefits are the most important form of assistance to reduce the cost gap between families with and without children. Child benefits are tax-free and are not affected by a family's financial position. the amount of child allowances is determined by the number of children in a family.
3	Housing subsidies	Kela	Housing subsidies are mainly available for low-income households supported by government funds	Housing subsidies range from general housing subsidies to government-guaranteed housing loans to interest subsidies and tax subsidies on housing loans.The amount of the housing subsidy depends on the size of the household, its financial income, housing-related expenses and the size of the house.
4	Social assistance funds	Assistance from local government grants	Social assistance funds are intended for families who have no income or whose income cannot cover the necessary expenses of their daily life.	Social assistance funds are the last resort for family income security.Social assistance funds are intended to ensure a minimum living allowance for families. The amount of the assistance is based on the difference between the family's necessary living expenses and its current income and assets. If an accident occurs to the family, the amount of the assistance can be increased to survive the current financial difficulties.
5	Allowances for alimony	Kela	Only parents who have a child support agreement certified by a government social welfare agency or who have been ordered by a court to pay child maintenance are eligible for these allowances.	Kela grants allowances for alimony from public funds in the following cases: (1) when either parent does not pay the amount of alimony according to the agreement; (2) when either parent does not have sufficient means to provide adequate financial support for the child; (3) when the agreed amount is less than the allowances for alimony; (4) when the paternity of the child is not established; (5) when the child is adopted by a single parent.

2.2 Family Holiday Policy

The family holiday policy is implemented to allow parents an opportunity to stay home with their children in different situations. Parental and childcare leaves provide both parents with equal participation in the care of their children. Parents are entitled to maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave, and are entitled to maternity leave allowances, paternity leave allowances and parental leave allowances during the leave period(Kaarina Määttäkaarina & Satu,2012).

No.	Type of leave	Conditions and recipients of leave	Duration of leave
1	Maternity leave and maternity allowances	Maternity leave can begin no earlier than 50 days before or no later than 30 days after the expected date of delivery.	105 working days.
2	Parental leave and parental allowance	Parental leave is available to either parent at the end of maternity leave. Parental leave can begin immediately after the end of maternity leave.	158 working days.
3	Paternity leave and paternity allowance	Paternity leave begins when the mother is on maternity leave for the birth of a child.	The paternity leave is counted as part of the parental leave period, totaling 54 working days.Of these, 36 working days of leave must be taken when the mother is not currently on leave.
4	Childcare leave	Parents of children under the age of 3 or 10	Parents are entitled to childcare leave to care for their child at home during their absence until the child's third birthday. Parents of children under 10 years old are entitled to 4 working days of temporary childcare leave when their children are sick.

2.3 Early Childhood Education and Care Services

In Finland, families have access to various forms of child education and care services. After parental leave and before the child starts school (usually at the age of 7), parents are entitled to a variety of government services for child education and care:

2.3.1 Day care centers and kindergartens

Local governments should provide local early childhood education and care services, ensure their quality, and monitor their operation. Any parent of a preschooler is entitled to send their child to public day care services regardless of their financial situation and their employment status. Local governments are obligated to provide day care services to families for up to two weeks when they need child day care services due to unforeseen incidents such as employment, study or training. In addition to local government departments, many churches and NGOs provide early childhood education and care services to all families.

Local governments determine the fees charged for day care based on family size and income. The fee for the second child should be lower than that for the first child. The lowest-income families are exempt from the daycare fee.

2.3.2 Private day care allowance

Private day care allowances are made up of caregiver's allowances and caregiver's grants. Eligibility for the caregiver's allowance is determined by the size and income of the family. Some regional governments also offer government grants, the amount and criteria for which depends on local circumstances. The allowance is paid directly to the child care center and is counted as part of the taxable income.

2.3.3 Child home care allowance

Child home care allowance is available to families with children under the age of 3 who do not attend a public day care center, as well as to other preschool children in the family.

Child home care allowance is available to families with children after their parental leave allowance ends and before the youngest child turns 3 years old or is registered with a day care center. The allowance covers a basic care allowance for each child who is eligible for the allowance separately. In addition, depending on the size and income of the family, a caregiver's allowance can be applied for. This allowance is considered part of taxable income. Some local governments also provide government grants, the amount and criteria for which depends on the local circumstances.

2.3.4 Partial care allowance

When either parent of a family is working shorter than usual hours due to child care, the family may apply for a partial care allowance, which is only available to working parents of children under 3 years old or who have been enrolled in school for one to two years. Even if the family needs to care for more than one child simultaneously, the allowance is limited to one child.

3. Implications for China

3.1 The Government as a Duty-bearer and Supervisor of Child Care and Family Services

Finland's current policies indicate that the government is responsible for providing early childhood care and education services to every family. However, the Finnish Government does not act as a manager, but as a service provider to create a favorable policy environment and supportive atmosphere for the healthy development of children and family education. The government should take the initiative to provide day care services in various forms and options for each family to meet the diverse needs of parents for child care depending on the family and work situation. If some services are beyond the capacity of the government, it should be transferred to the market for allocation and management. Under the favorable environment and supervision created by the government, care providers should compete and cooperate in a healthy way, and perform their roles together for the growth of children and family development. Thus, in order to improve the quality of early education and family services in China, the government should first strengthen its sense of responsibility, optimize the allocation of resources, regulate the market management, create a benign environment where various forms of services coexist, and assume its responsibility properly.

3.2 Government Support Based on Financial Support, Mostly in the Form of Leaves

The Finnish government has taken a variety of measures to provide financial support for children's development, and to help parents to solve their worries about their children's education and medical care. At the same time, the Finnish Government also notes that the development of children is more than just about material satisfaction; it is more about parental companionship. On this basis, the Finnish government has established a comprehensive family leave system, so that working parents can have sufficient time to spend with their children at home. With the support of government policies, parents' employers are required to cooperate with them to create favorable conditions for parenting education.

3.3 Reconciling the Contradiction between Parents' Career Development and Child Care as the Main Purpose

Generally speaking, after the birth of a child, the conflict between the parents' work and the responsibilities of child care becomes more and more prominent. Parents and families are most concerned about how to secure their children's care while safeguarding the parents' work. In this regard, the Finnish Government's approach is worth learning from in China. Through various forms of paid and unpaid leaves, parents can take care of their children while safeguarding their original jobs under the guarantee of government allowances.

3.4 Child Benefits as the Foundation of the Policy

Early childhood education and care services in Finland are characterized by their wide coverage and variety of forms, and they always start from a concern for the basic living conditions of children and the material and spiritual needs of their development. Children's benefits are the foundation for the provision of early childhood education and care services and family services in Finland.

On the one hand, focusing on the benefits of children, the government safeguards the material and spiritual needs of children's development, creates a favorable living environment for them, helps them acquire beneficial early experiences, and promotes their healthy development. On the other hand, the government emphasizes the benefits of equity in education for all children. All Finnish children, regardless of their families' economic and social backgrounds, are eligible for early education and care services as stipulated in the policy. In China, due to the varied economic conditions in different regions, there is no uniform national regulation and local government policies also vary greatly. Children in less economically developed areas, as well as children from low-income families in economically developed areas, do not have access to basic early education services. To improve this situation, the government and society should establish the view that early childhood education is a benefit for children and introduce explicit policies and regulations to guide the community to give more attention and support to early childhood education and care, so as to create a fair and beautiful social environment for all children to receive early education services with quality and quantity assured.

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