

## **A failed circulation: the Montessori method and teaching materials in Republican China (1912-1949)\***

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### **Abstract:**

Montessori method arrived in China at the time when Chinese scholars wanted to established Chinese version kindergartens with modern and scientific teaching method and tools. Through translation and expert coming to China, Chinese scholars introduced Montessori thought into China. However, the study on Montessori method only stopped at the step of translating Montessori's theory and trying to reshape the didactic materials. In spite of two short-lived success examples in the 1920s and 1930s, it was never large-scale applied in China. Except the expensive of the didactic tools, lacking spokesman and teachers were the main reason for the failure of the method.

**Key words:** Montessori. Didactic tools. China

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## Una circulación fallida: el método Montessori y la enseñanza material en la República China (1912-1949)

### Resumen

El método Montessori arribó a China en la época en que las escuelas de ese país querían establecer una versión china de jardines de infantes con modernas y científicas técnicas y herramientas de enseñanza. Si bien mediante la traducción y llegada de expertos a China las escuelas introdujeron ese método, lo cierto es que la teoría de Montessori quedó en una traducción y en tratar de argumentar material didáctico. A pesar de dos ejemplos relativamente corto que sucedieron en las décadas de 1920 y 1930, nunca fue aplicado en gran escala en China, excepto por la expansión de herramientas didácticas, siendo la falta de un portavoz y de profesores formados con esta técnica la principal causa de fracaso de este método.

**Palabras clave:** Montessori. Herramientas didácticas. China

## Uma circulação falida: o método de Montessori e o material de ensino na República Chinesa (1912-1949)

### Resumo

O método Montessori chegou a China na época em que as escolas desse país queriam estabelecer uma versão chinesa dos jardins de infância com modernas e científicas técnicas e ferramentas de ensino. Embora mediante a tradução e chegada de expertos as escolas introduziram esse método, na realidade a teoria de Montessori ficou apenas numa tradução e em pretender argumentar o material didático. Aliás dois exemplos relativamente curtos que aconteceram nas décadas de 1920 e 1930, nunca foi aplicado em grande escala na China, exceto pela expansão de ferramentas didáticas, no entanto, a falta de um porta-voz e de professores formados nessa técnica a principal causa de fracasso desse método.

**Palavras chave:** Montessori. Ferramentas didáticas. China



## *Introduction*

The first half of the twentieth century was the epoch when Chinese absorbed different educational thoughts from foreign countries. Together with the new education system and ideology, came also the new teaching materials, including new textbooks, experimental equipments, and teaching tools into China. The fever of western education turned Chinese education into labor for different educational experiments. From the 1910s to 1920s, educators and teachers tried to apply Montessori method, Project method of teaching, Dolton Plan and the Winnetka Plan and so on new education methods in China. However, none of them like Montessori method and didactic materials find the second life in contemporary China. Searching “Montessori” in Chinese in Google, thousand news on Montessori kindergartens presents, as if the word “Montessori” authorizes a kindergarten with the most scientific and advanced ideology and method to cultivate children. Comparing with the contemporary favorite of Montessori, from the 1910s to 1930s it once also enjoyed flourishing at the beginning, however, faced the annihilation as a flash in the pan. Why did Montessori fail in China at that time? It was the central research question in the article.

The article first introduces the general situation of kindergarten in China at the beginning of 20th century. It argues that Montessori method and didactic materials came at the time when Chinese scholars wanted to change the situation that the traditional teaching method and missionary kindergartens governed kindergartens in China. Its children center and the scientific psychology quickly attracted Chinese scholars’ attention. In the second part, the article briefly introduced the thoughts of Montessori and its international dissemination, especially in the United States. In the third part, the article analyzes how Montessori method and didactic materials circulated in China. Translation and experts coming to China was the main channels via which a new education method and thought circulated in China at that time. The article analyzes what kind of articles that related to the Montessori method published in China and the Ms. Basty’s trip to China in 1916. In this part, the paper suggests Chinese scholars showed interest in the Montessori method and didactic materials at that time. However, they all focused on the didactic material itself and paid little attention to train teachers on how to apply the method and use didactic materials. Also, the trip of Mrs. Basty in 1916 failed to produce any practical influences. In the fourth part, the article gives some examples of how Montessori didactic and method applied in China. What were Chinese scholars attitudes towards the new didactic tools. In the conclusion part, the article analyzes the reason why Montessori method failed in China. The article maintains, except the financial shortage, the most important reasons were lacking proper agents and teachers training in China.

### *The arriving of kindergarten: japanese model and missionary version*

Traditional education in China conformed Confucianism as the orthodox. The fundamental function of education was cultivating officials for imperial bureaucrat system. Before the First Opium War in 1840, both officials and private schools were the places



where people prepared themselves for imperial examinations. Recitation and cramming was the primary method of teaching. In the Self-strengthening Movement that started in the 1860s and ends in the 1890s, the schools cultivating modern scientific talents came into being in China. The students in those schools, e.g., the Gezhi Shuyuan, not only learned the Confucianism classical as well as western nature scientific knowledge. The school also prepared the teaching tools like the tellurion, experimental tools for better visual instruction. (ZHAO, 2005) It was the first time that modern teaching tools became a part of teaching process in China. Nevertheless few people were reluctant to attend the new schools and only after China lost the First Sino-Japanese war in 1894 and the signature of *Treaty of Shimonoseki* in 1895 it became the consensus that establishing modern education was the groundwork of saving nations. (ZHANG, 2015, p.22) During the Late Qing reform<sup>1</sup>, in 1902-1903, imitated Japanese model, Qing Government launched the first modern education system. Especially after 1905 the abolishment of imperial examination, modern education comprehensively replaced traditional education became the educational route of official career promotion.

The development of kindergarten paralleled with the development of modern education. Kindergarten became a part of education system in 1902-1903. The official name of kindergarten at that time was Meng Yang Yuan. It contained the means of enlightenment and bringing up. The regulation stipulated that gaming, singing, talking and handwork were the main subjects for kindergarten. Besides that, the provision also designed the qualification of buildings and teaching materials and teachers for kindergarten. Because of lacking proper teachers, some kindergartens selected literate old women and nannies who got the necessary Confucian moral education to serve as teachers. With such kind teachers, it means the curriculum value of kindergarten continued traditional moral education and habit cultivation. (LIU, 2015, p.22) Also because of lacking qualified teachers, preschool education for most people was equal to home education. The government distributed the classical Confucian books, books on western home education and literacy books to the housewife, which aimed at cultivating mothers as the teachers. However the female education did not even belong to of national school system, it was imaginable that most females in China couldn't read let alone teaching.

At the turn of the 19th century, Japan was the place to where many Chinese studied and traveled. The cultural similarities and the conservative nature of Meiji education made Japanese model became the first choice to follow for Chinese scholars. (PEPPER, 2000, p.58) It also impacted on the emergence of kindergarten in China. The numbered kindergartens from 1900 to 1910 in China not only imitated Japanese model to set the curriculum and even operated by Japanese. For example, the Public Hunan Mengyangyuan established by Duan Fang, the governor of the Hunan province employed two Japanese women as the baby-sisters in the kindergarten. The subjects in the kindergarten included behavior, reading, teaching, handwork, music and games. (SHANG, 2014, p.40) In the kindergarten launched by Yan Xiu in Tianjin teacher was also a Japanese.

<sup>1</sup> The Late Qing Reform was a series of reforms in the every aspect of society to keep the empire in power. Education was one of the most radical parts in the Reform. The empire not only abolished the imperial examination that lasted thousand years, as well as established modern school and education system; dispatched overseas students to western countries.



Those kindergartens also imported teaching tools like the paintings of animals, pianos and children chairs from Japan. Though the development of female education could provide some qualified Chinese teachers for kindergartens later, the teaching cultivating, teaching materials and method still based on the Japanese model. On the other hand, the kindergarten operated by missionaries from western countries developed quickly at the first ten years of the twentieth century in China. According to the investigation in 1924, 156 of 180 kindergartens in China operated by missionaries. (HE, 1992)

The New Culture Movement that started in 1915 advocating democracy and science together with the return of overseas students with United States background changed people's cognition of education. The pursuit of democracy and science invoked educationalists to follow the education methods and theories that based on psychology experiments and pursue democracy and freedom of children in the teaching process. On the other hand, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 brought up the consciousness of nationalism among people. To the educators, kindergartens established by missionaries cultivated lovely religious children but not the warmhearted and sane people for the society. Though those kindergartens always decorated with beautiful classrooms and provided Froebel Gifts to children. While the Japanese style kindergarten operated like the pre-primary education, the curriculum was similar to primary school. It offered convenience to the teachers however ignored the children's psychology entirely. (ZHANG, 1994, p.56) Scientific and no-religion preschool education became the core value of kindergarten Chinese scholars wanted to achieve.

### *Montessori method and the international Influence*

Montessori developed her educational method based on the research of Seguin and Itard. After successful educational experiences in morbid children, she applied her scientific pedagogy at the "Children's Houses" that first established in tenements area supported by Roman Association of Good Building for the low-income families' children. The "Children's Houses" was the derivative of a beneficent program of the association. The program aimed at transforming the old house and reforming it according to the modern standard for the poverty, at where they "not only live in a house but they know how to live, they know how to respect the house in which they live". (GUTEK, 2004, p.98)

Spontaneous manifestation of children is an essential process of education in her theory. It means children should enjoy the liberty to behave themselves in the process of learning. Montessori believed the educational process that led by the spontaneous manifestation would guide children to both biological and social development. Against mechanism and immobility, she found children could learn automatically, which means children could teach themselves. In the activation process, children not only learn to do something but also understand the reason for such movement. (GUTEK, 2004, p.120) The learning is not an unconscious process. On the contrary, she believed children could achieve discipline via the liberty. She considered one is disciplined "when he is master of himself" and "regulate his own conduct when it shall be necessary to follow some rule of life". (GUTEK, 2004, p.113) It means the when a person understand what discipline means, he or she would obey it from their inward.





In the relationship between teachers and students, she defined teachers as an observer rather than a didactic. When she hired a young woman as the directress for the Children's House, she preferred someone without preconceptions of what a teacher should do in the classroom instead of being an authority in charge. Believing in human strive to self-actualization, Montessori asserted the teacher should not interrupt their activities because students could experience the joy of conquering the obstacle with his force. (GUTEK, 2004, p.116) Also the self-learning process could cultivate children's independence. However, it doesn't mean teachers are useless onlookers. In order to be actively disciplined, child must acquire the difference between good and evil, but the evil and good is not judged by activity or immobility. The function of teacher is to show children the path to perfection, furnishing the means and removing the obstacles.

In order to show the path and promote children's motivations, Montessori elaborately designed the school environment and didactic materials. The environments of Children House specially adapted to children and their specific attitudes and perspectives, in which they could grow and develop the sense of responsibility. (HERMANN, 1994) As a part of the prepared environment, didactic materials also had similar functions. Those materials start with the sense cultivation and step by step to intellectual learning, reading, writing. It includes rectangular wooden board divided into two equal rectangles covered with smooth paper or polished with smooth surface; different sizes of solid blocks of wood; rectangular trays; and series of cards and so on. Children could work on various activities and chose didactic materials based on their interest. Those materials have built-in "steps" and feedback mechanism to help children to realize self-correct and develop independence. (MIEZITIS, 1971) The educational with didactic materials and prepared environment aimed to aid "the spontaneous development of mental, spiritual and physical personality, and not to make of the child a cultured individual in the commonly accepted sense of the term". (GUTEK, 2004, p.184)

The success of Montessori method in Italy quickly expanded to the English world. The Montessori phenomenon was both commercial and academic professional at the beginning. (SHUKER, 2004, p.72) In the United States, the McClure's Magazine in 1911-1912 became the advocator of Montessori and her method. McClure arranged the manufacture and sale of didactic materials. A series material, not tools or games, cost 50 dollars with a booklet to instruct the correct utilization according to the Montessori method. Similarly, it also reached Great Britain and New Zealand. (SHUKER, 2004, p.72) Montessori rejected to authorize others to modify her method and materials as she considered the development of children is universal and she was the only person who could qualify teachers. The transnational visiting her "Children's Houses" and teacher training lectures was popular at that time too. Some American educators like Clara Craig visited Montessori and attended her speeches in Rome, and later applied her method in the United States.

To generalize her method, Montessori herself also gave public speaking in many countries. In 1913 she went to the United States to popularize her method both to professional educators and the public. It granted considerable interest from both academic and public society. (ZOLL, 2017) The visit to England in 1919 also generated thousands applications for her teacher training class and money was collected for a Montessori



training institute. (SHUKER, 2004, p.80) Besides, unlike Montessori method firstly experimented in Children House, the first Montessori school launched in United States by Anne George who went to Rome and studied with Montessori personally drew students from cultured families “who wanted to give their children everything possible in the way of education and rational enjoyment”. (POVELL, 2009, p.95) Also in other countries like England and Switzerland, public schools were the main field of the method. (SHUKER, 2004, p.73)

However, the popular of Montessori method quickly cooled down in United States after its peak in 1915. The wide influence of Kilpatrick criticism on her and her education technique inconsistency with the role of schools in progressive movement worked together turned the education members into other agendas. (THAYER-BACON, 2012) However, in Italy and other European countries, Montessori method still came through. In 1940s she also went to Indian to popularize her method and Indian.

### *A failed circulation: translation and expert coming to china*

Just like it was introduced into American at the point when kindergarten was in the midst of turmoil, (POVELL, 2009, p.104) it came to China at the epoch when early childhood education sought reformation. As aforementioned, Chinese educators urgently wanted to reform and establish the real Chinese kindergarten. The pursuit of science and democracy turned scholars attention to the Montessori method and didactic materials, which developed based on the scientific psychology research. Montessori method and her didactic materials was one of the most critical influences on the reform of kindergarten. However, searching the word “Montessori” in the most substantive Chinese magazines’ database,<sup>2</sup> from 1900 to 1949 only had approximately 72 articles related with Montessori. Comparing with the Project Method (not including the articles on William Kilpatrick) that had more than 171 items, the fruit of the research on Montessori method was comparatively limited. Why did Montessori method and didactic materials only aroused limited discussion? To understand the question it should first analyze how the Montessori and her didactic method came to China.

The Translation was the main channel that Montessori method and didactic materials came to China. As early as in 1913, the two most influential educational magazines in China, and the *Educational Magazine* and *Chong Hua Educational Review* both published papers introducing the Montessori method. The article in the *Chong Hua Educational Review* titled *The Teaching Method of Ms. Montessori* (WO, 1913) and the other titled *The Institution of Ms. Montessori new Educational Method*. (QUE, 1913) The contents and structure of the two articles were similar, which implied that they were translated from the same material by different people. Both articles briefly introduced the popular of Montessori method in western countries. Then they summarized the key characters of the Montessori method, among which freedom, the sense training and the didactic tools were the primary factors. In the part related to didactic tools, they interpreted that the traditional oral teaching couldn’t cultivate the children’s ability of independent learning.

<sup>2</sup> The database covers most popular educational journals from 1890s to 1949. [www.cnbkcsy.cn](http://www.cnbkcsy.cn)



Teaching children, especially training their sense must rely on teaching tools. In the next part, the articles respectively introduced several didactic materials. At the last part, the articles praised the function of the Montessori method and didactic materials. They manifested that the children who got education with such method and materials had better performance than children in common kindergartens. The articles were translated at when the popular of Montessori method in United States were not merely an educational activity but also partly commercial popularizing. The article indeed provided the basic knowledge on Montessori method and didactic materials, it is undeniable that the conclusion part with shopping address of the didactic materials that cleared the priority of the Montessori method without experimental data exposed it was also to some extent a commercial propaganda article.

The number of articles on Montessori method and didactic materials increased slowly in 1914 and 1915. In 1914 Gu Shusen, who studied in United States and came back to China systematically translated a book on Montessori method serializing in *Chong Hua Educational Review*. (GU, 1914) However, the translation didn't arouse any discussion on Montessori method and didactic materials in China. It was only in 1916 when the Ms. Basty coming to China to introduce Montessori method that the articles on the topic recurred again. At that year, Gu Shusen and Wang Weiyi cooperated translating a book about the children in Children's House. In addition the magazine *Chong Hua Educational Review* published several photos on children at Children's House to give people directly impression on the application of Montessori method. (GU&WANG, 1916) Then the Montessori method was almost silent on press channel from 1917 to 1920. After the 1920s Montessori recurred in educational magazines. Except the translation of Montessori's books, pieces news of Montessori and the application of Montessori method in western countries untimely presented in magazines and newspaper. At the same time, some articles introduced Montessori method and the function of various didactic materials again. Even so, those articles never question the Montessori's thought. None article discussed how teachers should work in the application process of Montessori method and how to use didactic materials to emancipate children's freedom in the learning process. The popular and decline of articles on Montessori method and materials in educational magazines synchronized with that in the United States. Because the United States was the country that profoundly influenced Chinese education at that moment, scholars translated educational papers mainly from the United States. So when Montessori method faced its first decline since 1915 in the United States, the articles on Chinese magazines also decreased. The limited message source constrained Chinese scholars to have more knowledge on Montessori method.

The other channel for the circulation of the Montessori method in China was experts' visiting and generalization. The 1910s and 1920s was a period when educators from various countries gave lectures and generalized their methods and theories in China. Scholars like Paul Monroe, John Dewey and William Kilpatrick came to China several times, and their thoughts had pronounced influence in China. However, Montessori never been to China in her life. Though she rejected to authorize training teachers to others and considered her was the only person who owned the explanatory power of the method and didactic, in 1916 Ms. Basty with the aspiration to opening teacher training schools came to China to popularize Montessori method and didactic materials.





She firstly gave a lecture that could invoke sympathy of Chinese people in Shanghai. In the speech, she started with entirely passionate words that connected education with the construction of a real republican country. She ascribed the gap between China and United States to schooling. She further pointed out that to cultivate citizen for democratic society Chinese education that was at the beginning step should from initiative not follow the lock-step system that long established in western countries constraint children's mobility and activity. As the replacement of that system, Montessori method and didactic materials was the best alternative for Chinese educators. Later she attributed the superiority of the Montessori method to the scientific psychology and the unique character of females that they naturally love children and could consider things from the perspective of children. Later she explained the importance of freedom in the Montessori method. The role of teachers in the children's self-manifested activity was to give advice that appropriate to the situation and cultivate their spirit. (JING, 1916) At last, she wished Chinese government could invite Montessori personally to China and support the diffusion of Montessori method in China.

Later she gave another lecture in the Jiangsu Education Association. Before the speech, Huang Yanpei, the deputy of the Association declared that "Montessori method is popular in western countries. Educators in China also realized its importance and did research on it. Though we have translated books, imitated didactic tools, however, we haven't mastered the method in practical". (JING, 1916) How to use the didactic materials was the most urgent problem for the scholars in China. To the didactic materials, Ms. Basty said, "It is not necessary for the people who apply Montessori method to use the didactic materials. Yet the tools are helpful; however, if we catch the spirit of the method, we could apply the method without the tools". (?-1913) For Ms. Basty, the key point of the Montessori method is not the obtaining of didactic materials, but understanding the spirit of the method and applied it to different tools. In the lecture, Ms. Basty gave some examples on how to use the didactic tools to train children's sense and body. In the conclusion part, she summarized the core values of the Montessori method were "develop children's freedom, cultivate their interesting and give their the chance of good education". (?-1913) The representative of the Association high praised the speech and advocated attendees to study the method. Nevertheless, no records proved any further studies did those scholars make to understand how to use didactic materials to help children's auto-learning.

During her visiting in China, she also met with Zhang Yuanji, the holder of Commercial Publish House, one of the leading market holders of textbooks in China to organize a Montessori method training class. For unknown reasons, the attempted failed silently. Ms. Basty only visited China once, though the speech was popular temporary, the fever cooled down as soon as she left. It was until Zhang Xueying, who attended the Montessori training course in the United States, came back to China in 1925, the systematical experiments of the Montessori method and didactic materials did really begin in China.



### *Only tasted: the application of montessori method and didactic materials in china*

Though the academic research on Montessori method and didactic material was tiny at that time, the attempt that applying didactic materials in practical teaching never stopped.

From 1913 to 1920 the attempts mainly focused on the reshaping and improvement of didactic tools. In 1914, the Jiangsu Education Association launched the Montessori Method Research Institute in China. The Institute aimed at generalizing Montessori method and applying it in teaching. In 1915 the Institute held a conference to propagandize the tools. They exhibited three kinds of didactic materials respectively from United States, Japan, and China. After the introduction of the tools, Gu Shusen, the committee member of the Association discussed the ways to improve and use the materials. The first question they concerned most was how to reshape the tools and adapt them to meet Chinese custom. For example, to the fasteners, they recommended to take five types from the didactic tools and add another three types of bonds; To the weight tools, they recommended to change the weight standard into Chinese measure unit. The writing material was the toughest one for Chinese scholars. Because the structure of Chinese word is entirely different with the Roman alphabet, the scholars in China found it difficult to design a proper one for Chinese people. (Zhang, 1915) Secondly, they believed the applied orders of those materials should be different according to the age of children. Unfortunately, no further information showed the Institute held another meeting to discuss the topic. One reason for the later silence of the institute was that none of the organizers were experts in childhood education. Also, they were too busy to study the Montessori method. For example, the deputy chairman of the institute Huang Yanpei, after 1915 he went abroad several times to study the vocational education and devoted most of his time in vocational education. At the same time, he also involved in the generalization of mass education in China. Like him, most members of the Association could only function as advocators for a new educational method while couldn't devote their times on the research on how to use the teaching tools in practical everyday kindergarten.

In 1920 an article published by Xu Feng-qin discussed the possibility of producing replacement tools. The reason the author tried to introduce the replacement tools was that the origin version was too expensive for most kindergartens in China. She listed nine replacements for didactic tools, including the devices for recognizing shapes, colors, practice listening and so on. The author considered teachers could imitate teaching tools by themselves with cheaper materials. (XU, 1920) Tang Ruolan also wrote a paper to introduce how to make Montessori didactics and the different ways to use them. The author explained, "Firstly let children observe the different height of three groups cylinders. Secondly, let children put them into the proper positions that meet the shape of different cylinders. Finally, blindfolded children's eyes and let them to practice and touch the different shapes, to cultivate their sensitivity". (TANG, 1920) The method was nothing new than concluded from Montessori's books. Without experimental experiences in Chinese kindergarten, scholars at that time failed to provide any pieces of advice other than citing from books.



In 1922 Lu Xiuying who studied in Montessori International Teaching schools came back to China and experimented the Montessori method in kindergarten affiliated to Beijing Female Normal School. She originally designed only to enroll 40 children. Unexpectedly, more than 400 people applied to the experiment class. It reflected the popular and the magic effect of Montessori in China. However, because lacking proper teachers and funding, the experiment stopped three years later. (WU & Zhang, 2015) In 1931 Montessori via the Italian embassy sent a telegraph to Chinese Education Ministry. Together with it she also posted a book on her method and the constitution of her teaching school. She in addition hoped Chinese government could appoint teachers to Italy to learn the method and mail her some reports on the application of the Montessori method in China. In reply to the telegraph, Jiang Menglin, the minister of education in China said, “the method has already been experimented in China in more than ten years ago. It requires a lot of didactic tools that are too expensive for China. Now Chinese kindergarten and young pupils are using the Project Method, which is thriftier. So we only understand how to apply the method, unfortunately, couldn’t provide any concrete report”. (? , 1931) In the second Sino-Japanese war Lu Xiu who personally visited Children’s House in Italy, operated the Sichuan Experimental Kindergarten. In the kindergarten, she applied the Montessori method and didactic materials in the teaching process together with other teaching methods. (SHANG, 2014) However, the kindergarten was only an individual case. After the Communist Party governed China in 1949, Soviet Union was the only model that China followed, for that reason Montessori method was completely dead. Until the 1980s, when China re-opened to the western world, the Montessori method became popular again.

### *Conclusion*

In 1934 the famous writer Lu Xun in China published an article in *Dagong Newspaper*, in the article *Saving the Children* he pessimistically cried, “At the beginning of Republican China, someone once introduced Montessori method into China. It was so popular that even in the countryside of southeastern China I could buy related books. Later I sent the books to the Female Normal Schools; now people must have forgotten them at corner. The advocating of Montessori has already dead in China. The Montessori tools that produced by Shanghai bookshop also disappeared”. (LU, 1934) When Montessori method firstly introduced into China, it advocating children center and emancipating the freedom of children attracted scholars’ attention. However, almost 20 years later, not only the Montessori method disappeared the problem “saving children” was still a pending issue.

The over-expensive of the didactic materials was the main reason concluded by scholars of that time for the decline of the Montessori method. For most kindergartens, it was impossible for them to buy didactic materials that imported from the United States or even produced by Commercial Press in China. However, as mentioned above, Chinese scholars tried to find cheaper materials to make didactic materials and also Mrs. Basty in her lectures said the didactic materials was not the most crucial link in the whole process.



The expensive of didactic material was one but not the decisive reason for the fail of Montessori method in China. The critical factor was that the United States' influence on Chinese education. The cooling of the method in the United States also adversely impacted its popular in China. Since 1910s with the overseas students studied in the United States came back to China, the United States gradually replaced Japan became the country from where Chinese scholars got the updated educational news and theories. When William Kilpatrick criticized Montessori method in 1915, and the popularity of progressive education movement in the United States became powerful, Montessori method cooled down. So the translation of Montessori method and her didactic materials also became less in China. On the contrary, the students graduated from Teaching College of Columbia University became the spreaders of new education movement in China. With their invitation, John Dewey William Kilpatrick both visited China in the 1910s and 1920s. The progressive education and the project method for early children education became popular in China.

Secondly, comparing with William Kilpatrick and John Dewey, whose students and colleagues were educators who held important positions in China in the 1920s, Montessori never been to China and didn't have a spokesman in China. The scholars who constituted the Association were interested in every new educational method and thought. They only imported them into China while had no time to do any practical experiment of the method. Later, neither Ms. Basty nor Lu Xiuying succeeded in turning the Montessori method into a national movement. The 1910s to 1920s was the period that different educational thoughts competed with each other in China. Without a leader, it quickly lost voice among the various educational new ideas. The most important reason was that Chinese scholars failed to establish training schools and cultivate teachers who understand Montessori method and how to use didactic materials. Without training, it was impossible for kindergartens' teachers to use the didactic tools to motivate children to realize auto-learning.

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