



# A Study of the Assimilative Education in America and China

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**Abstract.** The functions of education have unique impact on children, particularly at an early age. Among these functions, assimilative education on children has become a trend in education study. Previous studies have indicated potential associations between children and assimilative education. However, the former studies 'failed to illustrate this topic thoroughly. Therefore, the chief aim of this article is to provide a systemic analysis of the assimilative education between America and China, as the two countries differentiate from each other from both the cultural background and the educational traditions. A number of studies were performed to support that assimilative education has plenty of differences in different periods, different races, and different countries. The findings as well indicated that the purposes and influences of assimilative education are changing with the society, the economy, and the policy. A better understanding of the focus of assimilative education can greatly contribute to the application of the assimilation method which may lead the world's education to become more diverse and more suitable for different individuals.

**Keywords:** Assimilative education · America · Chinese education · Segmented assimilation

## 1 Introduction

Education, as an important means of human heritage and development, demonstrates its role as a guide and orientation in all aspects: The role of education in promoting productivity. Education can enable people to acquire certain knowledge, which can promote the development of productivity in the political and economic system. The role of education as well as in culture. Education has the role of spreading, renewing, transmitting, and enhancing culture. The pedagogical model of education can be divided into the following four points: the assimilation, the structural, the guided, and the systematic views of teaching and learning. Among these four teaching models, the assimilation teaching model is of great importance.

In the book *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View* [1], the cognitive educational psychologist Ausubel proposed that the basic idea of cognitive assimilation theory is that the learning of new knowledge must be based on existing cognitive structures. The process of learning new knowledge is a dynamic process in which learners actively

extract from their existing cognitive structures the old knowledge that is most related to the new knowledge and “fix” or “attribute” it. While the assimilation teaching discussed by Ausubel is only related to the field of teaching and learning, the assimilation education discussed in this paper extends downward to a wider and deeper aspect. The author will elaborate on the statement that assimilation education not only exists in the teaching model or the educational psychology but has a vehement connection with society, culture, and stereotypes.

Since the idea of the assimilative education has been proposed, the concept of assimilative education raised a lot of concerns. Although the assimilative education has been discussed by many researchers, none of them led to integration of all aspects of assimilative education. Take Carol Dutton Stepick and Alex Stepick as an example, they said that the emphasis on national origins in both description and explanation should be replaced with a focus on social contexts and processes in a book that refers to the confusions and complexities of segmented assimilation [2] and the main discussed part is about the segmented assimilation on the children of immigrants in the US. However, it only refers the one side and one group of assimilative education. From *Boarding Schools to the Multicultural Classroom: The Intercultural Politics of Education, Assimilation, and American Indians* [3] written by John Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey it can be seen that boarding schools played an important role in assimilative education for children. Compared with the former, it has a more detailed orientation but is still not very profound. Assimilative education will not stop developing as time goes by, it is of great significance to have a forecast. A brief analysis of the future situation of assimilation education is presented in this paper *Assimilation, past and present* [4] though the discussion hasn't combined the whole aspects of the future situation with the effects of assimilative education. These four articles refer to the different aspects of the topic but did not make a systemic conclusion. Therefore, this article would give the reader a systemic discussion and make them a better understand.

Except for the analyses on the United State, this paper mentions the situation in China as well. A comparison may be an efficient way to learn more about the different assimilative education between the United and China. Cheng, Yinghong, and Patrick Manning proposed an idea in *Revolution in Education: China and Cuba in Global Context* [5] that the ultimate goal in each case was to break all institutional barriers between school and society. However, during the time of education progress, lots of unpredictable activities influenced the direction of the development of assimilative education. As for China, the Cultural Revolution has proven to be a powerful method of assimilating the aspect of education. Written by Zhou, Xueguang, and Liren Hou, *Children of the Cultural Revolution: The State and the Life Course in the People's Republic of China* [6]. Deeply discussed the special period and analyzed the reason why the Cultural Revolution occurred and how it affected this generation in China. The whole changing trends contrast, such as the contrast between the Cultural Revolution and the 21st century's education development, haven't been presented in the former research and this would be slightly discussed in the following paper.

The current article focuses on the differences in assimilation education between America and China, as well as the contradictions and inequalities within each. Firstly, this paper divided the assimilative education into three parts by time which is from

the 19th to the 20th or so. Secondly, it focuses on the discussion of assimilation education in the Chinese region, which will be discussed in depth from two perspectives. Thirdly this thesis explains the categorization of educational approaches, such as teachers' approaches to students' education, families' approaches to students' education, and society's approaches to students' education. The orientation of education and its effects, especially on primary and secondary school students, are discussed and analyzed in a comprehensive manner.

## **2 An Analysis of the Assimilative Education Focus on America and China**

### **2.1 Assimilative Education**

#### **2.1.1 The Definition of Assimilative Education**

Assimilative education, a method to assimilate children by educating the dominant mainstream ideas, existed ever since the day people created different gatherings and it has been a popular catchphrase in the field of education. As one of the instruments of education, the assimilative education is greatly used in education recently, especially in primary and secondary schools education. The merits and demerits of assimilation education to social development go hand in hand. As a method of promoting social development, assimilation has a guiding and directing effect on people's thoughts, culture, and behavior. Assimilation education, as one of its important tools, has a profound impact on primary and secondary school students in particular. Students' outlook on life, values, and the world is still immature, so they are easily influenced by the outside world. Assimilation education is a way to unify the future by assimilating the immature minds of children. On the other hand, there are certain inevitable limits: the destructive effects of cultural discontinuity and cultural pluralism brought about by assimilation education.

#### **2.1.2 The Purpose of Assimilative Education**

Assimilation education occurs mainly for the purpose of assimilation of non-dominant cultures by the dominant culture in society. This can be divided into culturally and socially based purposes. Firstly, cultural differences can lead to disagreement and contradiction among different cultural subjects. The party that is the dominant cultural body begins to assimilate the non-dominant cultural body in order to strengthen and expand its dominant effect. One of the reasons why children are the dominant object of assimilated education is because children's worldviews and values are still unformed and therefore are easier to assimilate than adults or senior students. Secondly, at the social level, the dominant group has more privileges and rights, and when the non-dominant group is involved in their interests, the dominant group will take some measures to make the non-dominant group dependent or even belong to them. This is also a means for the government to consolidate its power. Thus, the target and main purpose of assimilation education can be obviously known.

### 2.1.3 The Application of Assimilative Education

The application of assimilation education can be divided into two parts, one is straight-line assimilation and the other is segregated assimilation. Firstly, the straight-line assimilation. The school, as an assimilation institution since the mid-1800s, has a major mediating role in the application of assimilation education. The Native American boarding schools, for example, were established by the government and churches in the late 1800s. The explicit goal is to eliminate traditional American Indian ways of life and replace them with mainstream American culture. Families were often forced to enroll their children and some of the children even were kidnapped. Boarding schools challenged the very make-up of Indian cultures by forcing the tribal languages and customs. American Indian children were forcibly separated from their families and severely punished by the schools if someone deviated from the cultural norms imposed upon them. Secondly, the segregated assimilation. This kind of assimilative way emphasizes the relationship between families and neighborhoods. The outcome of the segregated assimilation is the following three points: Consonant, dissonant and selective acculturation which are discussed in Segmented assimilation revisited: types of acculturation and socioeconomic mobility in young adulthood [7]. Consonant acculturation is reflected in the fact that both parents and children are motivated by mainstream American culture and to some extent reject their own culture. Dysfunctional acculturation occurs when children are introduced to mainstream American culture to a much lesser extent than their parents do, and children are assimilated more fully and deeply. Selective acculturation can be regarded as a mixed way of assimilation between own culture and the mainstream culture. This phenomenon is partially preserved in the culture of ethnicity in ethnic communities. This situation considers selective acculturation and community together, allowing cultural assimilation to occur not only between individual families but in combination with community, with unique cultural intermingling and assimilation.

## 2.2 The Assimilative Education in America

### 2.2.1 Different Periods of the Assimilative Education in America

The periods can be divided into three parts by time which is from the 19th to the 20th or so. During this period, assimilative education will be discussed in detail which refers to the paper Assimilation, past and present [4]. Especially the time World War II made a vital changing point in the assimilative education.

*The Nineteenth Century* In the 19th century, as the American Civil War came to an end and the industrialization began, the United States ushered in an era of rapid development of the capitalist commodity economy. Industrialization began on a large scale, cities expanded, and populations concentrated in large numbers. Industrialization, urbanization, and economic development became the most unique landscape of the United States at that time. With the approval of the U.S. government, Richard Pratt founded the first boarding school for Indian children in 1879, stating that the purpose of the school was “to kill an Indian and save a new man. Indian children were forced to give up their representative Native clothing and hairstyles, were forbidden to speak the Native language, and had to use English names. Much of the assimilation education in the 19th century

was about racial and cultural assimilation and was aimed at students in elementary and secondary schools who had not yet developed stable cultural roots.

*The Early Twentieth Century* In the early 20th century, the U.S. economy became much stronger after World War I. As a result, there was a greater concern for improving social welfare protection. Education, as part of social welfare, was also taken seriously. The “Progressive Education Movement” [8] began to emerge. This movement aimed to expose the shortcomings of American education, such as the lack of differentiation, uniformity, and assimilation. As society developed and became more concerned with children, the direction of assimilation education changed during this period to focus more on children and educational models rather than simply on ideological uniformity.

*After the World War II* The assimilation of education in the United States after World War II was mainly reflected in the promotion of science and defense, for the urgent desire to secure its world dominance and educational reform, stimulating the rapid development of military education in the country. After World War II, the United States became the strongest country in the world economically. The Soviet Union, also the world’s leading power, was the only country that could check and balance with the United States. To secure its position, the U.S. began to develop military education vigorously. In 1957, after the Soviet satellite went up in the sky, the call for reforming education in the U.S. The U.S. education reform in the 1960s focused on three areas: curriculum reform in primary and secondary schools, which continues to improve the inequality educational opportunities, and developing and improving the quality of higher education. These reform elements had a catalytic effect on U.S. science and technology defense and greatly enhanced U.S. comprehensive national power and its ability to dominate the world.

## 2.2.2 The Assimilative Education in America to Different Races

In this part, the different assimilative education among the different races group, such as the American White, the American Indians, and the other non-dominant races. For the reason of uniting the whole country, the government published amount of policies to support the assimilation which referred to the social environment and race discrimination.

As a country with a deep history of immigration, the United States itself is a melting pot where various races have integrated and developed with each other. Firstly, American Indians, as the original inhabitants of the land, were the main target of the sacrifice of American assimilation education. Robert J. Havighurst mentioned in *Education among American Indians: Individual and Cultural Aspects* [9] that education is always a process of teaching culture, and the education provided by the whites for the Indians has always been aimed at teaching the white culture, or at least some elements of it, to people who have been reared in another culture. The natural racial divisions prevented these American Indian children from receiving an equal education. This equal education is not just about equalizing educational resources, but also about not being able to feel as confident in their own culture as white Americans do in the dominant culture. According to surveys, more than 70 percent of American Indian children are disgusted with the color of their skin and their race during school. Most American school teachers are white and having white teachers teach these children cultural ideas is undoubtedly

assimilating the children in the subtle ways of education. Secondly, as a large immigrant country, the education of immigrant children is greatly influenced by the dominant native ideology. Model Minority Theory declared in *Assimilation Differences among Africans in America* [10] has explained why assimilation in education is of great significance. Comparisons of racial immigrants and African Americans have great significant implications for the way African Americans are perceived in American society. The “model minority” point attributes the relative lack of economic success of African Americans to a supposed lack of positive work which relates to motivation, ethics, and attitudes; that is, to supply-side factors. From this, it can be concluded that successful groups of immigrants have positive cultural thinking and behavioral values toward their work. The so-called positive cultural and behavioral values are generated within the framework of the dominant culture. As a result, immigrants and their children assimilate into the dominant culture on their own in order to meet certain expectations. Thus, assimilative education as a means of assimilation has an impact on children.

## **2.3 The Assimilative Education in China**

### **2.3.1 Different Periods of the Assimilative Education in China**

The situation of education from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century and the current situation of modern education after the Cultural Revolution can be found in *Children of the cultural revolution: The state and the life course in the people’s republic of china* [6]. In the following part, the education situation changed from time to time and made great effects vary from time.

*The First Stage of Modern Education 1862–1911* In 1862, China was still under the rule of the Qing government and was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. However, with the awakening of national consciousness, people began to rethink feudal education. Modern education in China began to take off and new types of schools, represented by church schools and foreign affairs schools, emerged. In addition to organizing foreign affairs schools, the foreign affairs faction also pioneered the education of official study abroad, which started in the 1870s and later became one of the important forms of education. During this period, the purpose of education was very clear: to learn from the West in order to break the control of the West over China. Therefore, the assimilation education during this period can also be called patriotic education to save the country, unifying the minds of the educated people to achieve effective results in saving the country.

*The Second Stage of Modern Education After the Cultural Revolution* The Cultural Revolution had a profound impact on the direction, content, and orientation of education in China. The Cultural Revolution started with the purging of old things from the old society, but the overly radical, and absolute purging of all old knowledge led to the stagnation of social development, especially education, and the destruction of a large amount of cultural essence. After the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government began to re-examine the development of education. In 1980, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made the Decision on Several Issues Concerning

the Universalization of Primary Education, proposing that “in the 1980s, the country should basically realize the historical task of universalizing primary education, and in areas where conditions exist, it can also proceed to universalize junior high school education”. In December 1982, “the universalization of compulsory primary education” and “the development of various educational facilities by the state to eradicate illiteracy” were included in the newly revised Constitution of the People’s Republic of China. Since then, education in China has been advancing by leaps and bounds. In order to better unify education, Chinese primary and secondary schools have unified the use of Renminbi textbooks, unified study subjects, set unified large-scale exams, etc. To some extent, these practices are also one of the means of assimilation education. The practice of unifying textbooks can be traced back to the history of the First Emperor of Qin’s unification of writing, who issued the regulation in order to consolidate his rule and stabilize the social order, which not only promoted close ties between regions but also advanced the development of his country to a certain extent. Chinese education has grown substantially on the road to assimilative education. However, in recent years, influenced by the Western education system, the direction of China’s educational development has begun to move in the direction of autonomy and diversity.

### 2.3.2 The Impact and Direction of Assimilative Education in China

China is a multi-ethnic country with 56 ethnic groups, but unlike other countries, China’s ethnic groups are more united and unified. However, education policies do differ for different ethnic groups and have different contents and impacts depending on the minority group and the Han nationality.

*Assimilative Education for Han Nationality* The Han Chinese, as the majority group, have a relative advantage in terms of numbers and survival circumstances. With a more convenient uniformity in education, the Chinese government is more inclined to develop policies with specific care for ethnic minorities. Therefore, the same policies that apply to Han nationality also apply to the minority group. The two main policies are as follows.

- (1) Nine-year compulsory education: All of the children and teenagers of school age are obligated to enjoy the right of compulsory education by the nine-year compulsory education system, which is a public good that must be guaranteed by the state. The implementation of nine-year compulsory education requires that school-age children and adolescents begin to receive education for nine years without tuition or miscellaneous fees. The state has established a compulsory education funding mechanism to guarantee the implementation of the compulsory education system.
- (2) Rural Teacher Support Program: On April 01, 2015, the Central Leading Group for Deepening Reform held its eleventh meeting and considered and adopted the Rural Teacher Support Program. Its purpose is to stop the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Develop rural education so that every rural child can receive a fair and quality education.

*Impact and Direction for Minorities* The education of minority groups has always been an integral and important part of Chinese education. Some minority groups are unable

to respond positively and effectively to national education policies due to language, religious beliefs, and geography. Besides, the economic situation is not good enough for the minority children to get into the school. Minority children have a higher dropout rate from school than the majority Han nationality children do, and their illiteracy rates are generally higher as well [11]. Therefore, the Chinese government, in an effort to unify the ethnic groups, has developed special policies that are appropriate for minority groups and provide advantages for minority education. The main policies are as follows:

1) Minority students' preferential policies for further education

In 1978, it was stipulated in the enrollment of colleges and universities that the minimum admission score line and the admission score band could be appropriately relaxed for the minority candidates in border areas. After continuous improvement, after 2006, the policy of minority matriculation is mainly based on "additional points for admission".

2) Promoting Bilingual Education

In 1992, it was stipulated that "all schools that use ethnic languages for instruction should improve 'bilingual' teaching and promote Mandarin, which is commonly used throughout the country". In 2005, the State Council of the CPC Central Committee pointed out that "bilingual" teaching and scientific research and development should be carried out in accordance with local conditions, and Mandarin should be actively promoted. By 2020, two years of bilingual education will be basically popularized in pre-school education in areas. From the former announcements, it is clear that the policy of bilingual education is not only to assimilate the usage of language but to develop both the assimilative education and purify the ethnic characteristics.

### 3 Conclusion

After understanding the impact of assimilation education, it is meaningful to analyze and discuss its development in different regions, cultures, and political environments. The direction of assimilation education in the future is polarized. Education is becoming more and more important as a carrier of cultural transmission, and the development of education is changing with the direction of world development, which can be referred to in this paper Assimilation, past, and present [4]. Besides, the outcome of the analysis of assimilative education in America and China has some differences and similarities. The differences in educational approaches between the United States and China stem primarily from their historical development and the nature of their countries. The United States, as a capitalist country, is much freer for the operation of capital. As a result, the U.S. educational system is also diverse because educational policies vary from state to state, and educational regulations vary from community school to community school. In contrast, China as a socialist country Ministry of Education is under central control. That means the education control is deeply governed by the center and the education approaches have a high uniform. Although China and the United States are two countries with different political systems, there are similarities in their education. Take elite teaching as an example. Both China and the United States place a high value on elite education.



Although the findings have provided a profound understanding of the assimilative education, more empirical studies on assimilative education are required to be conducted to further test and refine these findings. Firstly, the research on America and China in education similarities should be more detailed in data. Secondly, the references are better be contrasted and analyzed deeper. In summary, the assimilative education will not disappear and its impacts on education would be widely rethought by educators. Countries all over the world are changing their single education method in a diverse way, which remains to be seen whether it can update the model of education or make it worse.

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