

# Xu Yangben's Family Education Thought and Its Contemporary Enlightenment

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**Abstract:** Xu Yangben, born in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province in 1914 (year of death unknown), graduated from the School of Education, Daxia University in 1940. He has served as a middle school principal, primary and secondary school teacher, university professor, etc., and has worked in institutions such as the National Chongqing Normal School, Zhijiang University, Daxia University, and Guangxia Commercial College. He also founded Zhiren Middle School in a place in Shanghai and served as its principal, enjoying a certain reputation in educational circles in Guiyang and Shanghai. This paper mainly discusses that Xu Yangben's educational thought has gone through three stages from germination to maturity: the "Blind Period," the "Transition Period," and the "Enlightenment Period." It focuses on Xu Yangben's family education thought: first, parents should have an accurate position in the family; second, attach importance to children's practical guidance and labor training; third, identification of "problem children" and educational discipline; fourth, pay attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness. His thought bears the shadows of Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin and Yan Yangchu, but he also has a relatively complete ideological system in educational practice. In particular, his family education thought has certain enlightenment significance for contemporary family education.

**Keywords:** Xu Yangben; Family education thought; Enlightenment

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## 1. Introduction

Xu Yangben, born in Wuxi, Jiangsu Province in 1914 (year of death unknown), graduated from the School of Education, Daxia University in 1940. He has served as a middle school principal, primary and secondary school teacher, university professor, etc., and has worked in institutions such as the National Chongqing Normal School <sup>[1]</sup> (a famous secondary normal school during the war), Zhijiang University <sup>[2]</sup> (one of the thirteen Christian universities in China), Daxia University <sup>[3]</sup> (a comprehensive private university in Shanghai), Guangxia Commercial College <sup>[3]</sup>, and Jiangsu Normal College <sup>[4]</sup> (now Jiangsu Normal University). During his university years, he led students to run schools on the ground through classroom teaching, and founded Zhiren Middle

School on the east bank of the Huangpu River and served as its principal <sup>[5]</sup>. During his tenure in primary and secondary schools, he was quite famous in educational circles in Guiyang, Shanghai and other places <sup>[6]</sup>. In the early 1980s, he co-published the article “A Comprehensive and Correct Evaluation of Tao Xingzhi’s Educational Thought” with Mr. Wang Siqing in the famous educational journal “Educational Research,” which caused a strong response at that time and set off a famous academic debate in the history of Tao Xingzhi research. Although Xu Yangben was not as famous as contemporary educators such as Wang Yukai, Chen Bochui and Yu Huandou, who worked with him, he had rich educational experience and derived many high-quality educational theories from practical educational practice, with many unique views on education that are worthy of learning today.

## **2. The formation process and historical evolution of Xu Yangben’s educational thought**

Xu Yangben’s educational thought has gone through three stages from germination to maturity, which he divided into three periods: the “Blind Period”, the “Transition Period” and the “Enlightenment Period.”

### **2.1. The “Blind period” of Xu Yangben’s educational thought**

Originally, Xu Yangben’s year of birth and death were unknown, but at the end of his autobiographical educational novel “Teacher Xu”, there is a writing time of “May Day of the 37th year of the Republic of China at No. 40 North Humaoming Road” <sup>[5]</sup>. The article also mentions that “seventeen years ago, Teacher Xu was only seventeen years old” <sup>[5]</sup>. The 37th year of the Republic of China was 1948; seventeen years ago, he was seventeen years old, that is, he was seventeen years old in 1931. Therefore, it can be roughly inferred that he was born in the 3rd year of the Republic of China, namely 1914. In addition, according to the alumni records of Zhijiang University in Zhejiang Provincial Archives, Xu Yangben’s ancestral home was Wuxi, Jiangsu Province <sup>[10]</sup>.

From the article “Teacher Xu,” we can get Xu Yangben’s general life experience: his family was broken in his early years, and both parents passed away. He dropped out of junior high school at the age of seventeen. In the following two or three years, influenced by his father, he did not want to enter educational institutions, but had to work as a substitute teacher in a school due to the pressure of life. Later, he obtained a high school diploma and was transferred from a substitute teacher to a formal staff member. Before entering Daxia University, he basically wandered around the Jiangsu and Shanghai areas. Except for the two or three years after dropping out of junior high school, when he did not enter the education industry, he then started his turbulent life. Xu Yangben divided his educational experience into three periods, and he called the first stage the “Blind Period”. According to the above inference, he dropped out of junior high school in the 20th year of the Republic of China (1931). After working in factories for two or three years, he wandered to a small town outside Wuxi and started his educational career (around 1933–1934). This period was basically an introductory exploration stage of education. He believed that his state at that time was “having the temper of treating students as slaves, passing on the pain of being oppressed in the past and traditional conservative education to the next generation of students” <sup>[5]</sup>. Due to beating and scolding students, being humiliated by students, being lovelorn and other reasons, he wandered constantly for two or three years.

### **2.2. The “Transition period” of Xu Yangben’s educational thought**

Xu Yangben called the second period the “Transition Period.” During this period, he deeply realized that he

wanted to change China's backward and ignorant state, so he chose to study diligently and save the country through education. At the same time, in order to change his own traditional, backward, and ignorant state, as stated in "Teacher Xu": "When the August 13th gunfire rang out, the school moved westward, and Teacher Xu followed the school. At first, he was worried about the three years of courses he had not finished" <sup>[5]</sup>. "August 13th" refers to the "August 13th Incident," also known as the "Battle of Shanghai," which broke out in 1937. Moreover, "Teacher Xu" also says: "He also thought that in the future, after finishing these four years of university and obtaining a university diploma, he would be able to live such a wealthy life" <sup>[5]</sup>. It can be seen that Daxia University has a four-year academic system. Therefore, it can be inferred that Mr. Xu Yangben should have been admitted to the Department of Education, Shanghai Daxia University in 1936 and spent one year in university. After the outbreak of the August 13th Incident in 1937, Daxia University had to move to the rear area. In January 1938, it united with Fudan University in Changsha to establish the first joint university in Chinese history, "Fudan-Daxia United University." The First Fudan-Daxia United University moved to Jiangxi and disbanded in February 1938. The Second Fudan-Daxia United University moved to Guiyang Huaxi Campus for school, and Xu Yangben also followed the school to Guiyang and graduated in 1940. In the same year, Fudan University and Daxia University became completely independent, and the Second United University was officially abolished.

After graduation, he took up the post of political instructor at a military academy in Hunan, before resigning from the position later. Later, he returned to a provincial middle school in Guiyang to teach history and geography. During this period, he gradually had some new views on education. Later, he resigned and wandered to work as the director of academic affairs in a primary school attached to a transportation agency in Guiyang. At that time, there were three employees' children's primary schools in Guiyang: Southwest Highway Bureau Employees' Children's Primary School, founded in 1941, Guiyang Employees' Children's Primary School of the 10th Transportation Office with unknown founding time, and Guiyang Railway Employees' Children's Primary School, founded in 1947 <sup>[10]</sup>. According to Xu Yangben's life story and the material in the article "How to Guide Students to Write Weekly Journals" which mentions "Guiyang Employee's Children's Primary School," this article was published in "Southwest Highway" in 1942, so the first two are possible. Because he had the experience of being a primary school teacher before, Xu Yangben was soon praised in Guiyang's educational circles and began to "pay attention to the holistic nurturing of living education" <sup>[5]</sup>. However, due to unfair treatment, he later wandered to Chongqing. When leaving the employee's children's primary school, the children's tearful farewell made him start to think about the true essence and significance of education. Since then, he was determined to reform society, arouse "human nature," and serve in the educational circle forever. This period was called the "Transition Period" by Mr. Xu Yangben himself.

### **2.3. The "Enlightenment period" of Xu Yangben's educational thought**

The third period of Xu Yangben's educational career was called the "Enlightenment Period" by himself. After arriving in Chongqing, Xu Yangben "first worked as the director of academic affairs in an accounting class in the suburbs that recruited students from war zones" <sup>[5]</sup>. After resigning, he entered a middle school, and in the second semester, he wandered to the National Chongqing Normal School to work as a teacher and concurrently worked in the academic affairs office. It is worth mentioning that the National Chongqing Normal School was one of the representatives of secondary normal schools during the war and a landmark school for the development of secondary normal education during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Mr. Cui Yunwu commented: "If it is said that the overall development of secondary normal education during the eight

years of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression was based on the previous foundation, then one of the symbols of this development is the emergence of some normal schools with certain school-running quality and characteristics. Among these normal schools, the National Chongqing Normal School is one of the representatives”<sup>[1]</sup>. Xu Yangben once served as an associate professor in this secondary normal school. Later, due to lovelorn, Xu Yangben resigned from the National Chongqing Normal School and transferred to Zhijiang University in August 1944 to serve as a full-time lecturer in the Department of Education, College of Liberal Arts<sup>[9]</sup>, and concurrently worked in the academic affairs office<sup>[5]</sup>. When Xu Yangben taught at Zhijiang University, it was “the two years before and after the victory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression”<sup>[9]</sup>, which should be around 1944. Later, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression was won. “In the first month of the 34th year of the Republic of China, he personally led the students of that university to move back to Shanghai”<sup>[5]</sup>. “That university” refers to Zhijiang University. After the victory of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, due to the serious damage to Zhijiang University’s campus, books, equipment, etc., in Hangzhou, senior students resumed classes in Shanghai after moving eastward. The 4th issue of the 24th volume of “Daxia Weekly” also mentions that Xu Yangben taught at Zhijiang University in the 35th year of the Republic of China<sup>[6]</sup>.

At this stage, Xu Yangben first proposed that education should be socialized. Socialization means that ordinary people also have the right to receive education, which is similar to Yan Yangchu’s “mass education view.” He advocated that all people have equal opportunities to receive education and advocated the popularization of national education. Secondly, he advocated the simplicity of school buildings and that the campus environment should not be artificially beautified. Thirdly, he advocated that junior high schools should be generally established as regular schools. Junior high school should be an extension of compulsory education, encouraging all primary school graduates to have the opportunity to enter junior high school to improve people’s cognitive level. Fourthly, he advocated the implementation of a dual-track system in senior high school. Based on the dual-track system, he advocated the establishment of more vocational high schools and five-year vocational colleges to cultivate a group of useful professional cadres to meet the urgent needs of society. Finally, he advocated the use of living teaching materials. He proposed six types: “knowledge, physical fitness, emotion, group, and skills,” believing that these six types of education are equally important and there is no distinction between main and auxiliary subjects. He noticed that we should not only focus on “self-education” but also consider the social environment. Mr. Xu Yangben believed that without the joint cooperation of society (including family) and schools, education cannot be completed. He believed that society has too many “suggestive” effects, leading to unsatisfactory school education, and even weakening and invalidating. Therefore, Xu Yangben advocated “social education,” which he called “holistic education.” Before educating students, it is necessary to reform parents and the social environment; it is necessary to take the combination of “transforming the social environment” and “adapting to children’s oriented life” as the premise.

During this period, against the backdrop of the times, Xu Yangben also held that the development of education at that time was in need of transformation. It should not be excessively attached to external orientations, so as to avoid the situation where teachers’ teaching autonomy was constrained, the original intention of curriculum design was deviated from, and students’ growth paths were improperly guided. The value of education has never been to serve the demands of a minority group, but to benefit the common interests of the general public. Since the fundamental goal is public welfare, it is imperative to restore the purity of education in schools, enabling education to exert its inherent leading role, promote the development and improvement of individuals, and thereby indirectly drive the society towards positive progress<sup>[5]</sup>.

Therefore, he focused on the research of “social education” and offered a course on “social education” in universities. This period was called the “Enlightenment Period” by Mr. Xu Yangben. Later, he gave lectures at the Shanghai Primary School Teachers’ Seminar and “won great praise from the audience”<sup>[6]</sup>. In 1948, he entered Daxia University to teach the course “Child Psychology.” After the founding of New China, there is almost no record of Xu Yangben’s life, and he occasionally published articles. It was not until the early 1980s that he co-published the article “A Comprehensive and Correct Evaluation of Tao Xingzhi’s Educational Thought” with Mr. Wang Siqing in the famous educational journal *Educational Research*. It aroused a strong response at that time and set off a major wave of academic debate in the research history of Tao Xingzhi<sup>[8]</sup>.

### **3. Xu Yangben’s family education thought and its contemporary enlightenment**

#### **3.1. Parents should have an accurate position in the family**

The positioning of parents in family education is a process of historical evolution. In traditional society, parents possessed absolute rights and authority, and children were obliged to obey their wishes and demands. However, with social progress and the transformation of people’s ideological concepts, the positioning of parents in family education has gradually undergone changes. Modern society emphasizes equality and mutual respect among family members; parents no longer hold absolute power but engage in equal dialogue and consultation with their children.

Whether parents’ positioning in family education is accurate exerts a significant impact on the growth and development of children. On the one hand, parents are children’s first teachers, and their words and deeds exert a profound influence on children. By accurately grasping their own positioning in family education, parents can better guide their children’s growth and help them establish sound values and outlooks on life. On the other hand, the establishment of a positive parent-child relationship between parents and children helps build a bridge for parent-child communication and facilitates mutual understanding and respect between both parties. This enables children to be willing to communicate with their parents and seek help and support when encountering problems during their growth.

In view of the irreplaceable role of parents in children’s growth, Xu Yangben repeatedly mentioned that transforming parents is an important task. “He believed that to transform children, we must first transform their parents”<sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, in family education, parents should have an accurate position, change some traditional concepts, and change their family position. In education, the role of parents play an extremely important role in children’s development. Therefore, in many cases, adults’ behaviors and words will be regarded as objects for children to imitate. Therefore, parents should be cautious about the implications of their own words and deeds for their children in family education. Adults’ hints are generally divided into intentional hints and unintentional hints. Intentional hints refer to adults’ acquiescent behaviors and guidance. For example, the development of children’s stealing habits is often because parents do not punish or correct them on the grounds that their children are too young. Over time, children think that such things are not only harmless but also can be protected by their parents, and bad habits are formed. Unintentional hints refer to certain unintentional behaviors of adults that are imitated or misunderstood by children. For example, when adults smoke, children will imitate them, which is an unintentional hint. For this reason, Xu Yangben emphasized that parents should re-examine their own position in the family. Parents should not only care about their children’s material needs but also pay attention to their spiritual needs, mental health, and moral development. Through their own exemplary power, parents can establish correct values and behavioral norms, set an example by words and deeds, and set a good “model” for



their children. As he said when discussing the impact of the family environment on children's language: "If there is a good language environment, and parents, brothers and sisters can all speak correct Mandarin, the child will surely be able to speak good Mandarin in the future; if parents and elder siblings all speak dialects, the child will surely speak dialects in the future. If not paid attention to when young, it will not be easy to learn when growing up" <sup>[11]</sup>.

Therefore, Xu Yangben believed that the accurate positioning of parents in the family is crucial, and parents have multiple roles and responsibilities. They are not only the nurturers, educators, role models, and supporters of their children, who need to meet their children's basic living needs, but also provide a sense of security and educational guidance for their children, and cultivate their children's independence and self-confidence through communication and understanding. Instead of regarding children as their own property and completely imposing their own behaviors and ideas on them. Parents should respect their children's individuality and choices, respect the laws of their physical and mental development, maintain patience and tolerance, and give more encouragement and affirmation. At the same time, a harmonious marital relationship, reasonable family rules and attention to family time are all key to ensuring family harmony and children's healthy growth.

### **3.2. Attach importance to children's practical guidance and labor training**

Practical guidance and labor training have a profound historical background and practical significance in children's growth. From a historical perspective, from the ancient apprentice system to modern school education, practice and labor have occupied a certain position in the field of education. This traditional educational method not only imparts theoretical knowledge but also emphasizes the cultivation of practical application and labor skills. For example, ancient craftsmen or farmers inherited skills and promoted social progress through personal practice and labor. Practical guidance and labor training are of great significance to children's growth and development in many aspects. On the one hand, practice is an important way to acquire knowledge. Through personal participation and experience, children can better understand abstract concepts and theoretical knowledge and transform them into practical operational skills. On the other hand, labor training not only cultivates children's practical ability and labor awareness but also shapes their qualities of diligence, perseverance, and self-reliance, which helps to form a healthy personality. Finally, practice and labor are also important means of children's socialization. Through cooperation and communication with others, children can cultivate good interpersonal relationships and teamwork spirit.

The important points of Xu Yangben's family education thought can be roughly summarized as guidance, training, and practice (games). Xu Yangben pointed out: "We should adopt a compromise method. When children are young, because it is a period when they are supposed to develop habits, we can lean slightly towards interventionism to ensure that they are on the right track from an early age; when they are older and can live independently, we can gradually transition to liberalism. However, this is not absolute. We need to teach students in accordance with their aptitude based on their environment and facts" <sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, parents must adopt relevant methods according to their children's physical and psychological characteristics. If children's physical and mental development is intervened too early, it will not only damage their mental health but also often lead to children's greater resistance to the issues or events guided by their parents. In guiding children's or students' practice, on the one hand, Xu Yangben believed that parents play the role of guides. For example, parents should guide children who cannot carry out independently or have misunderstandings. On the other hand, Xu Yangben also believed that attention should be paid to children's basic skill training, such as language training, basic etiquette and emotional development. Finally, he also believed that the knowledge and skills learned by children

should focus on practice, and training and expanding thinking in practice. For example, the practice of etiquette: parents guide their children to give up their seats to the elderly, weak, sick, disabled, pregnant and lactating on public transportation.

### **3.3. Identification of “Problem children” and educational discipline**

Problem children generally refer to teenagers and children who have problems in behavior, emotion, academic performance, conduct, etc. Identifying and disciplining problem children is an ancient and practical issue. Historically, different cultures have adopted various methods to identify and correct problem children, such as the ancient Chinese concept of “If a child is not educated, it is the father’s fault”, the educational method of “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” and flogging and corporal punishment in the Western Middle Ages. In modern society, people’s educational methods and disciplinary measures for problem children are more diversified, but there are also controversies. However, identifying problem children is of great significance for early intervention and prevention of problem behaviors. By identifying problem children, parents, teachers and society can provide targeted support and help to prevent the further deterioration of problem behaviors. At the same time, early intervention for problem children helps to promote their healthy growth and development. Educational discipline is one of the important means to correct problem children’s behaviors. Reasonable educational discipline can educate children to understand behavioral norms and values, restrain bad behaviors, and promote their development of good social behaviors.

However, the use of educational discipline must be appropriate. Excessive or improper use may cause physical and psychological harm. In modern society, the educational methods and disciplinary measures for problem children show a diversified development trend. In addition to traditional educational methods such as persuasion, warning and reproach, many new methods have emerged, such as family therapy, psychological counseling and positive reinforcement. These methods help to understand and solve children’s problem behaviors from multiple aspects. Through early identification and reasonable educational discipline, problem children’s behaviors can be corrected, and their healthy growth and development can be promoted. When using educational discipline, we must consider the child’s age, personality, the nature and severity of the problem behavior, as well as the expectations of the family and society to ensure the rationality and effectiveness of educational discipline. At the same time, attention should be paid to children’s long-term development and diversified educational methods to provide comprehensive support and help for problem children.

Xu Yangben re-interpreted “problem children” to facilitate educators to identify truly “unruly children” in daily life. In his book “The Theory and Practice of Family Education,” Xu Yangben mentioned that many parents and teachers regard some lively and naughty children who are unwilling to act according to the wishes of teachers or parents as “unruly.” “What they call unruly is nothing more than being active, violent and disobedient. On the contrary, they are regarded as excellent children”<sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, this often leads to the result that “due to this arbitrary vision, teachable children are often regarded as unteachable, and even negative means are often used to deal with them, making these children wronged. It really has to be said that it is a pity”<sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, in many cases, the unruly children considered by school teachers or parents are not necessarily truly unruly. Xu Yangben believed that in identifying unruly children, psychology should be used to truly identify them. Truly problem children should be divided into “unruly” and “inferior.” “Unruly” refers to having some abnormal psychology, such as psychological disorders, psychological defects, etc. While “inferior” focuses more on physiological functions, such as dementia, foolishness, etc. in terms of IQ. Therefore, our perspective on some lively and active children should be changed.

### **3.4. Pay attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness**

Paying attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness emphasizes fully focusing on children's needs and individuality in the educational process and creating an educational environment conducive to children's growth and development, that is, paying attention to the edification of the real environment. Education in China has always had a tradition of emphasizing the choice of educational environment. For example, Zhuangzi said in "Butcher Ding Dismembers an Ox": "Therefore, a gentleman stays away from the kitchen". A gentleman needs to stay away from killing things, which also notices that people's "sense of compassion" will be influenced by the "environment." It is also because the influence of the environment on people is imperceptible. Therefore, in the transformation of the modern social environment, the promotion of some slogans advocating virtues, public service advertisements and public morality all have a good effect on improving the social atmosphere. Family education needs a good environment, including a good environment of schools, families and society. To build such an environment, society, families and schools have great responsibilities. As Xu Yangben said: On the lecture platform, educators spare no effort to impart to children the life principles of pursuing goodness. However, when they step out of the school gate or engage in daily life beyond the campus, they will inevitably encounter quite a few inappropriate behaviors and ways of doing things. Given that children's mental faculties are not yet fully developed and their ability to distinguish right from wrong is still in the formative stage, and that imitation is an innate human instinct, the silent implications of the surrounding environment will often subtly reshape their cognitive patterns and behavioral modes <sup>[5]</sup>. Therefore, the enlightenment of school education, the good guidance of social atmosphere and the accurate positioning of family education can create a society with a generally good atmosphere.

Xu Yangben believed that paying attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness can, on the one hand, fully focus on children's needs and individuality, mobilize their learning enthusiasm and initiative, and improve learning effects. The display and layout of the environment can imperceptibly affect the direction of children's development. When the educational environment matches children's needs and individuality, they will be more willing to participate in learning activities, give play to their potential, and thus achieve better learning effects; at the same time, a warm and healthy environment plays a great role in shaping children's personality. On the other hand, paying attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness helps to cultivate children's sense of autonomy and innovation ability. In a relaxed, free and inspiring educational environment, children can better give play to their imagination and creativity and cultivate their ability of independent thinking and problem-solving. Finally, paying attention to the combination of educational environment transformation and child-centeredness helps to promote equality and interaction between parents and children. Under this educational concept, parents and children are partners in equal dialogue and communication. This interactive relationship is conducive to enhancing trust and communication between parents and children and promoting children's all-round development.

All the above fully shows that environmental transformation plays an extremely important role in education. Therefore, to give play to the imperceptible role of the environment, it is necessary to pay attention to the transformation of the environment not only in families and schools but also in society. As Xu Yangben said: "For any child with bad habits, if the environment change method is adopted to integrate their feelings, it can indeed change their habits in fact" <sup>[11]</sup>. Therefore, schools and families should attach importance to environmental transformation and construction, atmosphere creation and cultural edification. For example, the construction of campus culture in schools: schools can make full use of cultural walls, red education bases, campus newspapers,



campus cultural festivals, etc.; and the creation of family atmosphere: families can make efforts in the construction of study rooms, lighting, wall colors, children's room layout, etc.

Finally, the relationship between schools, families and society in the transformation and construction of the educational environment should be inseparable. For example, in family education, many social figures still have a vague understanding of family education, and even think that after sending students to school, students' education has little to do with the family. This view is obviously wrong. In response to this problem, Xu Yangben proposed that home-school cooperation should be adopted to teach students. Like Mr. Tao Xingzhi, he advocated the "Little Teacher System". "In short, families should contact schools, and schools should also be responsible for families. Schools must often hold parent-teacher meetings, conduct home visits, or implement the Little Teacher System, which are effective methods for mutual contact between schools and families"<sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, Xu Yangben also believed that to ensure the good promotion and implementation of family education, it is best for the state to introduce relevant policies to support the development of family education, so that family education has a foundation for development and soil for promotion. He believed that "the highest educational authorities should order local educational administrative organs at all levels to set up more children's welfare institutions, such as children's amusement parks, nurseries, children's homes, kindergartens, health centers, mothers' associations, children's nutrition research associations, children's health competitions, family education instructors, rural model families, primary school teachers' seminars, etc.; to transform families, benefit children, and cultivate the masters of the next generation of the country"<sup>[11]</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, Xu Yangben's educational ideology, rooted long-term in frontline educational practice and in-depth theoretical reflection, has developed into a relatively complete system characterized by rigorous logic, rich connotations, historical adaptability and practical guidance. His ideological evolution went through three phases: blind exploration – transformative reflection – insightful maturity. From his early stage of intellectual unclarity about the essence of education, to his middle stage of inquiry into the true nature of education, and finally to his later stage of formulating systematic propositions covering educational socialization, school system reform, the application of living teaching materials, and the six-dimensional educational objectives of knowledge, physical fitness, emotion, sociality and skills, his ideology has always taken the cultivation of human beings as its core tenet, highlighting the dominant position of children in education.

He also made remarkable achievements in the field of family education. Based on his book *The Theory and Practice of Family Education* and articles such as *Yaping's Success*, a relatively complete ideological system of family education can be sorted out. First, he clarified the positioning of parents, emphasizing the diversity and exemplariness of parental roles, thus laying the foundation for the rights and responsibilities of family education. Second, integrating knowledge guidance with labor practice and based on the laws of children's physical and mental development, Xu constructed a cultivation path featuring guidance – training – practice. Third, he proposed scientific methods for identifying children with behavioral issues and rational disciplinary approaches, establishing a psychology-informed model of rational education. Finally, he combined the improvement of educational environments with child-centeredness, building a collaborative educational ecosystem involving families, schools and society, and forming an all-round education framework. These four aspects are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, together constituting the complete theoretical framework of Xu Yangben's family education ideology.

Xu Yangben's educational ideology not only absorbed the ideological essence of contemporary educators such as Tao Xingzhi, Chen Heqin and Yan Yangchu, but also incorporated his practical insights gained from working in multiple schools and running educational institutions across different regions. Free from the limitations of a single theoretical perspective, it achieved a profound integration of theoretical depth and practical relevance. Although some of his viewpoints sparked controversies in specific historical periods, the profound insights into the essence of education, respect for the laws of children's development, advocacy of family-school-society collaborative education, and vigilance against the utilitarian tendency of education embodied in his ideological system still hold significant theoretical value and practical reference significance today. His educational pursuit, centered on child-first principle and oriented towards social progress, provides valuable ideological resources and practical enlightenment for contemporary education reform, the optimization of family education and the improvement of collaborative education mechanisms, demonstrating the timeless vitality of classic educational ideology.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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