

# The Cultural Factors that Affect the Sex Education in China among Students

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## Abstract

**The implementation of the sex education in China is not very optimistic, which is affected by multiple reasons from various perspectives. This paper mainly focuses on and discusses three cultural constraints that slows down the pace of implementation of the sex education in China, which are students in rural areas, ethnic minorities, and homosexuality. In rural areas, the poor condition can't ensure the sex education course is conducted on a regular basis; in ethnic minorities, people's limited perception on sex prevents the further operation of the sex education; among homosexual groups, the circumscribed tolerance and view on themselves caused only a few of them to receive the sex education. Overall, there's still a long way to go.**

## Keywords

**Sex Education; Cultural Constraints; Content Analysis.**

## 1. Introduction

Sex education is an important part of health education, and it is the publicity and guidance to the learning, application, and practice of sexual science knowledge. Its main tasks are to popularize scientific sexual knowledge, strengthen the concept of ethics and morality, promote the continuous improvement of people's psychological, physiological, scientific and cultural quality and ideological and moral quality, to establish a civilized, healthy, and scientific way of life, and ensure a harmonious and happy family and social stability and unity (Wang 93). It began to receive international attention in the 1860s and has now become a crucial social activity in many countries. The United States and Japan, as the early countries in the development of sex education, promoted courses and activities in the middle and late 19th century (94). Constrained by traditional beliefs, China was one of the latest countries to promote sex education. Albeit, beginning in the 1950s, the government began to promote sex education national wide, but it is still not enough.

To some extent, nationally implemented sex education program has greatly improved the awareness of sexual knowledge. However, the work is far from complete. 4,151 people were prosecuted for sexual assault of minors in the first quarter of 2020, up 2.2% year-on-year (The Supreme People's Procuratorate of People Republic of China). Given the surging cases of sex crimes in China, sex education in China should be further strengthened. This is especially true for Chinese rural communities, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals, which are not the mainstream of the country, so that leads to the title and theme of the essay: cultural factors have already influenced certain aspects of Chinese sex education.

## 2. Various Cultural Perspectives

### 2.1. The Perspective of Rural Communities

With the continuous progress of society, sex education has received extensive attention from all walks of life and become the core component of students' mental health education. However, due to the shackles of traditional thoughts for a long time in China, especially in rural areas,

people regard sex as a taboo, linking it with ugliness and evilness, which results in obstacles to promote sex education. In Chinese rural areas, sex education is often poorly implemented. According to the study in Niutian Town, only 51.9% of the children surveyed know the physical difference between men and women (Yuan et al. 144).

Besides, more than 72.1% of adolescents who know the difference between boys and girls learn through books, television, or other means through self-study, which may be not scientific enough, while family and school education do not account for much of the sex education, accounting for less than 27.9% (145). As the statistics shown above, sex education among rural communities was historically neglected.

## **2.2. The Perspective of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China**

In China's southwest ethnic minority areas, sex education remains a daunting topic for many. In the view of many ethnic minorities, sex is often very mysterious which is supported by the reason that people hide and avoid sexual issues. According to the research by the Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities, among the minorities in southwest China, the emphasis on sex education is a concentrated reflection of the concept of life first. Since the southwest minorities take a cover-up and evasive attitude towards sex, sex education for teenagers is also carried out for specific persons in a special scope. Unmarried young people learn about sex mainly from their married elders, who know little about the subject themselves (87). For example, Dulong parents provide very limited premarital sex education for their children. They even try their best to avoid talking about such topics. Dulong parents think that when it comes to sex, their children will know when they get married (87). In the Yi ethnic group, when children reach the age of 13 or 14, boys and girls have to be separated for specific education. The man begins to join in some adult activities. A woman of this age is further immobilized at home and begins various pre-marital training, often with a ceremony held for her by her mother, from which the daughter is free to mingle with the young men (87). In Dai social structure, there are organizations responsible for educating teenagers to abide by the common rules concerning male and female activities, mate selection and a marriage proposal, and for mediation and handling of the violation of the legitimate relationship between male and female youth and the interaction between men and women inside and outside the village community (88). There is also a special custom among the Hani people. During the Spring Festival, the girls who got married the year before will go back to the mountain outside the village to gather together and tell each other about their married life. The sex education of Bulang people is mainly carried out through the words and deeds of the older generation in peacetime and social activities such as marriage, sacrifice, and festival. When getting married, the family elders, village heads, and relatives of both sides should educate the bride and groom about relevant knowledge (88). It's not hard to see that sex education of minorities can only be taught to specific persons in specific places, which is still limited.

## **2.3. The Perspective of Homosexuals**

In China, the living conditions and social environment faced by young homosexuals are not optimistic. On the one hand, homosexuality is still a taboo among students, and discrimination against homosexual students occurs very often. In 2012, the published "sexual minority bullying survey" by a non-profit organization called Aibai Culture and Education Center shows that 77% of respondents had experienced school bullying based on their sexual orientation, 10% of the respondents have suffered from physical attacks, and 7.6% of respondents even suffered sexual harassment from classmates and teachers (11).

On the other hand, sex education fails to reflect the needs of the homosexual community, leaving some students unsatisfied with information on sexual health, adolescent emotions, and relationships. Homosexual men are among the most vulnerable groups in the HIV epidemic.

According to Yiming Shao from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the spread of HIV “is becoming younger and more common among college students (23).”

As personal health and sex education has not yet become a compulsory course in schools, most students only have a superficial knowledge of personal health and sex, not to mention topics such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and safe sexual activity among homosexuals. The UN's 2012 global report states, to apply sex education to be comprehensive, special attention must be paid to diversity “because everyone has the right to deal with his/her sexuality (23).”

### 3. Conclusion

To sum up, to the question of whether Chinese students should receive more sex education, my answer is yes. To prevent sexual assaults in the future, institutionalizing sex education as mandatory courses enable students to learn the knowledge and values related to sex and acquire the skills needed to manage their sexual behavior (Wang 175). Based on those courses, China can establish a sex education system that combines family, school, government, and society. Society, as the largest container, should play its role as a climate guide, and governments and schools should work together to encourage students to face up to sex education and its function. Students, as individuals, can lead a family to break the traditional logjam and mental bondage. Although it may not be easy to concentrate on diverse forces, it would be an unbreakable alliance, once it is formed. As a whole, although Chinese sex education started late, it is still feasible to form a scientific force supporting sex education as long as there are good policy guidance and social atmosphere.

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