

Life Education Theory and Contemporary Enlightenment From the Perspective of Marxism

JING Chi^[a]*

^[a]School of Marxism, Nanchang Hangkong University, China.
*Corresponding author.

Received 2 December 2021; accepted 6 March 2022
Published online 26 April 2022

Abstract

The theory of “life education” is the core of the tao’s education theory, theory of main originally derived from Wang Yangming and Dewey western education thought, in the sublation on the basis of Chinese and western education thoughts, based on the actual conditions of education of China, created the “life is education”, “society is school”, “teaching” the trinity theory core, formed its own unique educational concept. In the life education theory and marxism would see, practice and methodology of materialism, has a certain commonality and compatibility, with marxist perspective to interpret the life education theory, with the deep understanding of the meaning of life education theory and rich marxist education has important theoretical and realistic significance.

Key words: Marxist perspective; Life education theory; John Dewey’s western educational thought

Jing, C. (2022). Life Education Theory and Contemporary Enlightenment From the Perspective of Marxism. *Canadian Social Science*, 18(2), 59-63. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12490>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12490>

The theory of life education was put forward by Mr. Tao Xingzhi, a famous Chinese educator, in the book Education Reform in China. On the basis of his profound understanding of Chinese traditional culture, social reality and the education theory of his teacher John Dewey, he criticized the traditional education of China and carried out a series of landmark educational practices in the history of modern Chinese education, creating a new

theory of life education. The theory was a complete educational theory system composed of the purpose, principle and basic approach of life education, which had a great influence on the educational cause of China at that time. Although it is in a different historical era and social background, it still has important guiding significance for our education today.

1. THE COMBINATION OF CHINESE AND WESTERN: THE MAIN THEORETICAL SOURCES OF LIFE EDUCATION

Life education theory, there are two main theories source, can be said to be the one China, one in the west, one is Wang Yangming’s thought in Chinese traditional culture, the second is Dewey’s theory of western modern education, the two ideas as the mainstream deeply affected the Tao Xingzhi, based on the reality of Chinese education, he is moving the Chinese and western education idea, the new world of the life education theory.

1.1 Theoretical Dialogue Between Life Education Theory and Wang Yangming’s Concept of Knowledge and Action

Tao Xingzhi was good at absorbing ancient and modern excellent thoughts at home and abroad, inheriting and developing the concept of knowledge and action of Wang Yangming, a famous educator in Ming Dynasty. On the relationship between knowledge and action, Wang Yangming put forward: “Some people say that knowledge is the idea of action, and action is the kung fu of knowledge. Knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge. If we can only say that knowledge has its own action, we can only say that an action has its own knowledge. Who knows is the beginning of action, who knows the accomplishment. There is only one time for learning. You cannot do two things.” (Wang, 2018) The unity of knowledge and

action has always been widely recognized by people. To analyze it with marxist philosophy requires us to adhere to the materialist world outlook and achieve the unity of practice and knowledge so as to promote the development of practice and test the truth of knowledge with practice. Tao Xingzhi obviously inherited this point of view, and tried to explore the best combination of Chinese traditional education and western modern education while learning from others, forming the concept of knowledge and action education with Chinese characteristics, and putting forward the view that “action is the beginning of knowledge and knowledge is the completion of action”.

Many educators in ancient and modern times have been thinking and debating about the connotation and function of “knowledge” and “action”. Whether it is Tao Xingzhi’s educational theory or Wang Yangming’s educational thought system, the dialectical unity between knowledge and action occupies a very important position. The intrinsic attributes of education and knowledge view has a basic link, the category of the opposition and unification always involves the education content, principles, methods and even with the national education and the value orientation of personnel training and so on many issues, especially on the education purpose, specifically on how to implement education through the “unification”.

1.2 Theoretical Integration of Life Education and Western Modern Educational Thoughts

John Dewey is a famous Educator, philosopher and psychologist in The United States. He is the embodiment of pragmatism and one of the founders of functionalist psychology and modern pedagogy. It is rich in Dewey’s pragmatism education thought system, its core essence from pragmatic empiricism and functionalism criticism of the traditional school education, on the basis of this puts forward the basic idea of his, in generalizing the main four: “education is life experience, growth and transformation”, “school is society”, “education with no aim” and “high school”. Tao xingzhi studied with Dewey and was deeply influenced by Dewey, but he did not fully share his teacher’s views. He believed that Dewey’s educational view and theory were based on the educational reality of the United States and were not universal. But inherited the teacher’s point of view, based on the actual situation of Chinese education, do a deeper step of thinking. “Education is the weapon of national liberation, mass liberation and human liberation.” And critically created three theoretical cores of life education: “society is education”, “society is school” and “integration of teaching and doing”.

2. CRITICISM AND INHERITANCE: TAO XINGZHI’S VIEW OF LIFE EDUCATION

After combining Wang Yangming’s concept of knowledge and action with John Dewey’s western education theory,

Tao xingzhi formed his own unique understanding of education. He proposed that “education is the weapon of national liberation, mass liberation and human liberation.” First of all, his concept of education embodies the distinctive people, he believes that the purpose of education is to liberate the nation, the public and all mankind. Second, it was distinctly revolutionary. He regarded education as a weapon of liberation rather than an ordinary tool, which was the unique mission of education given by the historical era and position of China at that time, and also the external representation of the way of cultural salvation. The educational ideas and methods at this time are historical, popular and progressive. As an educational thought in modern culture, the theory of life education is an important reflection of China’s political and economic situation in the educational concept.

Tao Xingzhi defined the theory of life education from two perspectives. From the connotation, life education is not only to teach in life, but also to use life as the material to teach, and finally realize the progress of life. In life, education is the content of education. In life, education is an indispensable part and crucial to the free and all-round development of human beings. Use life to educate, here refers to endowing life with the function of education. Whether it is people in life, or the experience that happens to people, whether it is positive success, or negative failure, all have a unique educational function; Education means to give life the purpose of education. The fundamental purpose of education is to make people live a better and happier life. In terms of effectiveness, education becomes real education through the power of life. There are three meanings: first, life is the “database” of education. The materials of education come from life and are passed on to students after being processed by educators. This is the inherent educational nature of life. Secondly, life also plays the role of “internal combustion engine” in education, transforming “life energy” into “education momentum” to realize the real sense of education. The needs of real life often promote higher quality education. Finally, life practice education is more powerful and vivid than book theory education. Under such a definition of life education, Tao Xingzhi constructed three theoretical cores.

2.1 Society is Education

Tao Xingzhi inverted Dewey’s “education is life”, because Dewey’s idea of education holds that education is to prepare for life and provide the necessary foundation for a better life. However, it is worth discussing that Dewey’s educational ideas could not be implemented until the American society had developed to a certain height at that time. To some extent, it already had the conditions for the practice of ideas. However, in China at that time, most people had not received education, so “education is life” had no foundation at all. From this perspective, “Life is education” proposed by Tao Xingzhi is to expand the scope of education to all aspects of life, is the omni-

directional education in life, every life has the possibility of education. Moreover, every Chinese is included in the category of education, which reflects the universality of the concept of life education. It can be said that it is put forward on the basis of further thinking on China's education reality, universal education and civilian education.

2.2 Society is School

"Society is school" emphasizes the implementation field of life education theory. The reason why Tao Xingzhi opposes Dewey's "school is society" is that Tao Xingzhi hopes to break through the estrangement between school and society and tries to integrate all social forces into educational activities so as to give full play to the educational function of society and make it break through the existing conditions. In Tao Xingzhi's opinion, "school is society" proposed by Dewey is to catch a lively bird from the outside world to the cage, and replace all the functions of the society with all the functions of the school. In fact, the knowledge learned in this way is just to adapt to the school as the standard. The right thing to do is to put the birds in nature, the extension of the school into the wider society and nature. (Tao, 2020) This practice was closely related to the social status quo of China at that time. At that time, school education was not yet universal and most people were still illiterate. Only by using the function of social education and giving full play to the educational role of the people could the scope of learning be expanded. This view shows that life has an educational function. Society is an important carrier of life and place of practice, so society also has educational function. From the essence of school, society is a "school".

2.3 Integration of Teaching and Doing

"Integration of teaching and doing" is the methodology of life education theory. Tao Xingzhi's methodology is based on Dewey's "learning by doing". Tao Xingzhi believes that only with the methodology of integrating teaching and doing, "life is education" and "society is school" can be operable and realizable. Faced with the separation of education from real life and the separation of teaching, learning and doing, Tao Xingzhi advocated the combination of labor and heart, and realized the goal of integrating teaching, learning and doing. "Teaching" is the method of life education, successfully avoids the blind do teach teaching dilemma, blind, blind, he emphasized the "knowledge" on labor, to the mutual unification of theory and practice, which is in accordance with the "line is the beginning of knowledge, knowledge is the line into" the education of epistemology, to a certain extent changed the disadvantages of the traditional Chinese education from the actual.

In order to more intuitively show the difference between Tao Xingzhi and Dewey's educational ideas, the following table makes a comparative analysis of Tao Xingzhi and Dewey's educational ideas and viewpoints from multiple perspectives.(See Table 1)

Table 1
Comparison between Tao Xingzhi and Dewey's educational thoughts from multiple perspectives

Compare projects/people	Dewey	Tao xingzhi
Education purpose	Although it advocates no teleology, it emphasizes the utility of education in social transformation	For the liberation of the nation, the public and mankind
Breadth of education	As a means of understanding	Every corner of life
Realistic foundation	The reality of American education	China's education reality
Carrier of Education	Incorporate all functions of society into the school	Society as a vehicle for education
Education method	Do the middle school	Unification of teaching and doing

3. THE THEORY OF LIFE EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARXISM

3.1 Life Education Is Distinctive and Revolutionary, and Is Common With Marxist Standpoint

Marxism is a scientific theory which creatively reveals the law of development of human society. It was the theory of the people that first created the ideological system of the people's liberation. It is the theory of practice, guiding the people's action to transform the world; It is a developing open theory and always stands in the forefront of The Times. The Marxist mass view of the people insists that the masses are the promoters and creators of social history. "Historical activities are the cause of the masses, with the deepening of historical activities, will be the expansion of the masses." The character of the people is obviously reflected in Tao Xingzhi's education view. Education is a weapon of national liberation, mass liberation and human liberation, rather than another weapon for the dictatorship of the ruling class. This happens to coincide with the marxist position of the people and class revolution.

3.2 Life Education Is Tao Xingzhi's "Localized" Theoretical Achievement Based on Dewey's Education Theory

Why is the theory of life education the result of localization? Because it is a land to grow up in China, although by Dewey the profound influence of the western modern education concept, but Tao Xingzhi has not accept, Dewey's theory is westernized, suitable for the present situation of native American education idea, then most people accepted the education in the United States, and China's education population are few, Obviously, if the western education thought of John Dewey is rooted in China, it is empty talk and cannot be realized. The essence of Marxism is to seek truth from facts and adopt appropriate strategies according to the actual situation. Sinicized Marxism is a theoretical result that combines the basic tenets of Marxism with the realities of China's

revolution, reform and construction. It conforms to China's basic national conditions, so it can grow and develop on China's soil and guide practice.

3.3 From the Perspective of World Outlook, Life Education Is Materialistic Education, Which Is Consistent With Marxist Practice View

Marxism holds that the world is material. This is the Marxist world view. In 1845, Marx put forward a new world view by criticizing the old philosophy in his *Theses on Feuerbach*. Later in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels pointed out that "in fact, and for practical materialists, namely communists, the whole problem lies in revolutionizing the real problem and actually opposing the existing things". (Compilation Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1995) Marx also pointed out that "thought by itself cannot achieve anything at all. To achieve the realization of thought, there must be people who use the power of practice." All these fully reflect the significance of material existence and practice. Tao Xingzhi's life education theory runs through this understanding from the beginning to the end, which is mainly reflected in the relationship between knowledge and action. Life is the source of cognition, and knowledge comes before knowledge. This is also the soul of life education theory.

3.4 From the Perspective of Methodology, Life Education Runs Through Dialectics and Is Compatible With Marxist Methods

Dialectics is the living soul of Marxism. In Karl Marx's "Critique of Political Economy", Engels pointed out that: "Since Hegel's death, he has studied economics. There has been almost no attempt to describe a science within its inherent interconnections. The official Hegelians, having learned only the simplest techniques from the teacher's dialectics, applied them everywhere, often with ludicrous clumsiness. For them, Hegel's entire legacy is nothing more than a rigid formula to be applied to any subject, a vocabulary to be used to put off when ideas and empirical knowledge are lacking." (Compilation Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2009) Colloquially speaking, dialectics is a guide to a holistic movement rather than a disjointed view of things. Tao Xingzhi's theory of life education expounds the relationship between life and education, school and society dialectically. The educational elements and materials contained in life, and society is also a big school that makes people progress, which fully embodies the unity of these two pairs of concepts.

4. CONTEMPORARY ENLIGHTENMENT OF LIFE EDUCATION THEORY

4.1 Education Should Return to the Theme of Life

Life is not only a reality, but also a source of education. It means not only the unfolding of the external way of life,

but also the inner experience of human beings. And this inner experience of life is the source of education. Life and education can be regarded as two interactive systems. With the continuous development of The Times, the way of life of human beings is also changing. This means that life can provide a constant supply of nutrients for education, and that the talents cultivated through up-to-date educational concepts will also have a positive impact on social life. Conversely, if education is divorced from real life, it will lose the existence value of education itself, and if life is divorced from education, life will also lose the motivation for progress and development. In short, education is involved in the production and life of human society, and it is also integrated into the social production and life of politics, economy, culture and society. Actively play the function of education, will people in production and life to create the ideological and cultural transmission, so that people can better production and life.

4.2 It Is Necessary to Build a Unified Education System

Tao xingzhi's thought of the unity of teaching do enlightens us in teaching at the same time, to do social contacts with the school and strengthen the social practice, should avoid to be outdated old education content, does not conform to the actual student life, don't suit student ideological understanding, not good for the students of the phenomenon of living service again in the future. In the choice of teaching content do not blindly refer to the textbook, can completely abandon this shackles. Open and thematic teaching is carried out according to the teaching content that students are interested in. In terms of teaching methods, people such as parents and experts can be invited to participate in learning, which is "teaching and learning". The teaching time may not be in class, but students' spare time and the teaching place may not be in the classroom. Society is the best classroom, so that students can go out and have intimate contact with society, and learn and grow in life. Mobilize all mechanisms to serve teaching. To achieve these, it is necessary to understand life, understand the status quo of students' life, understand the trend of life development and the change of life's requirements for people as the basic teaching premise. Therefore, it is imperative to construct a set of effective, orderly operation of teaching and doing integration, collaborative education system.

4.3 Promote the Affinity and Transformation of Teaching Practice

Teaching practice should not only stay in the traditional indoctrination mode, but also adhere to the unity of indoctrination and inspiration, pay attention to inspiration education, and gradually guide students to find problems in daily life, analyze problems, think about problems, and finally solve problems smoothly. In the process of continuous inspiration and guidance so that students can come to the conclusion naturally. This kind of class is

vivid. The factors affecting the affinity of ideological and political theory course are multifaceted and systematic, including teachers' own knowledge reserve and professionalism, the mining of teaching materials, personal teaching style, teaching methods and teaching homework design and other elements and links. Each element is linked with each other, and any problems in any link will affect the overall vividness and effectiveness of the classroom. This requires teachers to actively cultivate students' ability and thinking of combining theory with practice, dig out some vivid cases in the narration, enrich the teaching material library to increase the sensation of theory.

REFERENCES

- Compilation Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (1995). *Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 1* (p.88). People's Publishing House.
- Compilation Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (2009). *Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 2* (p.40). People's Publishing House.
- Tao, X. Z. (2020). What is Life Education. *Reading for Middle School Students* (Junior High School Edition), (03), 38-39.
- Wang, Y. M. (2018). *Transmission of Practice* (A. L. Xu, et al, Eds., p.55). Beijing United Publishing Company.