

The Application of Confucian Enlightenment and Education in Humanistic Education of Chinese Teenagers

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Supported by Project of Shandong Provincial Institute of Education Research (2010); Project of Shandong Provincial Teenagers Quality Education Research Center (2014); Project of Shandong Provincial Planning Office of Social Science (2014).

Received 12 May 2014; accepted 20 July 2014
Published online 27 August 2014

Abstract

The Confucianists always take “learning for oneself” as their highest pursuit. The core of Confucian enlightenment and education lies in its educational concepts. Based on “learning for oneself”, Confucius has formed his educational concepts, like training all round qualified persons and teaching them to apply their learning to practical use, learning actively to perfect their personality, and cultivating both soul and body to maintain harmony. These concepts are related with humanistic education of teenagers. Putting particular emphasis on people's quality is the essence of Confucian enlightenment and education, which should be applied to humanistic education of teenagers in a flexible and proper way so as to help cultivate talents needed by the society, who obtain not only modern scientific knowledge but also humanistic quality.

Key words: The confucianists; Confucian enlightenment and education; Humanistic education of teenagers

Xu, X. Q. (2014). The Application of Confucian Enlightenment and Education in Humanistic Education of Chinese Teenagers. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 5(3), 153-157. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/5499>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5499>

INTRODUCTION

Confucian culture grows up from thousands of years' Chinese historical accumulation and is the crystallization of Chinese wisdom and emotion. As an important component of Confucian culture, Confucian enlightenment and education has many concepts and ideas that are still of significant value today. In the times when people think highly of education and talents, we should focus more on applying the essence of Confucian enlightenment and education to humanistic education of teenagers.

1. CONFUCIAN ENLIGHTENMENT AND EDUCATION AND ITS EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS

The original meaning of enlightenment and education is that a noble man should set an example for ordinary people to follow to help them build up their strength and redress their weaknesses, so as to change for better. Confucianists advocate education on people, wishing to teach them to pursue virtue, so as to reach “supreme virtuousness” of society. Confucian enlightenment and education includes “learning for oneself”, which means learning to achieve one's ideal virtue and perfect one's character; and “learning for others”, which means using learning as an instrument to flaunt themselves. These are recognitions of learning on two different levels by Confucianists. As said by Confucius, “ancient scholars learn in order to achieve their ideal virtue, while present scholars learn in order to show off to others”. (Zhu, 1988) The former believes that the aim of study is to improve one's own moral state, perfect one's character and virtue, while the latter takes learning as a tool to please people and show off to others. Confucianists always take “learning for oneself” as the highest pursuit. The core

of Confucian enlightenment and education lies in its educational concepts. Based on “learning for oneself”, Confucius has formed his educational concepts: training all round qualified persons and teaching them to apply their learning to practical use, learning actively to perfect their personality, and cultivating both soul and body to maintain harmony, all of which are related to humanistic education of Chinese teenagers.

1.1 Training All Round Qualified Persons and Learning to Meet Practical Needs

Training all round qualified persons is the main content of Confucian enlightenment and education concepts. Confucius focuses on training all round persons and introducing general education. He teaches his disciples not only the six classical arts, which are Etiquette, Music, Archery, Riding, Reading and Maths, but also the six ancient Chinese classics which are *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Rites*, *The Book of Music*, *The Book of Changes* and *The Annals of Spring and Autumn Period*. He emphasizes on humanistic cultivation and cultural inheritance. What’s more, by studying ancient Chinese classics, the aim of inheriting Confucian orthodoxy and education, and cultivating allround persons can be realized. However, the six classical arts and the six ancient Chinese classics are only part of Confucius’s education. According to chapter Shu Er in *The Analects of Confucius*, Confucius takes “Culture, Conduct, Sincerity and Truthfulness” as the four core learning. The descendants of Confucius’s also regard “Virtue, Language, Politics and Literature” which have been mentioned in chapter Xian Jin in *The Analects of Confucius* as the four subjects. Chen Lai deems that “compared with the statement of six classical arts, that of the four core learning and the four subjects gives a more inclusive reflection of conception and practice of Confucian education.”(Chen, 2005) However, moral conduct is the core of general education, which aims to train all round persons by cultivating humanistic quality of competent and virtuous persons. Confucius not only advocates “learning for oneself” and general education, but also upholds the idea of “learning extensively and acting perseveringly” and encourages people to grow erudite and versatile through practice. Confucianism emphasizes “being erudite” for the purpose of being knowledgeable and holding sensible views. There are three meanings of being knowledgeable and holding sensible views. The first is to master all kinds of knowledge and cultivate all sorts of talents. The second is to digest, apply knowledge and concepts by reasoning in a proper and correct way. The third is to look up with veneration all round persons who adopt flexible principles in learning as well as in living their lives. Confucius once comes up with philosophy of “an accomplished scholar should not be a utensil”, which means “a wise man will not make himself a tool fit only to do one kind of work”. He warns his disciples against being a utensil, because it

is merely for only one purpose. Some disciples of his have become all round persons who have a good command of profound knowledge on astronomy, geography and statecraft.

1.2 Learning Actively to Perfect One’s Character

“Learning for others” is to show off to others while “learning for oneself” is to perfect one’s own character and spirit, a noble man should develop fully in his character and ability and so on. Confucius puts emphases on learning, he says, “acquiring knowledge and, as you go on acquiring, putting into practice what you have acquired”¹, regarding learning as the basis of moral cultivation. Another famous ancient Chinese thinker Xunzi gives his understanding of the above sentence in Chapter Quan Xue of his book *Xunzi* by saying “as long as one person keeps on doing good deeds and cultivating his noble virtue, he will become a holy and sainted man through constant accumulation of moral deeds.” Confucius not only thinks highly of learning, but also gives normal people chances of receiving the six arts education. His education concepts, transcending the six arts in *the Rites of Zhou* and even the classical education in Zhou Dynasty, have developed on the basis of humanistic knowledge into comprehensive education on free characters. In *The Analects of Confucius*, “what kind of personality should one person have” has become an important core concept of education. This has never happened during the Spring and Autumn Period before Confucius. It is also based on this that Confucius takes “a man of noble personality” as the core of highly “Dao learning” education. (Chen, 2005) According to Confucianists, learning means learn to be a noble man, which implies perfection of morality, establishment of personality and sublimation of spiritual state.

1.3 Keeping Harmony and Getting Refined Internally and Externally

“Learning for oneself” places emphasis on perfection of one’s personality, which is closely related to Confucian thoughts of harmonious education. Confucianists hold the view that “man is an integral part of nature”, which means heaven, earth and human beings are interrelated and there are mutual interaction and influences among them. Human beings should respect and act in accordance with law of nature and live harmoniously with nature. During the late Zhou dynasty, Shi Bo proposes “harmony” by saying “harmony actually fosters new things.”² Confucius says, “.....With equal distribution there will be no poverty, with mutual good will, there will be no want, and with contentment among the people, there can be no downfall or dissolution.”³, emphasizing overall harmony in society. Later, another great ancient Chinese

¹ Chapter Xue Er in *The Analects*.

² Chapter Zheng Yu in *Guo Yu*.

³ Chapter Ji Shi in *The Analects*.

thinker Mencius further thinks “harmonious human relations” as more important factor than good timing and geographical convenience. The above mentioned form philosophical basis of harmonious educational concepts of Confucianists’, which include realizing harmony between human and nature, between human and society, among human beings, and achieving harmony within inner hearts of people.

Aiming to realize integral harmony in society, Confucianists use benevolence and etiquette to adjust relations among people, and relations between people and society. Confucius emphasizes that the core of benevolence is love for people, which means one should treat others as what he expects to be treated, and one should realize “don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you”.⁴ “A moral man in forming his character forms the character of others; in enlightening himself he enlightens others”, and “those who love others will be loved by others”, thus creates a good environment for harmonious human relations. Confucius puts forward that “renounce yourself and conform to the ideal of decency and good sense”⁵, “In the practice of art, what is valuable is natural spontaneity”⁶ and tries to cultivate noble man with broad knowledge, noble personality, remarkable ability and high humanistic quality.

2. HUMANISTIC EDUCATION ON CHINESE TEENAGERS

The word “humanity” is firstly found in *The Book of Changes*, including humanistic knowledge and humanistic spirits. Humanistic knowledge is originated from traditional Chinese culture. As one of wonderful treasures of excellent traditional Chinese culture, Confucian culture is originated in profound accumulation of thousands of years of Chinese civilization and embodies wisdom and emotion of China. Humanistic spirit is universal self-concern among human beings, which shows itself in preserving, pursuing and concerning about human beings’ dignity, value and destiny, attaching supreme importance to all kinds of spiritual and cultural phenomena left by human beings, as well as affirming and shaping all round ideal personality. As for the importance of humanity, as early as in 1948, Liang Sicheng, a scholar in China has mentioned in Tsinghua University that a person who knows either science or humanity instead of both can merely be considered as a “half man”, and couldn't become a real scholar. Both in China and abroad, scientists and scholars who have made creative devotion generally possess a vast store of knowledge, and have many interests. Modern humanistic education

includes not only modern humanistic quality but also general education, and the latter is closely related to Confucian quality education. General education is a kind of comprehensive education for all college students which internalizes human being's excellent cultural achievements into personality, temperament and morality, and turns them into relatively stable inner quality through knowledge teaching, environmental influence and personal practice. Modern humanistic quality education is more than knowledge teaching and wisdom cultivation; it has been elevated to overall and balanced development which integrates knowledge, ability and personality. Besides learning cultural knowledge in middle schools and colleges, students should also be guided to cultivate correct attitudes towards life, world and morality. Through educating, middle schools and colleges should cultivate high quality students who are adaptable to development of modern society with wide knowledge and profound humanistic accumulation, as well as creation and comprehensive abilities.

3. THE APPLICATION OF ESSENCE OF CONFUCIAN ENLIGHTENMENT AND EDUCATION IN HUMANISTIC EDUCATION OF TEENAGERS

Putting particular emphasis on human cultivation is the essence of Confucian enlightenment and education, schools and colleges should apply it into humanistic education of teenagers to cultivate talents needed by our society who grasp not only modern scientific knowledge, but also humanistic quality. Humanistic education for teenagers contains not only knowledge learning, but also cultivation of innovation, development of fine morality and personality, and keeping inner harmony. The latter plays a decisive role in teenagers' personal development.

3.1 Cultivation of Innovation

As is known to all, innovation is not only perpetual motive force to keep a country flourishing, but also a major factor that decides overall national strength and competence of a country. It is pointed out in the 12th five-year plan for development of national education in China that, “..... strengthen cultivation of creative consciousness and ability. work hard to create a good environment to encourage independent thinking, free exploration and creation.” More emphasis on cultivation of innovation should be placed on humanistic education of teenagers.

The Confucian enlightenment and education provides a wide and profound cultural foundation for cultivation of students' innovation. Innovation has close relationship with flexibility. “Jing and Quan” thoughts in ancient China mean principle and flexibility. Mr. Yang Rongguo explains that, “Principle is supremacy and absoluteness of righteousness, while flexibility means that moral principles

⁴ Chapter Yan Yuan in *The Analects*.

⁵ Chapter Yan Yuan in *The Analects*.

⁶ Chapter Xue Er in *The Analects*.

could be adapted to certain circumstances.”(Yang, 1992) Confucius regards “flexibility” as “adaptation to circumstance”, he appreciates those who know how to adapt to circumstance and make necessary changes when needed, and calls them “the noble men”. Innovation means achieving new breakthroughs on the basis of accomplishments of predecessors. This is similar to “adaptation to circumstance”. The Confucian enlightenment and education is beneficial to widening students’ horizons, encouraging their innovation and cultivating their imaginative abilities. Persons with extensive knowledge and rich imagination are more likely to produce association, integration and inspiration, which help them to generate new thoughts.

Innovation is a combination of intellectual and non-intellectual factors. The former includes ways of thinking like imagination, intuition and inspiration and so on, while the latter includes creative consciousness, thirst for knowledge and strong will and so on. Therefore, besides emphasizing intellectual factors, it is more important to cultivate and develop students’ non-intellectual factors such as motivation, interests, feeling, will and character, helping these two factors develop mutually and harmoniously. In cultivation of non-intellectual factors, ancient Chinese enlightenment and education has played an important role.

3.2 Development of Fine Morality and Character

It is pointed out in the 12th five-year plan for development of national education in China,

.....Taking construction of the value system of socialism as the core, we should put ideal and belief education, patriotic education, civil morality education and basic quality education thoroughly into the whole process of education and teaching.

The Confucian enlightenment and education is helpful to form students’ attitudes towards values on life and ways of thinking.

As globalization of the world economy picks up speed, people’s needs take on a multiple trend. Under heated competition, how to figure out the relationship between “righteousness” and “interests”? How to realize one’s value when wealth becomes the standard of one’s ability to some extent? These have become problems modern people should be concerned about. The campus of university is no longer an isolated ivory tower; teenagers have been influenced in different scale. Under influence of utilitarianism thoughts, a minority of teenagers advocate individualism and are self-centered, some students are lack sense of justice and consciousness of living frugally, and seldom abide by the rules, a few of them need to strengthen ability of dealing with emergency and that of self-adaptation, as well as good psychological quality. At present, mental health problems on teenagers have aroused social attention. The event of “abusing rabbit” in a senior high school, and the event of a student’s committing suicide by jumping from a high building because of great

study pressure are all typical negative examples. Most teenagers are born after 2000, having neither brothers nor sisters. Because of excessive love from their parents, and deficiency of personal training and inner humanistic quality, some of them are lack of abilities of living and dealing with personal relationship independently, as well as good psychological quality. A small minority result in psychological problems, or even abnormal mentality, which would be performed as some extreme behaviors.

In essence, Confucian enlightenment and education, and the thoughts of humanistic education of teenagers could be traced to the same origin. Both of them emphasize that the basis of education is to teach a person how to be a virtual man. A famous Chinese scholar, Mr. Zhang Dainian once says that “Confucianists are all educators, and philosophy of Confucianism is philosophy of education and teaching The aim of Confucianists’ is to carry out principles of being a virtual man.” (Zhang, 1994)

Confucianists with the view “learning for oneself” always take morality cultivation as fundamental aim of learning. Confucianists believe that it is morality differentiates people from animals, and sage is someone with perfect morality. They advocate “As heaven maintains vigor through movements, a gentle man should constantly strive for self-perfection. As earth’s condition is receptive devotion, a gentle man should hold the outer world with broad mind”⁷ and advocate spirits of forging ahead with determination. Confucius praises broad-minded noble man “a wise and good man is composed and happy; a fool is always worried and full of distress.”⁸ He praises Yan Hui who would not be influenced and controlled by external things, “living on one single meal a day, with water for his drink, and living in the lowest hovels of the city, —no man could have stood such hardships, yet he—he did not lose his cheerfulness.”⁹ Mencius further advises people to pay more attention to perfection of personal character and pursuit to justice, “living in larger house, standing in the correct position, walking on the right track.”¹⁰ A person could have good personalities, only if he has firm faith, enough rationality and strong spiritual cultivation, and is open minded and able to get rid of disturbance of anxieties, fears and other negative thoughts. The principle of Confucianists’ “harmony without uniformity” emphasizes contradiction with unity embodied in maintaining one’s special personality, independent thinking, and blending into society. All of these have positive influence on development of teenagers’ good characters and promotion of harmonious relationship.

3.3 Maintaining Inner Harmony

⁷ *The Book of Changes*.

⁸ Chapter Shu Er in *The Analects*.

⁹ Chapter Yong Ye in *The Analects*.

¹⁰ Chapter Teng Wengong II in *The Mencius*.

Cultivating all round talents who are fully developed on morality, intelligence and physique is purpose of humanistic education of teenagers. Physical and psychological health is necessary, which represents harmony. As a basic unit of society, only by realizing inner harmony can one become all round person and realize harmony between human and nature, human and society and harmony among people. In humanistic education of teenagers, keeping inner harmony is important not only for students' studying and living at school, but also for their coping with pressure of employment, working and living after stepping into the world.

Confucianists have analyzed with keen eyes how to maintain inner harmony when facing temptations of fame and fortune. Firstly, one should keep in mind "learning for oneself" and go on with perfecting himself, which includes not only pursuing perfection on study by questioning whenever there is a question, but also emphasizing physical training and inner-heart shaping. When Confucius goes to the Imperial Ancestral Temple, he asks questions on almost everything. In daily life, he is not ashamed of asking those who are less learned than him, and finally becomes a sage. Many disciples of Confucius are leaders of both literary and military talents. They have travelled to many countries to spread their thoughts in spite of hardships. The reason why they could keep on doing this is that they have strong determination and will, what's more, they benefit a lot from archery, riding, and physical training.

The second is to keep physical and psychological harmony. Having peace of mind and enjoying oneself are helpful to have a quick intellect and keep healthy. In the world, people could be easily tempted and disturbed. Although "ordinary people go after fame and fortune", and "noble man also reaches after fortune", it will be totally wrong if one pursues fame and fortune to an excessive extent at the expense of his morality, or pursues material life at the price of spiritual life, or even seeks after nothing but fortune by all means, for that will

result in unbalance, and even bring disturbance and be harmful to himself. Most of the time, fame and fortune are like intangible knives, harming people deeply without being noticed. How to maintain harmony physically and psychologically? The first is to be indifferent to fame and fortune, "accomplish something by leading a simple and quiet life", and carefully adapt to one's own inner heart—listening to light music, enjoying beauty of landscapes, talking with good friends and keeping some hobbies. The second is to emphasize spiritual shaping. One reason why people are easily affected by the outside world is that the temptation is too strong, and the other is because one lacks enough inner cultivation. Confucius believes that one should have noble morality and character, and he could achieve harmony physically and psychologically through spiritual shaping.

Middle schools and colleges are cradles of future talents. The Confucian enlightenment and education is an important component of Confucian culture, as well as a beneficial supplement for humanistic education of teenagers. Nowadays, introducing essence of Confucian enlightenment and education into humanistic education of teenagers is of great importance, for it is helpful to strengthen teenagers' sense of identity and pride towards our motherland's excellent culture, and further improve their humanistic quality and comprehensive quality, as well as promote harmonious development of their quality.

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