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International Journal of Educational Studies

<http://www.escijournals.net/IJES>

THE INEVITABLE ROAD TO HUMANKIND'S EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to discuss the whole development of “three education” (intellectual education, moral education and aesthetic education) proposed by China’s Confucianism. Drawing upon insights from the classic Confucian texts, this article applies the method of discursive analysis to reveal the differences between the current education and China’s Confucian education. The perspective of “three education” is original and valuable. It emphasizes harmonious living between human and nature, human and human, and the whole development of human character. By focusing on the three education’s status and significance in the current human educational development, this article has a significant application to the theoretical enquiry of the international educational studies.

Keywords: Intellectual education, moral education, aesthetic education, knowledge, virtue, human nature.

INTRODUCTION

Noting the law of change and development from nature’s endless circle of life, our ancestors deeply realize that, humankind’s development does not separate from deliberate educational cultivation promoting harmonious living with nature, with other humans, and the whole development of human character. The whole development of “three education” (intellectual education, moral education, aesthetic education) proposed by China’s Confucianism, focuses on concord living between human and nature, human and human and the whole development of human character. The ideal of three education is an educational exemplar. It can be hypothesized that it is the inevitable road to humankind’s educational development.

Drawing upon insights from the classic Confucian texts, this paper reveals the differences between the current education and China’s Confucian education in order to emphasize the three education’s status and significance in the current human educational development. Its ultimate purpose is to offer a rather clear aim to direct the theoretical enquiry of the current human educational studies.

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The Pure and Authentic Intellectual Education: For the Confucian intellectual education, the tasks of exemplary persons are realizing the way, cultivating the way and acting out the way.

The approach to knowledge is through the combination of three ways: hearing (闻, seeing (观) and asking (问). The *Analects* raises the point that “Hearing much and selecting what is good and following it” (Book 7: 28). This suggestion emphasizes the importance of becoming familiar with a variety of perspectives, choosing from the multiple viewpoints and then accepting the good ones. In learning context, “hearing” represents an ability to take ideas from different fields and synthesize them. It demands the collection of rich materials and the selection of the good and useful ones. “Seeing” connects to “hearing”; and the only difference between them is sense organs. Similar to “hearing”, “seeing” also demands a person to obtain large quantity of practical materials in order to reach the aim of intellectual education. This aim of intellectual education is described in the *Analects* as the following:

“Hear much and put aside the points of which you stand in doubt, while you speak cautiously at the same time of the others- then you will afford few occasions for blame. See much and put aside the things which seem perilous, while you are cautious at the same time in carrying the others into practice – then you will have few occasions for repentance (Book 2: 18).”

On the other hand, “asking” requires a student to “learn of his inferiors” (Book 5: 15). Being humble represents a sincere and respectful attitude to treat others as teachers and mentors - a positive learning attitude. It is only by engaging in extensive and in-depth learning, a person is able to commit in continuous self-perfecting. This learning method reflects the most prominent characteristics of the Confucian education: to place emphasis upon practice, to maintain unification between knowing and acting, and to reflect truth from daily lives. The Confucian education stresses on applying broad knowledge to social practice because knowledge is for social benefit. While engaging in politics and devoting to government administration, individuals shall work skillfully, flexibly, and independently. Otherwise, one has no practical moral use even though his/her mind is filled with poetry and rationality. The Confucian education teaches people: learning about the human way is the same as cultivating the intelligent way of thinking. The aim of intellectual education is to learn and to understand life’s moral goal as the saying indicates: “a grasp of mundane affairs is genuine knowledge, understanding of worldly wisdom is true learning”. It is the tool for moral education. This perception, thus, gives a concise definition to intellectual education. In other words, intellectual education is to allow people to understand life values and the law of objective matters. Learning and cultivating the way can help people increase their knowledge, develop their skills, broaden their mind, and open their heart. It is only through engaging in these acts of character-building, life values can be illustrated. Life can become meaningful. In today’s context, people have separated “genuine knowledge” from “mundane affairs” and “worldly wisdom”. They are regarded as two distinct knowledge systems. This type of moral intelligence overshadows the authenticity of moral knowledge. Moral knowledge is neither writing books and building theories, nor students’ task of comprehending educational curriculum. Rather, it is the complete attempt and full engagement in becoming human. Intellectual education in the current educational context is only concerned about theorizing and discovering objective law, and delivering theoretical knowledge. This practice has led to knowledge-based theory. This perception inevitably produces education that is both expert and teacher-centred because compared to the knowledge authority, students’ experiences and

knowledge are scanty. Measured on this scale, their relationship can be described as tea pot and tea cup, and thus, unavoidably leads to the theory of knowledge infusion. Unless educational theory sets its aim as perfecting human character and revealing educational meanings, it is impossible for education to overcome the inclination of knowledge drilling.

Although numerous articles have been written with the objective to overcome similar issues that are existed in education, they are merely directed at the level of school system. Profound philosophical or ethical reflection is greatly lacking. As soon as educational theorizing begins, the enquiry automatically returns to knowledge education as the point of departure. It is important to realize that knowledge-based educational framework makes people dwell in the “cave” of epistemology. It stops them from facing directly to the Sun, and prevents them from arriving at the realm of educational clarity.

The Highest and Excellent Moral Education: The classic Confucian text *The Great Learning* points out: “What the Great Learning teaches, is to illustrate illustrious virtue; to renovate the people; and to rest in the highest excellence’ (1). “It values, instead, its good men”; “What he considers precious is the affection due to his parent”. Confucius asserts: “Virtue is the root”; “The ruler will first take pains about his own virtue.” (13). What then can be considered a nation and an exemplary person’s most precious “treasure”? A loving heart reflects the fundamental representation of the Confucian “benevolence” (仁), and the basic virtue of its “rites” (礼). A person with a loving heart does not distinguish between “loving oneself” and “loving others”. Confucius holds: “wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others” (Analects, Book 6: 30); “not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself” (Book 12: 2). Here, the “established himself”, “enlarged himself”, and “not wish done to yourself” are loving oneself; the “establish others”, “enlarge others”, and “not to do to others” are loving others. Together, “benevolence” is the most representative of the unified character between “loving oneself” and “loving others”. A person with a loving heart is able to properly control passions and impulses. He/she understands and respects code of conduct in human communication (moral thinking), and always behaves in conformity with moral principles (moral action). Confucius famously

states: “To subdue one’s self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue” (Book 12: 1). Here, the “subdue one’s self” demonstrates the self-control quality of a person’s will. Without self-control, will-power’s executive virtues such as persistence (恒) and courage (勇) are unlikely to emerge. Rites play an important role in maintaining social order and a nation’s development. A person’s spirit of self-sacrifice is in accordance with the sage’s spirit of “overflow in love to all” (Book 1: 6), the spirit of serving humans, and the spirit of benevolence.

Moral education with an aim to cultivating good is the vital content of practice. Moral education depicted by Confucianism is about learning human affairs rather than learning words. Indeed, practical wisdom is the exact missing component in the current education. The Confucian scholar and philosopher Jiuyuan Lu (陆九渊) states explicitly that “Without knowing a single word, I first want to build myself a dignified, open and trustworthy personhood”. Aren’t these strong words giving the current social atmosphere valuing “material gains above justice”, and the current educational phenomenon valuing “intelligence above morality” startling revelations? Practices show, intellectual disability such as illiteracy can be compensated from engaging in human affairs; yet, moral deficiency cannot be made up from literary learning. Moral education committing itself on human affairs can break down the overshadowed educational rules. For example, the exemplary legend of WuXun (武训), whose life begins as an illiterate beggar and ends as a hero of service, improves the fact that a selfless and righteous person can enlighten mind, learn reasons, make judgments, and cultivate morality. The Confucianism’s historical view values “righteousness over wealth”. In other words, it teaches people to not to overvalue things that do not belong to themselves. The true “virtuous persons” “|who can love, or who can hate, others” (Analects, Book 4: 3) are derived from cultivation of moral sentiment and morally well-attuned soul. Therefore, the moral quality, or the good and bad of a person, is closely related to how a person considers and values his/her own benefit and the benefit of society (benefit of others).

The Confucian highest and excellent moral education sheds lights on the current education. It make us ponder: how to help the educated correctly deal with the relationship between the individual self and the self with a capital ‘S’? How to cultivate moral reasoning such as

developing a great aspiration, a generous heart, and a strong sense of community? How to help the current education step out from empty moral lecturing, and extricate it from value singularity of knowledge; then begin to locate a valid and sound point of departure to explore the meaning of why education exists, and to place the educated in a moral climate as if warm spring breeze blowing them around. The goal of education is to essentially serve purposes of life and to explicate definition of moral character. They are the necessary issues and task the current education raise and demand. Practices show, the highest and excellent moral character is unlikely to happen in knowledge-centred enquiry. The current education has to set its own task and responsibility as explaining moral purpose of education and the values of moral life. In this light, the educated will be guided to arrive at the highest excellence of moral realm.

The Perfect and Humane Aesthetic Education: The aesthetic education proposed by the Confucian education has cultivated numerous definitions of indomitable “man”. Mencius holds:

“To dwell in the wide house of the world, to stand in the correct seat of the world, and to walk in the great path of the world; when he obtains his desire for office, to practise his principles for the good of the people; and when that desire is disappointed, to practise them alone; to be above the power of riches and honours to make dissipated, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend – these characteristics constitute the great man” (Mencius, Teng Wen Gong II: 7).”

What does the passage’s powerful determination come from? It comes from the righteous and noble spirit the perfect human nature and character holds!

The Confucian education demonstrates its spirit of searching for the ultimate life meaning as this: “if a man in the morning hear the right way, he may die in the evening without regret” (Analects, Book 4: 8). It also establishes its value viewpoint as follows: “the superior man is anxious lest he should not get truth; he is not anxious lest poverty should come upon him” (Book 15: 32). As far as its educational ideal is concerned, Confucianism believes that “learning without satiety; and instructing others without being wearied” (Book 7: 2). The spirit, value and aim of the Confucian education reflect a perfect state of human nature, by which human education can possibly imagine and idealize.

The perfect and humane aesthetic education gives people a sense of hope, satisfaction and admiration for morality; and draws out heart-feelings of worship, reverence and appreciation toward life and career. The discourse of perfect and humane aesthetic education requires emotional irrigation of the perfect human nature. It is only through this way, people will appeal for the perfect and humane aesthetic education, and educational discourse will possess and generate direct and vibrated power.

The Confucian educational ideal of using oneself to establish a school of thought is neither a mere moral claim, nor a dispassionate scientific research result. Rather, it is the natural expression of perfect human nature. The Confucian education's artistic perception is depicted as follows: "It is by the Odes that the mind is aroused. It is by the rules of propriety that the character is established. It is from music that the finish is received" (Book 8: 8). In other words, learning poetry and music, and practicing etiquette equip a person with eloquent language, graceful behaviour and kinder heart – a harmonious realm among nature, society and mind. The idea of "a natural ease is to be prized" (Book 1: 12) that is proposed by the Confucian education reflects exactly the aesthetic realm a person's heart and mind enabling to reach. These perfect and humane educational ideals motivate people to pursue noble character, refined interests, and graceful appearance; and to hope for the aesthetic and imaginative realm of truth, highest excellence, and admirable beauty.

The Great Learning suggests "to stir up the new people". It also claims that "if you can one day renovate yourself, do so from day to day. Yea, let there be daily renovation". Nature's endless cycle of life inspires us: everything sustains its life renewal during continuous process of generating, and reveals its everlasting power of life in an infinitely unceasing state of moving. It is only when humankind possessing a perfect heart at all time, we will be able to realize the meaning of selflessness, sacrifice and love. We will be able to act as a moral agent and take initiative to learn from the external environment. We will be able to return to ourselves' perfect human nature during practice, and to obtain the sublimation. The moral spirit and high character of approaching good and perfection asks people, while teaching morality and learning knowledge, has to be on the bases of aesthetic cognition, aesthetic affection and aesthetic conduct.

Practices show, the perfect and humane aesthetic

education, in particular, the cultivation of poetic way of thinking, can develop a person's disposition and capability to create beauty and appreciate beauty. At the same time, it contributes to the improvement of knowledge grasp and skill acquisition. Most importantly, aesthetic education motivates people to willingly conform to socially approved principles and set their minds free from self-interested temptation.

The inclination of self-interest existed in the current education has led education to become a straightforward technical application of general rules or prescriptions, and partial learning of moral reasoning against situated reflection and deliberation. As a result, educated become dry and single-minded knowledge entity, rather than lively and morally passionate human being. Moreover, the truth of life such as "Be concerned about the affairs of state before others, and enjoy comfort after others"; and "Heaven, in its motion, gives the idea of strength. The superior man, in accordance with this, nerves himself to ceaseless activity" only becomes the lip service of the educated, and has no practical benefit for either oneself or for others.

Confucius holds, "Music is an echo of the harmony between heaven and earth" (The Classic of Rites). Harmony prevents us from separating from each other, and allows us to perfectly connect with nature, society, and other humans. It allows the heart to feel the pleasure of the beauty, and transform our world to a magnificent palace hall where "life meets, and heart invites". This is indeed the true meaning of perfect and humane aesthetic education.

CONCLUSIONS

Scholars of educational studies have examined issues related to educational system (Benavot & Kamens, 2007). They propose pragmatic methods as solutions to social and educational problems (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2013). This discussion suggests the following hypotheses: the perfect and unified education consists of intellectual education, moral education and aesthetic education. Three education is a grand education for the perfect development of human heart-mind-body. It is a grand education to search for the harmony and unity among truth, good and beauty. It is a grand education to cultivate the whole development of human character. She comes from China's ancient philosophers' respect for and understanding about life. She will forever guides the educated to search for a whole new life stance and realm.

In today's world, humankind's material needs have been greatly met as the result of impressive development and progress of social civilization and science and technology. Nevertheless, material abundance has caused the great loss of human control such as massive social consumption and unlimited taking. A further hypothesis: human selfishness and greed has been spread like flood. It is worth noting that the current education has ignored the education and cultivation of truth, morality and affection; as well as the genuine moral conduct of care for the soul of the educated (Davies, Gregory & Riley, 1999). Without the perfect way to illuminate and educate humankind, education will not be considered as genuine education.

An alternative way of dealing with the current educational system is three education. It can be hypothesized that three education is the inevitable road to human educational development. She will indeed empower the holistic development of human

intelligence, morality and aestheticity. She will indeed create our global home a perfect, peaceful and pleasant future!

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