

COMMENT ON “EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN CONFUCIANISM”

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COMMENT ON “EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IN CONFUCIANISM”

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Confucian educational thought is a part of Confucian one. If you want to understand the origin of Confucian educational thought, you must first explore the roots of Confucian thought.

Professor Chen Lai once pointed out that Confucius founded the Confucian School in the land of Qilu, but one of the important reasons why Confucianism could happen and occupy the mainstream or dominant position of Chinese culture, after the Han Dynasty, was because Confucianism itself was not produced in isolation on the land of Qilu. It itself should be said to be the product of the development of Chinese civilization after three dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou) (Chen, 2019, p. 120). Confucianism is a continuation of the tradition of three generations of culture, and it can even be said that Confucianism is a conscious continuation of the mainstream tradition of three generations of culture.

In the three generations period, Zhou is the most important. “Virtue” is the theme word of Zhou era and is the key to understanding the people’s ideology of Zhou era. Xu Shen’s *Shuo Wen Jie Zi·Xin Bu* explains: “Virtue can be obtained from others externally and from oneself internally.” (Xu, 2020, p. 398). From this, we can know that “virtue”, at that time, actually contains two meanings: one is to improve oneself; the second is for others. It can be called a favor, get along well with others and achieve harmony among people by cultivating oneself.

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The cultural development of the Zhou Dynasty was closely related to the political development, and also to the cultivation of personal morality. The people's social life in Zhou Dynasty is the key to understanding the cultural background of Confucianism. The early Confucianism was born in such a background of The Times. It inherited and developed the ideology and culture of the Zhou Dynasty, and developed a theoretical system with its own characteristics according to the changes and needs of The Times. As an important part of Confucianism, the formation and development of Confucian education cannot be separated from the influence of Zhou Dynasty's cultural background, so it is always full of strong "moral education" color.

Confucius once said to his disciple Zixia, "You should be a gentleman, not a villain." This is Confucius' most concise expression on the purpose of education, that is, education to cultivate people like "gentlemen". The basic conditions for becoming a gentleman include two aspects: first, to treat oneself and cultivate one's self through sincerity and respect; second, to treat others, one must be able to "stabilize others" and even "stabilize the common people." *The Doctrine of the Mean* explains: "If you know this, you know how to cultivate virtue; if you know how to cultivate virtue, you know how to govern others; If you know how to govern others, you will know how to govern the world and the country". (Li; Zhang, 2010, p. 54). Therefore, how should a gentleman cultivate himself? Confucius believed that a gentleman should aspire to the Tao, adhere to the virtue, rely on benevolence and rest in the six arts of etiquette: music, archery, imperial control, calligraphy and mathematics. Through self-cultivation, the gentleman will reach a certain realm, that is, "the benevolent will not worry, the wise will not be confused, and the brave will not be afraid." It can be seen that "Tao", "virtue", "benevolence", "wisdom" and "courage" are Confucius' all the requirements for "gentlemen". Among these specific specifications, Confucius valued benevolence above all, hoping to cultivate virtuous gentlemen to rule the country and level the world.

In a narrow sense, Mencius' educational purpose is the same as Confucius' one, which is to cultivate gentlemen who can govern the country and bring peace to the world. However, Mencius had his own unique insights on how to cultivate virtuous gentlemen. Mencius believed that all innate human nature is kind, not just the saints who are born with knowledge. He pointed out that the four psychological tendencies of compassion, such as shame, respect, right and wrong can be the starting point or possibility of benevolence, justice, propriety and wisdom. The role of education is to guide people to "expand" and "preserve" their inner goodness so that they have the four moral qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. As for the way for a virtuous gentleman to govern a country and bring peace to the world, Mencius also inherited Confucius's thoughts on virtuous governance. Mencius proposed that, if the ruler could implement benevolent governance, there would be no need to go out to conquer the country, and the people would travel thousands of miles to this country to be his subjects. Different from Confucius, Mencius believes that a gentleman's

governance requires hard work and it is impossible to bring order and peace to a place or country without effort. That is to say, even if a gentleman knows how to rule the country and smooth the world, he must still have the technology to govern the country. In the middle and later periods of the Warring States period, all countries generally established an authoritarian system of centralized monarchy. To make a difference, scholars must serve in the government and have real political ability. Mencius’ hardworking theory can be said to be a revision of Confucius’ educational purpose view of “self-discipline and stabilizing others”.

During the Han and Tang Dynasties, Confucian moral education began to show a tendency of seeking inward transformation. For example, Liu Zongyuan’s moral education advocated seeking inward transformation. His “way to saints” must first solve the problem of moral ideals. Secondly, he believed that the “strong energy”, given to people by heaven and earth, is “zhi”, which is moral will; the “pure energy”, given by heaven and earth to people, is “ming”, which is moral reason. Only by observing things clearly, working tirelessly and pursuing them diligently, we can continuously improve our moral standards. Only in this way, ideal qualities can be cultivated and “saints” can be achieved.

The moral education of Neo-Confucianism, in the Song and Ming dynasties, deepened the orientation of internal pursuit. Confucianism believes that when teaching moral consciousness, it is necessary to express: What is sought from within? This, in the Cheng Zhu, there is “preserving the laws of nature and eliminating human desires.” *Second Journey Suicide Note*, in the explanation of the “sixteen character mind method”, said: “People’s hearts are driven by selfish desires, so they are in danger. The Tao is based on the principles of nature, so it is subtle. If selfish desires are eliminated, then the principles of heaven will be clear”. (Zhang, 2017, p. 78). This presents the two concepts as distinct opposites. Therefore, neo-Confucianists put forward that the purpose of education is to cultivate sages who are “pure in nature”, and the way to cultivate them is “understanding human relations”. Zhu Xi said, “The ancient holy king set up schools to teach the people of the world [...] Must all be able to remove the bias of its temperament, the cover of material desire, to restore its nature, and to understand human relations well”. (Chen, 2020, p. 91). That is to say, if people want to overcome the “bias of temperament”, the “cover of material desire”, in order to restore their own good nature, they must “understand human relations well.” Therefore, he emphasized that, between father and son, there should be affection; between sovereign and minister, righteousness; between husband and wife, attention to their separate roles; between old and young, a proper order; and between friends, honor and trust.

Starting from the idea that the purpose of education is “understanding human relations”, Zhu Xi severely attacked the school education, which was all aimed at imperial examinations at that time. He believed that the school education, at that time, caused “[...] scholars to seek books, no more than memorizing, exegesis, and literary words, in order to

catch fame and do money” (Chen, 2020, p. 142). Furthermore, induced students to “wilfully go to justice” to fight for fame and profit, and seriously ignored students’ ethical and moral education, which was completely contrary to the original intention of “the study of the former king is based on the understanding of human relations”. Therefore, in order to change the situation of customs are gradually obscured and talents are declining, Zhu Xi re-stated and emphasized the thought of understanding human relations, which had certain positive significance at that time. This is our comment about Xu and Chen (2024).

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