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#### **CONFUCIAN TRADITION AND MODERN TEACHER EDUCATION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

**KEYWORDS:** Confucian tradition; educational traditions; educational globalization; pedagogical education; diversified values; critical thinking.

**ABSTRACT.** Teacher education is not only an integral part of the national educational system, but also assumes a special mission for its rest indispensable portions. Chinese education being rooted deeply in its unique cultural tradition, its principles, objectives, contents, methodologies have all been impacted to a great extent by its Confucian tradition. To date, China's teacher education is confronted with some special issues and challenges caused by many big changes taking place in present age. Such issues and challenges include: educational globalization and cultural identification; diversified value and ideal rebuilding; democracy in education and the teacher-student relationship; developing students' critical thinking and fostering students' initiative spirit and practical competences.

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#### **КОНФУЦИАНСКАЯ ТРАДИЦИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННОЕ ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ: ЗАДАЧИ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ**

**КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА:** конфуцианство; педагогические традиции; образовательная глобализация; педагогическое образование; диверсифицированные ценности; критическое мышление.

**АННОТАЦИЯ.** Педагогическое образование – это не только неотъемлемая часть государственной образовательной системы, но и область, имеющая особую миссию. Китайское образование во многом опирается на многовековую национальную традицию; принципы образования, цель, содержание и методология основаны на конфуцианской традиции. На сегодняшний день педагогическое образование в Китае сталкивается со сложными задачами и проблемами, возникшими в результате серьезных изменений в обществе. Среди таких задач и проблем можно выделить: глобализацию в области образования и культурную идентификацию; разные ценности и перестройка идеала; демократичные отношения между преподавателем и студентами; развитие критического мышления студентов, самостоятельности и профессиональных компетенций.

**T**raditional Chinese culture takes Confucianism as the core of its ethical value system which provides not only the basic criteria for the country's governance, but also norms for individuals to deal with the relationship between individual family and the state, as well as ethics for reference while dealing with relationships between family members and general interpersonal relationship. Due to Emperor Hanwu's banning all other schools of thoughts while giving Confucianism a dominant position in ideology and Emperor Suiyang's policy of electing talented intellectuals through the imperial examination, Confucianism is firmly rooted into the official ideology and lasts for more than two thousand years. In the long river of history, its ethical values, classic works, Confucian ethics are highly integrated with Chinese educational goals, contents, and educational action modes, spreading Confucianism to intellectuals and the general pub-

lic, on the other, creating a unique temperament in traditional education.

China's modern teacher education began in 1904 when the late Qing government stipulated in "The Imperial Constitution of Schools" that "normal schools" be established although the earliest "Nanyang Public Normal School" was already set up in 1897. Prior to this period, a great majority of teachers were intellectuals who mastered Confucian classics, although they were not trained by professional normal schools. In the state-run schools, the court appointed teachers. While in private schools students of Confucianism worked as teachers. So teachers were mostly intellectuals of Confucianism who have commanded the knowledge of Confucianism and are deeply influenced by Confucian values. It is fair to say that Confucian traditions have defined the prescriptive roles of teachers and this understanding of teacher roles continued until the institutionalized teacher education started.

Hence, Confucianism and teacher education are naturally connected. To be specific, the classic works in the Confucian tradition are essential contents in teacher education, and Confucianism also has a great impact on some values and practices in teacher education. At a deep level, values in education, teacher-student relationship, teaching methods, etc. continue to be engraved with the imprint of Confucianism. However, in the present age, with the expansion of technology and the advent of the information society, the field of education has undergone profound changes. Accordingly, teacher education against the background of Confucianism in the contemporary society is now confronted with some special issues and challenges.

This paper aims to address the following four aspects of issues and challenges: First, globalization of education and the cultural identity in teacher education; Second, the reconstruction of ideals in teacher education in an age of diversified values; Third, the construction of democratic education and the relationship between teachers and students; Finally, the development of critical thinking and creativity.

### **I. Globalization of Education & the Cultural Identity in Teacher Education**

Confucianism, which has shaped the cultural identity of China, provides a set of shared core value system and has molded the national culture and social psychology. The understanding concerning the position, roles, functions, accomplishments of teachers, teacher-student relationships and education practices constitutes a cultural setting of contemporary teacher education despite the fact that the profession of teachers can date back to ancient times and teacher education did not start until modern times between 1840 and 1919. In other words, the Confucian tradition not only shapes the role identity of teachers, but also affects the action modes, which are shared and self-evident, in the educational practice field. Such shared modes of action are not only embodied in primary and secondary education, but also in teacher education institutions, which aim to train teachers.

Education is a most essential issue of concern in the complicated and systematic process of globalization, when exchange and cooperation as well as competition in education between different countries have been universal due to the globalization in economy, modern transportation and communication technology as well as the spread of technological civilization from developed countries. On the one hand, the specific philosophy, institutions, educational practices formed in the different cultural settings manifest their unique character-

istics in the evolution of teacher education and their charm to other countries for more exchanges. On the other hand, the development of international education market and the competitive situation have stimulated the process of globalization of education, which, as a result, has promoted the reform of teacher education. Although the process of globalization of education is judged differently, today, education globalization has become a matter of fact. Compared with the past, an "international vision" has become a general consensus in teacher education institutions, with advisable principles, experiences and practices absorbed and adopted in training teachers.

When the vision of education becomes more expansive, for majors of teacher education, the tension and even conflicts resulting from differing education philosophies, institutions and practices are bound to bring about conflicting values that require reconstructing. This, however, means a new opportunity to revise and amend the "existing" knowledge and conception of one's own culture. It also calls for a careful examination of and thinking about the foreign educational philosophies, institutions and practices, based on which adjustment, supplementation, optimization and reconstruction should be conducted accordingly. More often than not, this process turns out to be full of difficulties and hardships. In essence, it is an important process of reconstruction for educational and cultural identity, which swings between two ends: being attracted entirely by the exotic culture, consciously and unconsciously one starts to worship the foreign culture, referring to foreign education as criteria whenever it is necessary; or the foreign teacher education culture might be denied, deemed as something country-specific or something that only suits developed countries rather than less developed ones such as China. Thus, on the one hand,

the infiltration of Confucianism in teacher education makes the education philosophy so deep-rooted that it becomes collective unconsciousness. While on the other hand, the impact derived from the process of globalization is forcing young people to reflect on and enquire in detail the rationality of those educational ideas, which have contributed to conflicts or even anxiety in the pursuit of cultural identity in education

Of course, it is a continual process where the "given" traditional educational culture poses as the "keynote" or as the "undertone" against which the culture is re-built on reasonable assimilation of foreign culture, which is "the other" or a "stranger" that can easily be seen. The process of education and cultural identity is to set off from the "given" position, to "watch" and understand the

"stranger", and then return to their "given" position in cycle. In teacher education, we must, first and foremost, strengthen the traditional education of Confucianism, inheriting and enriching its quintessence. In particular, however, we should critically reflect on its principles, ideas, which normally are aroused by exotic educational culture.

Therefore, in the era of globalization, contemporary teacher education has two vital missions. One is to critically inherit the traditional culture centering on Confucianism. Taking into account the role of teacher education in the national education system, especially for other educational branches in addition to the importance of the teacher in the whole education system, "critical inheritance" is particularly important and pressing. To this end, the primary task is to carry out education of Confucian tradition and even a wider range of outstanding cultural traditions, shape the modern teacher education "background" with excellent traditional culture to lay a solid foundation for the extensive absorption of exotic education and culture. The other is to actively widen the global perspective of normal students so that they can stand on the height of humanity to think and approach education, implanting in the cultural background their analysis and thinking to the degree of a truly "sympathetic understanding". To put another way, it is necessary to critically inherit the excellent educational tradition, based on the reality of China's education, but also have the world especially developed countries in view to absorb their prime elements in their education for an integrated educational understanding, and to reconstruct educational and cultural identity with a open-minded and tolerant attitude. Therefore, contemporary normal school students should be guided to have the following questions in mind: What are China's deep-seated problems in education? What kind of philosophy, institutions and practices does Chinese education require? Why our ideals for educational value are difficult to be put in practice? What can we learn from the experiences and lessons of educational development in western developed countries? In a word, we should not be constrained to the narrow nationalism, nor indulge ourselves in the Western superiority theory, but rather establish educational and cultural identity based on the tradition of Confucianism.

## **II. Diversification of Values & Remodeling of Educational Ideals**

Confucian tradition clearly defines universal ethical values such as proper relationship between individuals, family and the state, personal ambitions in terms of ethics, which should be completely consistent with the tradi-

tional social structure. In the traditional Chinese society, everyone being fixed in their corresponding "position", the certainty of a person's "status" and "order" leads to the certainty of ethical norms, which effectively governs human life in different "positions" and thus governs the order of social life. Everyone acquires and follow this set of ethical norms in their daily life. Such ethical codes, which regulate individual behavior and mold cultural identity, are monistic in terms of values because the closed social structure lacks mobility. The core value of education is to inherit ethical culture dominated by Confucianism, which advocates virtues containing the essence of Chinese education culture. Confucian education concerns itself with the formation of moral characters, which can be best illustrated by the rank of the three majors responsibilities, to wit, "teaching morality, knowledge and clearing up puzzles", among which teaching morality is put in the first place.

Whereas in the open, mobile, ever-changing modern society, the belief of "hierarchy and order" in Confucian tradition has been abandoned due to the wide-held notion of equality typical of modern society. Some views of value incompatible with modern society have declined, replaced by the modern, diverse values of an open society. With increased openness and mobility, coupled with the rapid development of technological civilization, our living and communication space has seen an unprecedented expansion, because of which mobility has featured the society. Besides, the environment one lives in, the education one has received, the social class one falls into, the occupation one takes, race, religion, etc. all contribute to the values individuals hold. Consequently, value-orientation often differs widely between individuals, hierarchies, occupational groups, races and religions whose understanding of life and construction of goals are inevitably characterized with individualized traits. In a pluralistic society, respect for the choice of others' basic values, an active interaction with others, a tolerant mentality is fundamental requirements to all humanity.

Therefore, the changes in the connotation and methodology in the life and social practice of normal school students must be drawn to attention in modern teacher education so that the choice of value could be respected and understood and their autonomy would be duly fostered. This inherently requires that teacher education rebuild their own ideals: for one thing, many positive and progressive values in Confucian tradition should be inherited and developed. Typical examples include ideals of the university, concerns with national and world affairs, and the combination of self-cultivation and the governance of the states.

For another, a public communication platform for young students should be built in teacher education, and the public reason and sense in young students should be fully developed based on the concept of freedom and democracy absorbed from modern society. To this end, the contemporary teacher education is supposed to rebuild the public life on campus, and abandon the prevailing trend of treating knowledge as private tools, scholarly honor or official ranks as the orientation. Instead, students should be guided to actively participate in the public affairs, whereby they would learn to properly handle different views, to tolerate and respect diverse ideals, and to unify the values of one's own and the public.

It is particularly worth mentioning that, due to excessively intense competition and population pressure, as well as the impact of "honor and rank orientation" in traditional society, the minds of young students are steered to the "external" and "visible" level—pupils and even kindergarten kids are living in an over-competitive system in which the pursuit of "success" overrides that of "happiness". The "vision" of the student's soul is guided to pursue "external goodness", which is competitive, antagonistic and possessive, rather than "inner goodness", which is cooperative, non-confrontational, contributive. Under "external goodness", the loss of one person can often be attributed to the gain of another. While under "inner goodness", cooperation only leads to the achievement of excellence in human nature. With regard to teacher education, great importance should be attached to the nurture and development of personality and human excellence. To cultivate virtues in normal school students is the fundamental way to obtain the internal interest of education, which in most cases is "blurred" by the "honor and rank" mentality and the reality of education bombarded with various external interests, ruining the beneficial conditions that contribute to the realization of "inner goodness" in education and moral excellence in teachers.

The fundamental connotation of reconstructing the ideals of teacher education lies in the quest for inner goodness in teacher education, which also comprises of ideals of personality and public ideals prescribed in Confucianism. However, in contemporary times when professionalism and instrumentalism prevail, a severe challenge originates from the fact that teacher education focuses more on the professional teaching development and teachers' colleges have now turned into places of training teachers' professional competence. One critical prerequisite for the happiness of teachers and farewell of the public education is guiding teachers to pursue the "inner goodness" in education to achieve "the shift of soul" and moral

excellence. In a word, in teacher education, normal school students are expected to assume the mission of "morality education" and continually give new connotations to it that are in line with the present age.

### III. Democratic Education and Teacher-Student Relationship

What Confucianism says about teacher-student relationships constitutes an important part of the whole human relationship. It clearly defines the relative status and ethical requirements between students and teachers. Meanwhile teachers are highly demanded for their morality and scholarship. For example, Xunzi, an ancient Chinese philosopher, proposes that teachers should be highly respectable in morality and teachers rank the fifth following the Heaven, Earth, Emperor, and parents. He also sees morality as an essential condition to be a teacher. Teacher authority is emphasized in "师严而后道尊", which means that only when teachers are strictly demanded can morality be honored. This basically makes up the "keynote" of teachers in Confucianism. What Confucianism says about the order and status ranking from Heaven, Earth, emperor, parents and teachers show its prescription of human relationship. "师道尊严", which refers to the absolute authority of teachers, is one element in the general structure of human relationship that demonstrates the social structure in the ethnics field. "闻道有先后", which implies that age is no indicator of the level of learning, requires that teachers be equipped with knowledge earlier than students, which is a prerequisite for a teacher. In addition to that, teachers should command a certain authority, although an absolute understanding of the concept is in no way right. However, such authority could be ascribed to the structure of human relationship or the culture per se. In fact, intellectuals in the Confucian vein have already had the awareness of the fact that "弟子不必不如师, 师不必贤于弟子" by a famous ancient Chinese scholar Han Yu, which means that disciples don't have to be less knowledgeable than teachers, while teachers don't have to be wiser than their disciples.

Education democratization is chiefly manifested in teacher-student relationship in modern society, where the concept of democracy and equality has been shared values by the general public. On the one hand, with the advent of information age, the changes that have taken place to concepts concerning education and learning and the teach-student relationship, have, to some extent, gained "material foundation" due to the asymmetry between the knowledge possessed by teachers and students. On the other hand, there is a clear consensus on the equality between teachers and students in moral personality. Teachers of autocratic

style and their educational methodologies are universally questioned and criticized in terms of moral legitimacy. These have prompted people to reflect on the teacher-student relationship and the basic meaning of democracy and equality in education. First of all, it is impossible to ignore the fact that teachers as the institutional authority should continue maintain the authority, which is necessary in terms of teaching conditions. Secondly, it is also more than apparent that institutional authority, which is ascribed by institution, alone does not suffice to fulfill the objectives of education. Self-excited personal authority, generated in students from the interaction between teachers and students and the conviction, volunteered by students out of the teachers' accomplishment in academic studies, is also required. In an educational democratic society, teachers should take efforts to acquire such personal authority which internally entails the attitude of respect, trust and equality towards students. Thus it is fair to say personal authority does not go against the intrinsic requirement of democratic education.

Democratic education is also embodied in the students' right to equal treatment and their right to treatment as an equal. By equal treatment, students are meant to be entitled with equal rights and access to resources to participate in public affairs concerning classes in school and to be involved in issues of importance relating to student development. What matters the most is the right for students to take part as equals, which is inherently required by their need for respect and autonomy. Students grow up and flourish through participation in various affairs. While autocratic education denies students of their rights to play a role, making them obey the established framework, being arranged and set up. By the treatment as an equal, students can enjoy equal concern from teachers. Further more, teachers should show their care for students as an equal individual.

Democracy in teacher education can lay a solid foundation for the democratization of education, society and even politics, sowing seeds of democracy in the soul of students so much as to every corner of society. Therefore, in the institutions of teacher education, democracy should first become the life style of teachers and students and the spirit of democracy should be infiltrated into the daily operation of schools and every communication between teachers and students. Public spirit could be fostered in public life in which students' opinions and ideas could be attentively listened to with respect and care so that decisions could be made through negotiations with students. Widen the pathways and channels for students to participate in the management of schools and classes, making students of normal schools to take the charge through self-regulation and

self-discipline. Only in this way can the democracy spirit be integrated into students' minds as a fundamental quality. Only then can the teacher education institutions shift into a vibrant education community

In the process of teacher education democratization, the excellent ideological resources in the Confucianism could be fully exploited and utilized in a comprehensive and dialectical fashion. What should be rejected is the hierarchy of teacher-student status, unconditionally viewing teachers' personality and esteem as superior to those of students so much as to subject students to what teachers say and think, which is undoubtedly wrong. Nevertheless, the requirement for teachers' command of knowledge and morality is rational and acceptable in contemporary times. Besides, there is something in the statements on teacher authority, as one indispensable condition for education, in Confucianism, without which it would be hard for education to carry on. In the progress, we must be alert with a misleading trend, i.e. to oppose reasonable education request in the name of "democracy" as the teacher authority endowed by institutions are prescribed by the inherent trait in the teacher-student roles and the personal authority is a reward for an individual teacher's noble morality and brilliant learning.

It can be seen that the democratization of teacher education takes up a very special position. It is not only an integral part of the education democratization, but also works as a foundation in the process of democratization of education. By combining the thoughts concerning teacher authority as defined in Confucianism, modern teacher-student relationship can be appropriately oriented. Meanwhile, only by training teachers with democratic literacy and spirit can we effectively disseminate proper democratic ideology, democracy and democratic spirit. Thereby the teacher authority would be the one wanted in modern teacher education.

#### **IV. Cultivating Critical thinking & Innovative Spirit**

Confucian tradition primary concerns itself with knowledge of humanity ranging from wisdom of the governance of states and societies to individual ethical accomplishment, written in seminal classic works of Confucian scholars. The theoretical works by Confucius, the learned scholar who first started Confucianism, covers a wide range of topics: politics, ethnics, poems, history, music and etiquette, etc., which were all compiled in 四书, the four books which refers to the four books, that is, The Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects of Confucius and Mencius, and 五经, five classics, which refers to the five classics including Poetry, History, Changes,

Rituals and Spring and Autumn, which have been explained and interpreted by later scholars of Confucian tradition. Regarded as official doctrines, especially when combined with the Imperial Examination System, Confucianism serves as a political policy for ancient Chinese civil officials, which, in turn, strengthened its leading status and had substantially influenced the inheritance and development of Confucianism in later generations. One the one hand, Confucianism has got effectively propagated, substantially exerting its influence on virtually all intellectuals and other people by defining fundamental moral regulations. On the other hand, the imperial examination also largely restricts the innovation and development of Confucianism. Negatively influenced by the civil official system and the imperial examination system, Confucianism education is more limited to the annotation of Confucian classics, emphasizing the rote memorization of knowledge concerning humanity and classic works, valuing the ability to write poems and comment on military and political strategies. However, pontificating about empty theories has overlooked the necessity to train students' critical thinking and pragmatic ability. In fact, education in Confucian tradition which worships nothing but classic works are doomed to fail in terms of the development of critical thinking because in feudal society, the government intrinsically ask for the obedience to the adherence to and passing on of traditional values, while rebellion against orthodoxy is never tolerated.

Having lasted for more than two thousand years in Chinese history, Confucianism as well as its corresponding education system, coupled with the current fierce social competition, has exerted a great influence on the education system in which teacher education is an integral part. While Confucianism itself advocates "格物致知"- the study of nature to acquire knowledge, "诚意正心"- the belief that a sincere attitude leads to a righteous heart and thought, "修齐治平"-the faith in the importance of the self moral cultivation, a harmonious family relationship to the administration and governance of a country, thereby the realization of a peaceful world, it also misleads individuals to the idea that education is a means to a better destiny which entails fame, honor, profit and social status. In fact, the orthodox position of Confucianism, which has been stressed by civil official politics and the imperial examination policy, calls for a stabilized value framework to strengthen the closed social structure, upon which Confucianism could continue to stay. Such value framework allows for no doubt and deny. In other words, in Confucianism and Confucian education, variation and innovation is something to be criticized and negated.

Up until now, it is more than obvious that the development of critical thinking and innovative spirit would never fall into the research scope of Confucianism and its education. This is because critical thinking cannot go without reasoning. By critical thinking, any doctrine should go through verification against rationality and facts before it is accepted and any belief, opinion should stand doubts, negative proofs, and counter-examples to demonstrate its rationality. Only in this way can a specific viewpoint or thought be enriched and further developed. With logical induction or deduction, knowledge can be reliable and acceptable. In essence, critical thinking symbolizes enlightenment of reason and sense. However, Confucianism put much more emphasis on inheritance and annotation of classics-an "orthodox" explanation of the classic works, while the tenet itself should never be put under any skepticism. Due to the significance of classics of Confucian tradition and relevant interpretative works, teachers' absolute authority gained its social and political foundation, which is to say decisively that it is impossible for Confucianism and education in its vein to encourage doubts and criticism in students.

The same is also true with the cultivation of innovative ability, which is always accompanied by critical thinking. In contrast with what Confucian education which sticks to conventions, education that stresses innovation seeks changes, the processing, association and creation of knowledge based on problem solving. As an innate talent of human beings, creation is always faced with barriers posed by relating institutions and other elements. However, innovation and inheritance are not two opposing ends. But rather, innovation takes place on the basis of inheritance. In essence, to innovate is to process and assemble the existing knowledge and results and then create new ideas, new opinions and new knowledge by thinking critically in problem solving. Hence, to develop students' innovative awareness and competence, it is essential to create valuable settings with problems, and then instruct students to think critically in a democratic and free atmosphere.

The influence of Confucian tradition on teacher education is most profound and far-reaching, providing educational and cultural identity and to a certain extent, shaping our thinking pattern. For a long time in Chinese history, questioning and refuting the teacher's points of view, deviating from the Confucian classic "doctrine" are regarded as disobedience, the tolerance of which is viewed as destruction on the ethics system the traditional hierarchical society relies on. In contemporary society, democracy, freedom have become universal values that the general public are strive for and

defend anxiously, but as a way of thinking, great importance is still attached to “orthodox” and “standard” concepts as well as the continual existence of certainty, which is well illustrated by the central status of textbooks, teacher authority and standardized testing, etc.

This is the issue that we must face squarely in an age when democratization is going on in the field of education. Luckily reflections, criticism and reconstruction have already been launched on the philosophies in teacher education, but challenges are here to stay when in practice teacher education are still stuck in many restraints. Again, there is no escape. Therefore, on the one hand, in teacher educa-

tion, normal school students should learn about the fine cultural tradition centering on Confucianism so as to form a deep-rooted educational and cultural identity. On the other hand, an open and tolerant attitude should be encouraged to examine the values entailed in traditional culture with a critical eye. It is better for teacher education to take the practical needs in social life into consideration, committing itself to the reform and innovation of the educational practice, getting rid of the conventional, outdated teaching and evaluation. Dialogue teaching should be advocated to inspire, guide and train students to acquire abilities to think critically and innovate.

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