Is Confucianism Appropriate as a Core Curriculum in the Liberal Arts Education System of China?

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Abstract. It has become the conscious behavior in more and more Chinese universities to carry out the liberal arts education, and has achieved results in some colleges and universities. But there are still some problems, such as how to set up the curriculum system well and so on, awaiting us to solve. We believe that Confucianism should be taken as one core curriculum in the liberal education curriculum system. Confucianism belongs to the treasure house of world thought, and the educational principle advocated by it is highly consistent with the core concept of liberal education. As one core curriculum in the liberal education curriculum system, Confucianism has good practical significance for contemporary college student education. Our practice shows, in the course of teaching not only should we systematically teach the student the knowledge so as to enhance their sense of identity to Chinese traditional culture, but also let them achieve self-discipline combined with their own personalities, while feeling the charm of the self-cultivation tradition. In this way, their ideology, morality and academic performance are sure to be taken in a gratifying situation.

Introduction

At present, it has become the conscious behavior of many Chinese universities to carry out the liberal arts education, and even been regarded as an important part of the connotation construction of Emerging Engineering Education [1]. Trace its root; it is partially for that, some universities in our country try to solve through liberal education the problems caused by utilitarianism and examination-oriented education. On the other hand, Chinese higher education has changed from the elite education to the popularized education and will step into the universal stage, while China's economic development has entered a new normal stage from high-speed growth to steady growth. This makes our higher education have to pay more attention to its social and cultural functions while emphasizing economic function [2]. In other words, we need make a new orientation to the training of qualified personnel, change the old training mode mainly based on professional education, and set up a new mode of personnel training based on general education and lifelong learning, which combines professional education with general education.

So far, the implementation of liberal arts education has achieved fruitful results in some Chinese universities, for example, Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University and other schools, and has made breakthroughs in training the all-round development of the educated. However, there are still some problems waiting to be solved, such as the setting up of the curriculum system and so on. The drawbacks of the current liberal arts education curriculum system of China are mainly manifested as: The choice of courses, including curriculum kind, is messy, cannot form a complete chain of all-round improvement of students' spiritual realm and comprehensive quality, and especially lacks the core curriculum and the top-quality course. This article holds that Confucianism should be taken as the core curriculum in the liberal education system. To make it clear, we arrange this article as: Section 2 demonstrates the necessity of taking Confucianism as the core curriculum in the liberal education system of China, and Section 3 gives some problems that should be paid attention to in the course of practical teaching.
Necessity of Taking Confucianism as one Core Curriculum in the Liberal Education System

In the west, liberal arts education can be traced back to the “liberal education” in ancient Greece. This term has undergone at least three major semantic changes: In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the semantics of the term shifted from 'suitable for the free man' to 'suitable for the gentry'; By the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, this concept meant 'non-professional education', gradually converging with the concept of general education; And since the late nineteenth century, liberal education has become a general education for all citizens. Modern liberal arts education began with the development of modern education, and through the research and practice of some famous schools(such as Harvard University, Yale University, University of Chicago, etc.), it formed the training mode with the characteristics of flexible curriculum system, appropriate learning materials and "student-centered" teaching methods. The important elements of liberal arts education are (1) Erudition: integration of arts and science, interdisciplinary; (2) Decorousness: conducting oneself is the first, schooling is the second; (3) Centering around the students; (4) Encouraging questioning; and (5) Making students' second classroom rich. Of the five elements above, the first two are the objectives, and the latter three are measures [3]. In fact, liberal arts education has long been embodied in Confucian classics in our country. The principle of education in Confucianism is consistent with the essence of liberal education.

In Confucianism, the Analects of Confucius, Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean and Mencius are collectively referred to as the Four Books. The unit "Zi Zhang" in the Analects of Confucius wrote: “erudite and Atsushi, cut near the question thinking, then benevolence is among them”. In modern Vernacular Chinese that means “well-reading and learning widely, and can adhere to their own aspirations, earnestly ask questions, think deeply and realistically, it's there the benevolence lies”. There is no doubt that it highlights the spirit of both extensive learning and questioning and thinking. Here, ‘well-read ’is ahead, then the following is "cut and ask", which encourages questioning. Liberal education emphasizes 'conducting oneself is the first, schooling is the second', this expression can also be seen everywhere in the Confucian classics. For example, the first sentence in The Great Learning is: “The way of the great learning involves manifesting virtue, loving the people, and abiding by the highest good”. That is, the aim of the great learning is to carry forward the moral character of open and aboveboard, study and apply it to life, and make people reach the most perfect realm. Among them, “manifesting virtue” is the first, then “loving the people”, and then “abiding by the highest good”. And the unit “Xue Er" in the Analects of Confucius wrote more explicitly: ‘A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, outside, respectful to his elders, be prudent and truthful, pan-loving public and benevolent, and study whenever you can’. In other words, he who is a brother, a son of man, should be filial towards his parents when at home, obedient to his brothers outside, always with discreet and trustworthy conduct, with universal fraternity and close to the benevolent. After all of the above points are done, if possible, you can learn and study the text of the “Six Arts " It fully stressed that, as the educated, self-cultivation is the first while schooling is the second, but as far as educators are concerned, instructing, dispelling doubt is the second and preaching is the first. In Confucian ideology, the thought of “student-centered” emphasized in liberal arts education is reflected by that the schools should put educating people at the top of all work. And the rich second class emphasized in liberal arts education is actually corresponding to "the unity of knowledge and action" in the Confucianism.

Let Confucianism become the core curriculum in the liberal education curriculum system, it is conducive to the school's cultural self-confidence education. Cultural self-confidence is a full affirmation of a country, a nation or a political party for its own cultural value, and a firm belief in its own cultural vitality. Only when we have a firm faith in our own culture can we acquire the calm to persist, muster up the courage to make progress, and radiate the vigor of innovation and creation. “We should make clear the historical origins, development thread and basic trend of China's fine traditional culture, and make clear the unique creation, values and distinctive features of Chinese culture and enhance cultural self-confidence”, stressed by Chinese president Xi Jinping in February
2014. Here, the culture which makes the Chinese people confident, first of all, includes the excellent Chinese traditional culture. The excellent Chinese tradition is the value concept, ideal personality, mode of thinking, ethical doctrine, aesthetic sentiment etc. that the Chinese nation has formed in its long-term development. President Xi Jinping pointed out that: “The Chinese civilization has lasted for thousands of years and has its unique value system”. This unique value system contains rich cultural connotation and profound value, which is mainly embodied as the core values of the excellent Chinese traditional culture, such as “emphasizing benevolence”, “valuing the people”, “keeping honesty”, “respecting justice”, “advocating harmony” and “seeking harmony” and so on. What coordinate the six aspects of the core value are “imitation of nature”, “harmony between man and nature”, “ruling by morality”, “harmony but not sameness”, “unremitting self-improvement”, “social commitment”, “the whole world as one community”, “supremacy of justice”, “the unity of knowledge and action”, “one should not impose on others what he himself does not desire”, and other important ideas. These ideas reflect the unique wisdom and strength of the Chinese nation, and play a major role in promoting the development of the Chinese nation. Until today, it still has important spiritual values [4]. From here we see that Confucianism, as one of the most important parts of Chinese outstanding traditional culture, systematically mastering the essence of it is a must, if we want our students to strengthen their cultural confidence.

Taking Confucianism as a core curriculum of liberal arts education system and by lecturing the Three-creeds and Eight–entries, it can offer students a ladder of life pursuit with a practical color, and is good for casting students' healthy personality psychology, exerts an imperceptible influence on student's thinking. The so-called Three-creeds refers to manifesting virtue, loving the people, and abiding by the highest good, and the so-called Eight-entries refers to things-investigating, knowledge-getting, sincerity-accumulating, mind-uprighting, self-cultivating, family-regulating; state-ordering, and pacifying the land. The whole theory of Confucianism spreads in essence along the Three-creeds and Eight-entries [5]. Today's society is changing with each passing day. With the rapid economic development in the past thirty years, Chinese people begin to think more and more about the philosophy of life. Especially for the students in the middle of youth phase, though they have the physical and physiological function of adults, their psychological development is still not mature, they more easily produce psychological conflicts, such as the conflict between self-esteem and inferiority, conflict between ideal and reality, conflict between competition and job hunting, etc. Many college students lack spiritual comfort, and for them a legion of psychological conflicts intertwine and cause mental disorders, induce psychological illness, even leaving or committing suicide. They generally have such a psychological situation: self-image comes into question, in particular, the thinking falls in confusion about these issues such as “What kind of work will you do in the future? Study for what? What kind of life do you want?” They are overwhelmed with the incompatibility to the university environment, unable to shoulder the heavy pressure of job search and employment, undergo many contradictions of self-evaluation and cognition. Faced with this situation, let Confucianism enter the classroom as a core course, it can effectively help the contemporary college students to get rid of these mental disorders. For example, the Three-creeds and Eight–entries, mentioned earlier, which also created the brilliant thought of Chinese intellectuals ‘one tries to let others be benefited in success, pay attention to his own moral uplift without thought of others in poor’, can provide noble guidance to what a person wants to accomplish and what kind of road he will take, because it clearly summed up that "a man's accomplishments constitute the measure of his career".

Several Problems that Should be Paid Attention to in the Course of Teaching
After taking Confucianism as a core curriculum, we need to pay attention to the following problems in the course of teaching, in order to achieve the desired results.
Select the Course Content Reasonably

The Confucian content is resounding and profound, involving political views, ethical thoughts, moral concepts and principles of education etc. After taking it as the core curriculum in the liberal education curriculum system, because of the restriction of class hour, the first thing to solve is the content selection. How to choose? The general principle is: taking the essence and discarding the dross. Concretely, aiming at solving practical problems and boosting social development, we should, in the aspects of the core ideas, select the contents on “stressing benevolence, valuing the people, upholding justice, advocating harmony and seeking harmony” and so on; in the aspects of moral concept and value standard, select the contents reflecting self-improvement, filial piety, love, and honesty, such as “social commitment”, “emulating those better than oneself”, “loyalty and filial piety”, “propriety, righteousness, integrity, honor”, “trust is the coin of the realm” etc.; and in the aesthetic style, select the contents of aesthetic pursuit mapping the unity of beauty and kindness and the unity of form and spirit such as “qian qian jun zi, zong she da chuan (being a modest helps to pull through)”(see the Book of Changes), “yan wu jun zi, wen ru qi yu (A gentleman is as warm as jade)”(see the Book of Songs), etc. These contents either provide the beneficial enlightenment for us to understand and transform the world, and provide a useful reference to governing the country; or reflect the value standard of the right and wrong, gave birth to the Chinese traditional virtues; or embody the aesthetic pursuit of the Chinese nation and nourished the unique and rich arts and humanities of the Chinese nation.

Teach Confucianism with the Scientific, Objective and Worshipping Attitude

As known, Chinese Confucianism was founded by Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi developed this theory. After Dong Zhongshu's "Ousted 100, Only Confucianism" in the Western Han Dynasty, it became the feudal orthodox ideas thenceforth. Latter, there appeared the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty and Lu-Wang Mind-Philosophy in the Ming Dynasty, in which the former established and perfected the objective idealism Neo Confucianism system; the latter established the subjective idealism theory: the philosophy of the mind. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, thinkers, such as Li Zhi, Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu and Wang Fuzhi, appeared successively. Li Zhi lashed the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, denying the authority of Confucius and Mencius; while Huang Zongxi, Gu Yanwu, Wang Fuzhi et al opposed the system of the monarchy autocracy in politics, advocated economically putting what is learned into practice, and urged critically inheriting Confucianism in ideas [6]. This evolution process of Confucianism determines that, in the teaching process, we need to take the scientific and objective and worshipping attitude, not only vigorously carry forward the fine parts, but also point out the negative aspects. For example, in the teaching of " the Three Cardinal Guides and the Five Constant Virtues", one hand we must objectively present the historical background of the idea, introducing its basic connotation, the other hand we should clearly point out its positive contribution to the formation of China's value system, together with its negative role in the development of the Chinese nation as a safeguard for the feudal hierarchy. The words, "Three Cardinal Guides" and “Five Constant Virtues", originated in the Dong Zhongshu's book "Chunqiu Fanlu", of the Western Han Dynasty, were firstly used in conjunction by Zhu Xi of the Song Dynasty. Three Cardinal Guides refers to ‘ruler guides subject’, ‘father guides son ’, and ‘husband guides wife’; while Five Constant Virtues consists of benevolence (humanity), righteousness, propriety, wisdom & faith. As a kind of moral norms, the idea of "Three Cardinal Guides” and “Five Constant Virtues", derived from Confucius (another says they come from Han Feizi). Its skeleton of formation is as follows. First, Confucius put forward the ethical ideology of ‘Jun-Jun, Chen-Chen, Fu-Fu, Zi-Zi’, ‘benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom’ et al., then Mencius further developed it as the Moral Views of Five Ethics: ‘There should be affection between fathers and sons, affiliation between monarchs and courtiers, distinction between husbands and wives, order between seniors and juniors, and trust amongst friends’. And then, after Dong Zhongshu’s further deepening and development, the Three Cardinal Guides and the Five Constant
Virtues emerged formally. The moral discipline prescribed in the Three Cardinal Guides and the Five Constant Virtues, bound people's will and personality, is not conducive to the formation of scientific democratic spirit, what's more, the preached thoughts of ‘the three obedience and four virtues’ and subservience filial et al deviate from modern human civilization. Of course, in the course of teaching, apart from explaining these negative effects, we should also confidently point out its positive contribution to the formation of China's value system. Actually, the ‘Five Constant Virtues’, as a standard to regulate the relations between human relations in China, have already gone through the development of Chinese ethics and become the core element of China's value system. For example, “faith ”, it is a way of life, the road to business start and development. Keeping promise and cherishing reputation have become the accepted standards of value and basic virtues of the Chinese nation.

Review Confucianism with the Eyes of Advancing with the Times, and Explain the Broad and Profound Confucianism by Focusing on Practical Problems

For a long time, especially from the Qing Dynasty to the end of the Cultural Revolution, Confucianism was often denied and criticized in China. Confucianism has revived in nearly a decade, part of the reason is that, with the rapid development of economy after China's reform and opening to the outside world, people begin to think more about the current life and the meaning of self-existence. Faced with the increasingly serious moral crisis or spiritual crisis, people once again realized that many values in Confucianism still apply. The development of Confucianism is also advancing with the times. The innovative Confucianism is abandoning old values that are no longer applicable and is merging with modern values with an open mind [7]. So, in the course of teaching we should review Confucianism with the eyes of advancing with the times. Compared with the case a few hundred years ago, great changes have taken place in China today; this determines that, to avoid falling into empty talk, we should interpret the broad and profound of Confucianism by focusing on the present practical issues in the course of teaching. For instance, we look at the current haze problem and think about the relationship between man and environment, in the Confucian thought of "harmony between man and nature"; Combined with the construction of a harmonious society, we explain the Confucian "harmony is most precious" thinking; Combined with the issue of the return of Taiwan, give an account of the idea of Confucian unification; Combined with the construction and improvement of the current market economic order in China, explain the view of justice and benefit in Confucianism et al.

Conclusion

In terms of individuals, the nucleus of Confucian thought are benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, faith, forgiveness, loyalty, filial piety, and fraternal respect, etc. The educational principle advocated by it is highly consistent with the core concept of liberal education. Our school (Xiamen Institute of Technology) has been carrying out liberal arts education for many years. Several years of practice show, as a core curriculum of the liberal education system, Confucianism provides a handle to carry out humanistic education for our students, which embodies the essence of "decorousness education" and has good practical significance. To educate contemporary college students with "benevolence" of Confucian thought and the relevant ethical views derived therefrom, not only can it treat the numbness mentality existing in a few students, but also arouse the life consciousness, urge them to advance, and form a positive outlook on life; The Confucian culture emphasizes the interests of the whole society, proposes “remembering what is right at the sight of profit”, which also plays an important role in setting up correct values for today's college students [8]. Of course, in the process of teaching we need also note that, not only should we systematically teach the student the knowledge so as to enhance their sense of identity to Chinese traditional culture, but also make them realize self-discipline combined with their own personality while feeling the charm of the self-cultivation tradition, and finally achieve the effect of renewing themselves every day and adjusting the state of
mind and temperament. In this way, their ideology, morality and academic performance are sure to be taken in a gratifying situation.

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References