

CHINESE EDUCATION AND CONFUCIUS

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Preface

As we know, China is a country with long history and splendid culture. More than three thousand years ago, Chinese created characters that were being used in the Shang dynasty (BC 11th-16th centuries). For example, Jia Gu Wen is a kind of Chinese characters written on bones or tortoise shells.

Chinese education has developed since that time and continued up to now.

China therefore has a long history of education from ancient times. Because of the limited time, we cannot look in depth at the subject of Chinese education and Confucius. I will give only a brief introduction,

The topic includes two parts. One is the essentials of Chinese educational development, and the other is the essentials of Confucius' educational thought.

Part One: Essentials of Chinese Educational Development

Thousands years ago, China has education institutions. Their main mission is to develop healthy young men. China's major education institutions are usually classified into two categories: one is run by the government, and other one is run by private individuals.

Educational organizations run by the government

Educational organizations run by the government can be separated into two important levels, which are Central Government and Local Government.

Run by the Central Government

During ancient times, Taixue was the representative school run by the Central Government since Jin dynasty (BC 124). It lasted for more than 2,000 years, until the end of the Qing dynasty (AD 1898). It was the highest institution in China. As getting educated in Taixue is a very main way to make people became officers, many civilians were encouraged to go into Taixue. Taixue trained a lot of talented people and made an invaluable contribution to the development of Chinese culture, especially to Confucianism.

In the Yuan dynasty (BC 1306), *Taixue* was called *Guoz jian*. It was the highest royal college during the Yuan dynasty, Ming dynasty and Qing dynasty. In 1898, *Guoz jian* changed its form to new style school, which is the first comprehensive university in China. In 1912, it was named Beijing University.

In the early Ming dynasty, the emperor had taken Nanjing as capital; so we have two *Guozijian* at that time. One is in Beijing and one is in Nanjing. *Guozijian* in Nanjing is the predecessor of today's Nanjing University.

Run by the Local Government

The school run by the Local Government has more than two thousands years' history. It was named "shi shi" and established in the early Han dynasty (BC 141).

According to the records, "shi shi" was built in BC 141 at the south gate of Cheng Du, Sichuan, China. The person who created it was the prefect of Cheng Du, whose name was "Wenweng". As a local school, "shi shi" trained lot of talented people for the Sichuan province, and they quickly spread Confucianism around Sichuan.

Because of the outstanding achievement, the Central Government and the Emperor gave Wenweng many awards. At the same times, the Central Government and the Emperor realized the establishment of local schools was a good way to education, and ordered other parts of China to establish similar schools. Since that time, the local schools in China have gradually developed. "Shi shi", the local school created by Wenweng has continued up to today, and became the predecessor of today's "shi shi middle school".

Educational Organizations Run by Individuals

According to historical materials, we find the first individual educational organization was created by Confucius (BC 551-479). After the Song dynasty (AD 960) there are lots of large scale individual education organizations. "Shuyuan" is one form of academy, which can be used as a representative.

There were lots of "Shuyuan" in Chinese history. The first one that is popular and famous; it was called "Bai Lu dong Shuyuan" and set up at Lu Mountain in the Jiangxi province in AD 940. The second one was set up in AD.976 and was called "Yuelu shu yuan", located in the capital of the Hunan province. (The name hanging on the front door of Yuelu shu yuan was written by the Song Dynasty emperor. It indicated education was really important for the Song dynasty, and thoughts of respected teachers are still there.)

Until the end of the Qing dynasty, China began to develop its modern education. All levels of government changed “shu yuan” into modern schools. Following this, “Yue lu shu yuan” changed the name into “Hu nan higher education school” in 1903, and in 1926 its name was finally changed into Hunan University. “Bailudong shuyuan” once changed its name into “Hu nan forestry higher education school” in 1910, but it has regained its primitive name in the modern times, and has become an organization including antique management, teaching, academic research, receiving visitors and garden building.

At the same time, by order of the government, many small scale “shu yuan” changed into modern secondary schools and modern primary schools that continue until today.

In ancient times, the small scale private education institutions were called “si shu” (old-style private school), and these spread all over the country. Generally, one “si shu” would have one teacher, and he taught several children from the neighborhood. The main contents of the teaching included reading, mathematics and basic ethics.

Part Two: Essentials of Confucius Educational Thoughts

Confucius (BC 551-BC 479) was the greatest thinker, philosopher and educator of the ancient times.

Confucius was the first educator who set up a private school. Throughout his life, he trained more than 3,000 students and 72 of them became outstanding persons of that time. Confucius also organized and reformulated the most important books of that time – “Liujin” (the most important classic books of Confucian books). These books are not only important carriers of the Chinese mainstream culture, but also provide basic teaching materials students must read in the ancient China.

“World Famous Dictionary” published in the United States in 1984 and “People’s Year Book” published in the United Kingdom in 1985 considered Confucius to be one of the top ten thinkers in the world. In January 1988, a gathering was held in Paris. Seventy five scientists who had received the Nobel Prize discussed and reached a consensus which was: If you want to have a happy and peaceful life, you should go back 2,500 years ago, looking for wisdom from Confucius. These show the thoughts of Confucius are very wide and profound. It had a great influence to the feudalism culture, which existed in China thousands years ago and the world culture.

As we know, the Confucian thought is very wide and profound. As the time is limited, we will introduce only three significant theories.

Education Decide the Development of Human Beings

The family of origin was the main opinion at that time. Confucius thought that people were similar when they were born. However, after they grow up, their achievement, behavior and psychology are different. The reason is if they have been educated. Therefore, education is very important for the development of individuals.

All People Have the Right to Accept Education

There was an intense argument during human educational practice concerning “who should receive education?” It’s an important question with regards to the rights for education. About this issue, Confucius was the first one who argued: “All people have the right to accept education”. He thought that any person, no matter who they are, or which region they came from, and no matter how poor or rich, should be educated.

During the educational practice, Confucian students came from different kingdoms. They did not only have different ages, but also belonged to different strata of society. Some of his students were influential officials, aristocratic children and poor children. Some people came from remote and backward places with little education.

Before Confucius’ times, only a few aristocratic or plutocratic children had the educational rights. Obviously, Confucian thoughts were directed against the accepted view of education of that time. His thoughts really expressed the equal rights and democratic rights of education. Some scholars considered Confucius as the first one who put forward universal education in China. Confucius’ educational practice was an epoch-making and pioneering work in Chinese education history.

Teaching Students on the Basis of Their Intelligence

In the Chinese history of education, Confucius was the first one who put forward the idea that teaching of students should be based on their intelligence. At the same time, he was good at teaching students based on their intelligence during educational practice.

Firstly, Confucius thought: The basis is that understanding the nature of students’ intelligence deeply. Consequently, he paid attention to listening to the students and observing the students. He also used very short words to describe the student’s characters, such as reasonable, extreme, decisive, and versatile.

Secondly, Confucius thought students depend on their needs, such as the level of their knowledge, intelligence and personality. For instance, he pointed out that different intelligence of students requires different teaching content. If a student's intelligence is not very high, they should just be given basic knowledge. On the contrary, if a student's intelligence is well developed, they should be given deep and abstruse knowledge. Another example was that Confucius often encouraged his students according to their personality. If the students were timid and overcautious, he encouraged them to express their opinion bravely. When he had some bold and reckless student, he always told them to think deeply before acting and thinking deeply before speaking.

It was the attitude of respecting people's rights to education, and teaching students on the basis of their intelligence that made Confucius so important. Confucius not only cultivated numerous students from all over China, but also made them respectful characters. For example, some of his students were admired by later generations for their morality; some had excelling ability of communication; some became outstanding officials their for excellent ability of management; some were good at academic research and proficient in literature and history etc. In short, all of Confucius's students became useful persons at that time.

Confucius' thoughts and theories have been handed down from generation to generation by his pupils since then, they have become the mainstream culture for more than two thousand years in China.

Summary

In closing, please allow me again: China's education has a long history and education. Thoughts of Confucius are broad and profound. Today's introduction is just "a drop of water in the ocean." In the future, I hope we can have an opportunity for a deeper, more comprehensive and more systematical communication.

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