

INSIGHTS FROM ZHU XI'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION FOR MODERN EDUCATION

*Hanqiao Tang*¹


*Lei Shen*²


Abstract: As a master of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi's unique educational philosophy plays a certain role in promoting the development of contemporary education and teaching. Based on the situation of requiring talents in feudal society, Zhu Xi took Confucian orthodoxy as the starting point to make innovative attempts on educational methods and teaching content. He believed learning from things to know. By learning from the ideological resources of ancient and modern Chinese and non-Chinese educational philosophy, and integrating ancient philosophical ideas with modern teaching methods, this paper offers some important innovative ideas for contemporary models of education.

Keywords: Zhu Xi. Educational Philosophy. Modern Education. Enlightenment.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the saint ideal of Confucianism, Zhu Xi absorbed and integrated various ideological resources, and put forward a set of extensive and profound Neo-Confucianism systems. As a master of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi also put forward a series of educational thoughts, including educational philosophy at the level of principle and specific educational methods. Exploring the connotation of Zhu Xi's educational thought and revealing its significance for contemporary education can not only promote

¹ Ph. D. School of Educational, Huainan Normal University, Huainan, 232038 – China.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3715-3815> Corresponding author e-mail: thq@hnnu.edu.cn.

² School of Finance and Mathematics, Huainan Normal University, Huainan, 232038 – China.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8121-0808> E-mail: shen199102@126.com.

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the innovation and development of China's excellent traditional culture, but also enhance the integration and development of ancient educational thought and contemporary educational practice.

1 THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF ZHU XI'S EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT

Zhu Xi, who lived in the Zhao and Song dynasties of Chinese culture, was one more great educator after Confucius. He not only achieved success in educational practice, such as the establishment of schools and the reconstruction of academies, but also made great theoretical innovations in educational thought, charting a new development direction of the educational cause of later generations. This paper focuses on the latter aspect, that is, through in-depth discussion of Zhu Xi's educational philosophy to dig out the modern enlightenment of his thought. This section will start from the philosophical foundation of Zhu Xi's educational thought and reveal his educational thought from his philosophical proposition.

2 THE IDEA OF “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”

In the whole philosophical system of Zhu Xi, “Li” and “Qi” are the basic categories for him to understand the world and human nature - “Li” and “Qi” are interdependent for everything in the world. In Zhu Xi's view, the basic idea of the existence of the world is demonstrated by means of li rationality. He has his own unique opinion on the origins and realities of the world, saying that the normative nature of the world is the premise of the existence of rationality and that the authenticity of reality is the basis for the existence of Qi , which is separate and echo each other. Under this premise, Zhu Xi put forward the idea of “unity in diversity”. “Unity” means that there is one principle between heaven and earth, and “diversity” means that everything has its own principle. As a creature in the universe, man also has one principle, and that is human nature. According to Zhu Xi, human nature is also the composition of qi. Qi can be pure and impure, so human nature is divided into “nature of destiny” and “nature of temperament”. The “nature of heaven” can only be achieved by the most pure and perfect saints, while ordinary people have the “nature of temperament”. Moreover, Zhu Xi believes that human beings are not perfect individuals when they are born, and most of “destiny's nature” can only be achieved through learning after birth. He also

believes that the biggest difference between people and things is that people have rational thinking and can break the limitations of the body to think about things outside the body. Although there are great differences between individuals, and different individuals have different thinking patterns, these differences can be remedied through the efforts of the day after tomorrow. This means that human nature is educable, and “make no social distinctions in teaching” is an acknowledgment of this nature that is shared by all.

3 THE FUSION OF “UNITY IN DIVERSITY” AND THE THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

Zhu Xi thinks that “Tai Chi is in everything”. Here Tai Chi means the existence of “the reason”. “Everything has its own reason” means all things have the reality of their existence. “The existence of all things has a way, the same Li and different Qi”, “Same Li” means all the original form of expression of everything is the same, while “Different Qi” indicates the specific existence of the subject is different. In the process of formation, individuals will be shaped into various forms, specifically to the individual’s different environment and different effects. Zhu Xi believes that the purpose of education is not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the cultivation and shaping of individual morality. From the perspective of the theory of “unity in diversity”, the most important enlightenment of Zhu Xi’s educational philosophy to contemporary education is that teachers and students should form effective interaction, and grow into talents through edutainment. On one hand, for teachers, each student is an independent individual with certain differences. Teaching should be based on the characteristics of each student, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses. On the other hand, Zhu Xi firmly believes that everyone has the potential of self-education and self-development. For the excessive optimism of human nature, he holds a negative attitude. Zhu believes that the foundation of the existence of human nature lies in its self-confidence for the masses. At the same time, the existence of dignity is also the most important difference between animals and humans. Based on this, teachers should also pay more attention to the advantages and disadvantages of each student, and do not ignore the nature of education because of the students’ personalized characteristics.

4 METHODS AND PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

Zhu Xi is good at drawing lessons from the Confucian tradition in history to construct his own educational theory. In the course of teaching, he uses “[...] erudite, interrogation, careful thinking, discernment, and practice” as the theoretical basis of teaching, and advocated that learning should focus on the use of thinking and arguing. Based on this, during the course of teaching, he lays stress on the teaching principles and methods. It promotes the progress and development of educational philosophy (LIU, 2015, p. 30).

5 INITIATIVE AND TIMELY INSPIRATION

Zhu Xi pays special attention to the initiative of learning. He believes that learning is the irreplaceable and fundamental issue of cultivating one’s morality. In his view, learning and reading are private affairs, and have no connections with outsiders, even if they want to help. Furthermore, initiative is spontaneous. It is the result of the active participation of the subject, not something to be bought. Zhu Xi believes that although teachers play a guiding role in the learning process, they cannot learn for students. That is to say, students should experience and comprehend everything by themselves, and improve their educational awareness and emotional cultivation through personal learning. Teachers are problem solvers in the learning process. Facing difficult problems cannot be solved on their own, students can ask their teachers for solutions and ideas, but learning is always their own thing. In Zhu’s philosophy of education, he believes that teachers are the inspirators and educators of thought formation; when finishing studies, they judge achievements in order to achieve the best (YU, 2017).

For example, in the *Analects* Zhu Xi said diligent reading is an approach to gain knowledge, which is of great significance for man’s development. He believes that learning is affected by many internal and external factors, such as the right time, the right place, and the right man. For instance, the first is students’ own initiative in learning, which is the main motivation, the second is the teaching method and pattern, which is the catalyst promoting students learning to a certain degree, and the third is the external environment of learning, which, as an objective condition of learning, affects the process of learning to a certain extent. While stressing the initiative of students in learning, Zhu Xi also advocated paying attention to the guiding role of teachers to students. As the main character of teaching, the teachers’ mode

of ideal education inspires and influences the students' learning-ability to a certain extent. While paying attention to the innovation of teaching methods and teaching content, teachers should also improve the quality of teaching, mobilize students' enthusiasm and initiative to learn, and enhance students' interest in the course content. The so-called initiative to improve students' own learning is not to weaken the position of teachers, but to guide the teachers about each student's individual differences. Teachers need to actively enlighten students, but not just to wait doing nothing for students to learn spontaneously (PHYLLIS, 2017). The effective combination of students' learning initiative and teachers' teaching guidance is Zhu Xi's beneficial innovation to the teaching mode.

6 STUDYING HARD AND GAINING NEW INSIGHTS THROUGH REVIEWING OLD MATERIAL

The so-called "studying hard" proposed by Zhu Xi implies concentration, determination, refrain from arrogance and irritability, and soldierlike fearless spirit. Zhu Xi believes that learning is a process. In the process of acquiring knowledge, students should pay attention to effective methods and do not waste time to harvest fruitless. On one hand, he advocates that students should have perseverance and determination, and do not give up half-way while learning. It is necessary to forge ahead with determination during the process of learning. On the other hand, he associates learning with the cart and the alchemy: it needs stronger strength to push the cart at the beginning. When the cart began to move, little strength is enough; Learning is the same reason: at the beginning, students concentrate all their energy to learn, which may be more difficult, but when the theory and methods of learning are prepared, they will find learning easy and pleasant (ROBIN, 2015). In addition, Zhu also believes that learning is to review the old and know the new. With the help of Confucian classical teaching ideas, Zhu's such learning thought is applied to inspire and guide students. Learning is a step-by-step process. In the process, students should pay attention to the use of learning methods. Only in this way, can knowledge play a greater role.

For example, Zhu believes that the world is amazing and profound. If humans do not take the initiative to learn, they will not know the truth contained in learning. Besides, if they cannot keep a long-term study, knowledge will not be applied for life. Zhu also said, learning is to acquire

knowledge at any time and everywhere. He believes that the premise and guarantee of knowledge are continuous study and scrutiny, in order to obtain knowledge on the basis of new discoveries (JOSEPH, 2016). “By reviewing the old and learning the new, you can be a teacher”. The process of learning is to review, at the same time, to obtain new knowledge. Therefore, learning is not only to forge ahead with perseverance, but also to learn and integrate new knowledge flexibly. Zhu Xi’s innovative teaching thought lays the foundation for the development of modern education, and has a certain enlightening effect on the innovation of modern education teaching mode.

7 ZHU XI’S PRINCIPLES FOR READING

Confucian educational thoughts on learning and teaching revolve around reading, and Zhu Xi had his own unique views regarding this. It is known that Zhu Xi devoted his whole life to education. He had his own practice and understanding of reading. His method of reading and learning can be summarized into a set of education reference materials for future generations. Zhu Xi believes that Four Books and Five Classics are the great embodiment of human knowledge at that time, which is the basis and paradigm for future education and has directly become teaching materials, especially for the Civil Service Exam. As a thinker and educator, Zhu Xi’s unique educational theory and methods expound the impetus for the development of contemporary education. According to Zhu Xi, reading should be in an orderly way and get familiar with the book. Knowledge can be memorized in mind. But for the theoretical knowledge, they can only be obtained by the application in actual life. The theoretical knowledge and actual practice are the characteristics of Zhu Xi’s reading principle (NIGEL, 2017).

8 STUDYING EARNESTLY AND THINKING CAREFULLY IN AN ORDERLY WAY

Zhu Xi believes that “[...] the limit must be set for reading”, which means that a plan is required before reading. Superstitious learning is unacceptable. We should pay attention to the pertinence and effectiveness of learning. The saying that “[...] study should not be hasty, otherwise it is a waste of effort” emphasizes on the use of correct learning methods. Students must not be careless, otherwise learning would be a waste of time and energy. Learning is a phased process. Learning should proceed from difficult to easy.

Make clear the difficult problems first and learn the simpler second. Following this order can make learning easy and natural, and also promote learning and understanding progress. Regarding learning, Zhu Xi advocates “knowing and doing”, which implies, in the process of learning, students should pay attention to the study of human affairs, and then integrate the knowledge of natural laws to meet practical needs. In short, students should not aim too high in study, but be practical and diligent. Knowledge can only be firmly grasped by steps. As the founder of educational philosophy, Zhu Xi advocates that sages teach people from school, step by step, reviewing the old and learning the new, which have been continuously inherited and developed by later generations.

Reading frequently refers to reading the book over and over again in order to achieve the effect of memorizing it by heart. In Zhu's view, there are three kinds of reading, that is, the heart, the eyes, and the mouth. That is to think with your heart, look carefully with your eyes, read more with your mouth, and do all three in place is the real reading. He said, “[...] reading a book a hundred times, its meaning is self-seeing”, meaning the book should be read more and repeatedly. Readers need to be familiar with the book and get the effect of reciting in order to truly obtain the original intention of the author. Books can be recited on the basis of repeated reading. That is to say, reading a hundred times is for sure better than reading fifty times. The effects of reading two hundred times and reading one hundred times are very different. If the knowledge learned cannot be familiar with the heart, the initial feelings and national conditions of the author cannot be appreciated. Students need to have a hard-working attitude and strong interest in knowledge, in order to achieve the desired results.

9 PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND MAKE GREAT EFFORT

According to Zhu, reading needs to be self-checking, which means that students must integrate the theoretical knowledge in the books with their own personal life experience. In Zhu's view, if the theoretical knowledge learned is separated from reality, it would be useless with no practical significance. As a great educator, Zhu proposes that scholars should thoroughly read books and strive for excellence. He believes that reading requires engagement and commitment. Students must bring their personal experience to understand the different meanings and emotions in books. Only in this way could the theoretical knowledge from books be applied to

solve real-life practical problems and achieve the effect of learning. Reading requires to learn with emotions, and to enjoy life in books. While reading, readers must check their own words and manners, so that they can fit their deeds to their words. This is the true meaning of self-examination. In order to make continuous progress and improve cultural literacy, a positive learning attitude should be maintained.

Besides personal experience, hard work is also needed in learning. That is to persevere in determination and diligence. Zhu Xi says that students should read deeply with an attitude of analysis. Extensive reading is ineffective. Scholars should have the perseverance to understand the profound traditional cultural essence of reading. The application and influence of Zhu Xi's educational philosophy have continued to modern times. It has become an indispensable classic thought in learning. Moreover, Zhu thinks, besides personal experience, a good student must also practice reading. It should be noted that working hard does not mean being eager for quick success and instant benefits, but refers to reading with a positive and diligent attitude for the pursuit of quality and the improvement of efficiency.

CONCLUSION

Zhu Xi's educational philosophy involves all aspects of education and teaching with the characteristics of diversity and uniqueness. For instance, it emphasizes the initiative and spontaneity of learning, the combination of learning and thinking, the application of theoretical knowledge, and the integration of theory and practice. In addition, it also covers many aspects including teaching purpose, pluralism, practicality and reflection. He combines the ancient educational teaching theory with his own teaching experience, and integrates a complete and systematic set of educational teaching materials. According to Zhu, reading is an important way to learn. Only by combining the theoretical knowledge in the books with hands-on practice in everyday life can we better understand the essence and connotation of education. Zhu Xi's theories can advance with the times and play an important role in the development of contemporary educational teaching methods.

TANG, H.; SHEN, L. *Insights da filosofia de educação de Zhu Xi para a educação moderna. Trans/Form/Ação*, Marília, v. 45, p. 59-68, 2022. Edição Especial 2.

Resumo: A filosofia educacional única de Zhu Xi, enquanto mestre do neoconfucionismo, desempenha um certo papel na promoção do desenvolvimento da educação e do ensino contemporâneos. Com base na situação de exigência de talentos na sociedade feudal, Zhu Xi tomou a ortodoxia confucionista como ponto de partida para fazer tentativas inovadoras em métodos educacionais e conteúdos de ensino. Ele acreditava que o conhecimento de objetos é uma maneira importante de adquirir conhecimento. Ao aprender com os recursos ideológicos da filosofia educacional chinesa e não chinesa antiga e moderna, integrando ideias filosóficas antigas com o método de ensino moderno, este artigo oferece algumas ideias inovadoras importantes para os modelos contemporâneos de educação.

Palavras-chave: Zhu Xi. Filosofia Educacional. Educação Moderna. Iluminação.

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