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Holistic Education from the Perspective of Confucianism

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Abstract: Holistic education has incurred attention from researchers around the world. Confucianism as an influential educational philosophy in Eastern countries resembles a holistic approach in many ways including the emphasis on whole development, as well as on educational principles, methods, and contents. The article aims to provide a deeper understanding of holistic education in the Chinese context by interpreting holistic education from a Confucianism perspective and the theme of harmony is illustrated. Furthermore, the implications for teachers are analyzed to facilitate holistic education accordingly. The findings suggest the thoughts embedded in Confucianism are in consistent with holistic education principles of inclusiveness, balance and connectedness. To implement holistic education in Chinese context, policy makers, school principals and teachers could combine Confucian thoughts with the development and flourishing of whole person.

Keywords: Holistic Education; Confucianism; Harmony; Chinese Context.

1. Introduction

Holistic education has gained attraction around the world due to its crucial role in promoting the development of holistic global citizens with shared human values (Miseliunaite et al,2022). Concerned with underlying worldviews or paradigms in an attempt to transform the foundations of education (Nakagava,2001), it seeks unity of opposites, i.e. individual and group, educational content and processes, knowledge and imagination, rationality and intuition, quantitative and qualitative assessment, competition and collaboration. Holistic education highlights the fullest development of the whole person both at cognitive and affective levels (Singh, 1996; Forbes, 2003) and is valued by countries with the developed education system and relatively high academic performance. For instance, some countries or districts incorporate it as a national education policy including Finland, New Zealand, Singapore and Taiwan. Other countries in North America including the US and Canada regard it as alternative educational practice and meet national academic requirements, as stated in recent systematic review research by Miseliunaite (2022). Holistic education is against the prevailing outcome-based educational system (Saito, N., & Akiyama, 2002) with an emphasis on standards and testing to follow workplace requirements (J, Miller, 2007), and is directed towards developing human beings with a global conscience, a vision of peace, love, and intelligence to shape the future of tomorrow (Nava 2001) by connecting students to the surrounding context and environment (J, Miller 2004).

The Confucian understanding of the person resembles with the Western tradition of whole person education both in rational, emotional and bodily aspects (Chan&Chan, 2021, p26). In addition, existing literature addressed that holistic education is characterized as inclusion, balance and connectedness(Miller J, 2019), which resembles the thought of harmony in Confucianism. Anthropocosmic view entrenched in Confucian ideology penetrates a holistic views. The relational understanding of the human person assumed by Confucianism has important implications for whole person education (Chan &Chan, 2021, p13). It is helpful to consider holistic education with Eastern philosophy for it provides effective solutions to difficulties in modern education (Nakagawa 2000,5).

These aforementioned present the question: are holistic views embedded in Confucianism? how to interpret holistic education from a Confucianism perspective? how to implement holistic education in the Chinese context? The article answers these questions from the Confucianism doctrine of harmony through comparative analysis in Western and Eastern philosophy. Furthermore, implications regarding educational principles, content, methods and teachers' role to attain holistic development would be explained.

2. A Confucianism Interpretation of Holistic Education

2.1. Whole Person in Confucianism and Western Philosophy

Holistic education incorporates ideas and principles from humanistic and progressive educators, transpersonal thinkers, anarchists, social critics and radical critics. Led by Ron Miller, the group of educators proposed the concept of "whole-person education". According to them, education should lead to the holistic development of the human body, spirit, intellect, emotions, sociality, aesthetics, and spirituality. We can conclude that the holistic approach attaches the importance of whole development by connection to reach balance so that pupils become inclusive. Western philosophers have depicted how to deal with opposition and reach balance. From Plato onward, harmony has been taken to mean agreement or adjustment to an underlying fixed cosmic order. Hegel argues that the most universal of all relations is the relation of opposition and that all ideas and phenomena in the world inevitably lead to their opposites and then unite with them to form a higher level. All ideas and phenomena in the world inevitably lead to their opposites and then unite with them to form a higher. It seems that western philosophy tends to highlight the opposite nature of objects instead of correlation. Different from the previous sages, holistic education with relationship throughout its focus, emphasizes complementarity and seeks to balance in dynamic, in place of division and opposition(Morcom, 2017). Therefore, a holistic

approach or whole person education, as systematic ideas and doctrines involve unity relationship in contradiction, full potential in diversity and long-term development in complexity.

Based on the textual analysis of the Confucianism classics, we find that although Confucius did not use the term 'holistic education', nevertheless, there are passages that might be read as supporting the comparison of Confucius' understanding of how the whole person was to be developed in harmony and holistic education. For instance, in Confucianism, everything in the world is interconnected, and people should achieve all-around development of learning, thinking and acting. In terms of worldview, Confucius described this harmonious state as "all things co-nurture without harming each other". In terms of methodology, Confucius describes it as "impartiality, no excesses, no shortcomings" , there is a saying in the Mean , i.e. Zhongyong that "if we can fulfill the nature of human beings, we can fulfill the nature of things; if we can fulfill the nature of things, we can praise the transformation and nurture of heaven and earth", and ancient Chinese thinkers advocate a holistic view of the relationship between the universe, society, human beings and nature, and advocate harmonious development following nature. In Zhu Guangqian's view, Confucianism is based on the spirit of music and ritual. Music is the natural flow of emotions, which makes people angry and lively, and ritual is the discipline of behavior, which makes people control and disciplined and achieve neutrality. Confucianism pursues both ritual and music so that the various activities of knowledge, emotion, and intention are each in their place and in their way. Therefore, the ideal education should cultivate a complete personality and develop all the possibilities of human beings, without killing one part of human nature to develop another, and without forbidding or destroying human nature, but education can make all human natures harmonious and parallel, which is an ideal of "whole person" development. Notably, ritual and music are regarded as ways to achieve harmony according to Analects "Of the functions of music harmonization is the [most] precious" and Zhongyong "When joy, anger and sorrow are not yet developed, they are in the middle; when they are all in the middle, they are in harmony".

Confucianism place people in the context of relationships and seeks harmony of relationships mainly in four layers. The first one is the harmony between the individual and nature. They advocate the unity of heaven and man. People should respect nature, protect nature and effectively develop and use nature on the premise of understanding the laws of nature develop and use nature to achieve a harmonious relationship between man and nature. The second one is the harmony between the individual and society. The "Middle Way"or "the mean way" as a methodological approach emphasizes the importance of the opposites and unity of contradictions in the world, e.g. "to hold the two ends of the spectrum and to use the middle for the people" and "to be harmonious but different". When coping with social relations, how to reach balance is crucial. e.g. "not to be biased, not to be impartial, and not to be over or under". The third one is the harmony between the individual and family. The relation with family ties mainly refers to paternity, fraternity and conjugality. The last one is directed toward the individuals themselves. Generally, harmony refers to spirit and flesh, as well as spiritual life and physical life. Though the four layers differ in relationship subjects, they cover all aspects of harmonious ties. Remarkable, they are directed towards a balance correlation to reach a whole person, a harmonious society and sustainable development.

Therefore Confucianism views human as a harmony in sentimental and rational, and a unity in ties of four layers. Holistic view endorse human in terms of having harmonious relationships with natural resources, plants, animals, technology, artificial intelligence (Howlett, 2018). Besides, holistic education and Confucianism have similar ideas to achieve harmony in diversity by reaching balance, attainment of inclusiveness and emphasizing connection. We assume that Confucianism embodies holistic education in the doctrine of "harmony" in ideas of human person.

2.2. Holistic Thoughts in Confucianism: Educational Principles, Educational Contents and Educational Methods

Confucianism emphasizes the natural flow of emotion, which inspires research on human subjectivity as one of the educational principles. In *Zhongyong*, it is said that "The joy, anger, sorrow and happiness that have not yet been developed is said to be in the middle; when it is in the middle, it is called harmony. He who is in the middle is the essence of the world; he who is in harmony is the way of the world." The state of middle is the state in which happiness, anger and sorrow have not yet developed, while harmony is the state in which happiness, anger and sorrow have developed but in a "moderate" manner. Emotions such as "joy, anger, sadness and joy" are given a fundamental place, while dealing with these emotions in harmony is the basic way to be wise. In this reference, human emotion is regarded as inevitable, and acquiring methods of expressing emotions appropriately is the way to become wise. The Book of Rites, Music says: "The great music is in harmony with heaven and earth, and the great rites are in harmony with heaven and earth." Additionally, "Music is the harmony of heaven and earth, and rituals are the order of heaven and earth." Music and the ritual are separately used to maintain inner tranquility and social order to achieve the sublimity of humanity. Music, as a way to cultivate moral character, is placed as preexisting and valued by Confucianism. Therefore, Confucianism is not about restraining human nature, but releasing emotion and finding a way to achieve balance. And it is through constant balance that we can get cultivation both in personality and morality.

However, the emphasis on subjectivity doesn't mean self-centredness. When handling relationships with others, it is particularly an important principle to respect different opinions and finally reach harmony in difference. As Confucians said a man of virtue pursues harmony but does not seek uniformity; a petty man seeks uniformity but does not pursue harmony. Harmony is different from sameness because the former presupposes the existence of difference and attempts to reach unity while the latter believes in no differences. The Book of Rites, Music identifies that "if there is harmony, all things will not be lost" and "if there is harmony, all things will be transformed". Harmony is ideal for transformations for it includes and preserves diversity rather than homogeneity (Chan, 2021, P23). Therefore, the Confucianism of harmony in diversity embodies the spirit of inclusiveness, openness and tolerance. Reflecting on its educational culture, it advocates respecting students diverse in background, personality, learning competency, etc. Holistic education should avoid of the tendency towards homogenity and equilibrium, a miseducative about the education of the

whole person (Saito & Akiyama, 2022). Moreover, to show inclusion, the educator should regard teaching students according to their abilities as an important principle in the practice of the idea of harmonious education.

The doctrine of the mean should be deliberated as a way to meet the balance. We have discussed the importance of harmony in diversity. But how to reach this kind of situation? Confucianism responded to the question by advocating the doctrine of the mean. It refers to the principle of impartiality and appropriateness in dealing with people in the world. When talking about it, Confucius felt desolate and helpless as the mean way was not working in the world. He believed that one of the major reasons for its slow decline if we look at it from the perspective of the man himself, was that the wise was too wise and the fools were far behind. According to Mencius, the mean way is established and those intelligent can follow it. We can infer that the doctrine of the mean, despite its difficulties to carry out, is considered important. Considering the principle, one should grasp the "degree" or deal with education problems appropriately depending on time, place and the matter. However, there is no fixed standard and we should rely on specific analyses. The mean way in Confucianism is mainly manifested in the question of the advancement of virtue and the cultivation of one's career in a timely and appropriate manner as well as in a gradual manner.

The educational contents cover both knowledge and moral behavior. Specifically, Confucius' curriculum consisted of "rites, music, archery, royalty, calligraphy, and mathematics", i.e., the "Six Arts". In the teaching materials, Confucius used six classics handed down from the Western Zhou Dynasty, namely, Poetry, Book, Ritual, Music, Yi, and Spring and Autumn. Firstly, a wide variety of educational subjects are covered, including politics, law, and moral education in addition to knowledge and skill-based subjects. Additionally, there is instruction in dance, athletics and music besides mathematics, literature and philosophy. Though the mission of each subject is multifaceted, each subject is not independent of the other and it is complementary with each other. Different fields are connected and constitute a whole, which follows the teaching goal of the modern Chinese education system, i.e. whole development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and cultural aspects. Secondly, these contents involve various aspects, but they all revolve around one central goal, namely, to be a gentleman, which, taken together, can be compared to the ideal, morality and wisdom of a person. In Confucianism, the saying "aspiration to Dao, according to virtue, according to benevolence, wandering in art" reveals that art, namely, the teaching contents, is the basis of pursuing Dao, virtue and benevolence. Just as stated in the Analects "Prosperity in poetry, standing in ritual, success in music", which reflects ways of self-cultivation: poetry, ritual and music. Although there are different explanations for this statement, some believe that one should learn poetry first, and then cultivate music based on them, while others believe that one should learn poetry first to cultivate, followed by a ritual to establish and finally music to nurture. Despite different explanations, we can infer that a comprehensive, broad range of knowledge and skills are required according to Confucianism. Thirdly, Confucius devoted himself to developing learning abilities and cultivating moral pupils through Six Arts. Zeng Zi, a Student of Confucius comprehended and integrated his teacher's thoughts and claimed "A man can't help but be a man of great courage, a heavy responsibility and a long way to go. Is it not also important to be benevolent? After death, is it not also far?" The purpose of the "Six Arts" is to develop human beings, including individuality, human spirit, emotion, and judgment, as well as people who are capable of achieving harmony, the ultimate goal. *Daxue* provides a clear line for the development process: "To be materialistic, to be knowledgeable, to be sincere, to be righteous, to cultivate one's moral character, to be a family man, to rule the country, and to level the world. The first five are called the "inner sanctity" and the latter three are referred as the "outer king". And those who can achieve the unity of inner morality and outer behavior, that is, the unity of inner sanctity and the outer king can reach the highest state of life. Thus, the teaching contents reflect a combination of inner cultivation and outer practice, and they work together to promote human development.

The educational methods of knowledge acquisition should be based on learning, thinking and action according to Confucianism. On the importance of learning and thinking, Confucius answered: "How can you do without learning, how can you get without thinking". The argument reveals learning is the basis of action and that thinking ensures success. In Analects, it is said: "to learn without thinking is confusing, to think without learning is dangerous", which emphasizes the correlation between leaning and thinking. Confucius' account of knowledge acquisition and its connection to action is strengthened by this evidence, which is one of several key indications that he saw the process of learning as dynamic. (Hall & Ames, 1987). The Mean prescribes the learning process as a five-step process: "Learn widely, ask questions, think carefully, discern clearly, and practice faithfully." The five-step process follows learning, thinking and action model because asking questions, thinking carefully and discern clearly can be profiled as a thinking process. Under the influence of Confucius, Xunzi proposed that "people are in the ears, in the heart, in the four bodies, in the form of movement". It is a sequential order in attaining knowledge, with which ears refer to perception, hearing involves the mind thinking and four bodies mean action. Unlike Confucius, Xunzi especially emphasizes "action". He said: "Not to hear is not as heard, heard is not as seen. Seeing is not as good as knowing, knowing is not as good as doing, doing is the end of the line in learning". Therefore, in the pursuit of the comprehensive and harmonious development of the individual, a holistic approach to the cognitive process, emphasizes the need for comprehensive development of learning, thinking and acting.

Practice is fundamental in Confucianism education methods, even more important than knowledge. Confucianism holds that those who apply the learned to practice can strengthen moral character, elevate the human spirit, and realize harmony via their deeds and efforts. In the book The Book of Rites - Miscellaneous Records, it is written "A gentleman who has his words but not his deeds are ashamed of them". The importance of applying what you learn was highly valued by Confucius who said: " If you recite three hundred poems and teach them to govern, you will not be able to achieve it; if you use them in the four directions, you will not be able to specifically match them". Humanity as the core value of Confucianism is explained by Confucius as "practice what one preaches is almost benevolent". The goal of Confucianism education is to help individuals realize a life that embodies kindness and benevolence while pursuing moral perfection((Jin & Dan, 2004, p. 576). And practice

concerning sublimation from awareness to practice in moral aspect is regarded vital to realize moral improvement.

2.3. Implications for Holistic Education in Chinese Context

As the implications regarding educational principles, contents and methods have been discussed, this part will mainly focus on teachers' role in the implementation of holistic education under the inspiration of Confucianism in a Chinese context, which inspires to solve educational problems. Yang showed concerns about Chinese education: "The weak cultural edification leads to students' humanistic quality not high; the narrow professional education leads to students' academic vision not wide; academic foundation not strong; excessive utilitarian orientation makes students' comprehensive quality cultivation and basic skills training insufficient; excessive common constraints make students' personality development insufficient." (1997). Confucianism has influenced Chinese culture and education for over two millennia and has deeply rooted in every walk of Chinese. Educators should carry out a holistic approach considering the Confucianism education philosophy to facilitate its implementation.

In light of the above analysis on education principles based on harmony doctrine, we have two implications for holistic education. Firstly, it implies that we should consider pupils as the whole person and respect them as a unity of nature and social attributes. Nature attributes drive people to pursue desire, profit and emotion, which makes harmonious education necessary. The social attributes drive people to obey moral norms and make harmonious education possible. Therefore, we should develop a holistic view, and cultivate moral education concerning human nature. Secondly, it implies that we should regard education dynamically. In other words, the education process should include three stages: identifying differences, finding a meaningful way and reaching balance or harmony in diversity. In the process, admitting and respecting differences is the prerequisite. Grasping appropriateness or the mean is the way to meet harmony, the highest ideal in Confucianism. Of course, in these three stages, three principles of holistic education, i.e. inclusiveness, balance and connectedness are throughout the whole process.

Three implications can be drawn from educational contents. The first implication lies in an emphasis on connection. Every subject in the "Six Art" has its characters but they are also correlated with each other both in focus and goals. A holistic approach requires us to examine interdisciplinary connections between different subjects. Additionally, the connection is reflected by inner and outer cultivation, knowledge and skills, abilities and personalities. The second implication lies in examining unity in connections. The "Six Arts" are united because they are directed towards the goal of developing a gentleman. Both holistic education and Confucianism highlight the importance of unity. Finally, transformation is embodied in the connection. "Inspired by poetry, established in ritual, and formed in music" is a process of transformation, and it is also a method of transformation. In this process, three teaching contents interact with each other, and one promotes the acquisition of another. As a result, they constitute a whole learning process.

We can get implications from educational methods in Confucianism and holistic education. The whole approach should consider the relationship between knowledge, deliberation and action. The ideal of learning is truth, the ideal of morality is goodness, the ideal of art is beauty, the ideal of religion is holy, the ideal of the body is healthy, and the ideal of life is wealth, in which truth, kindness, beauty, health and wealth are integrated. Besides, labor education is highly valued in his holistic educational thoughts. The ideal of learning are based on acquisition of truth, deliberation on kindness and beauty as well as practical skills. In other words, to attain holistic development requires a reflective process of acquisition, deliberation and practice.

3. Conclusion

Despite the currency of holistic education and the burgeoning literature on its significance and benefits, relatively little has been written on the holistic education from the perspective of Confucianism. Addressing differentiate views on the holistic education in Eastern, this paper draws insights from Confucius' notion of harmony and analyzed holistic approach embedded in educational principles, contents and methods of Confucianism. Based on Confucius' teachings and conduct recorded, I have explained how holistic education is encapsulated in the virtue of harmony. Confucius's notion of harmony is concerned with infinite reality and finite being to achieve universal reality. The way to reach holistic development is to explore multidimensional reality in our own existence (Nakagava,2000,p34-35). Practically, moral education is valued in harmony to realize unity with heaven. A Confucianism interpretation of holistic education echoes the questions aforementioned and generate the conclusion that Confucianism is compatible with holistic education, amendable to the development and flourishing of whole person.

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