

Study on the Phenomenon of College Students' Silence in Class from the Perspective of Chinese Traditional Culture

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Abstract: Chinese traditional culture has a profound impact on Chinese education, which runs through the classroom of China's basic education and higher education. The phenomenon of silence in the classroom of Chinese college students carries more "cultural implication" than that in the western classrooms. Behind the silence are elements of Chinese culture such as "introspective" thinking mode, respect for teachers and principles, cautiousness in words and actions, humility and so on. In order to deeply explore the factors of silence in Chinese university classroom, we should not only be confined to the field of education, but also find out the reasons through the cultural accumulation of thousands of years in China, build a class of "listening + participation", turn this silence into a positive factor, and improve the teaching quality.

Keywords: Chinese Traditional Culture; Teaching Quality

1. Questions

The word "silence" is an important word used by western scholars to describe the characteristics of Chinese learners. Silence, in its broad sense, includes all nonverbal behaviors. In the process of communication, people convey information through some non-verbal means, such as body movements, facial expressions, voice hints, touch, space utilization, dress and so on. And the narrow sense of silence refers to the silent speech act. In western classrooms, "cooperative learning" and "heated discussion" are advocated. However, the "extroverted" learning style labeled by the West is rarely seen in Chinese classrooms. In the eyes of western scholars, Chinese university classrooms are silent, where students listen more and teachers talk more. For example, Braddock's survey in Australia shows that 60% of university teachers think that Asian students, including Chinese students, are quiet and passive. In contrast, they generally feel the enthusiasm of students from America and Europe to communicate. Chinese scholars have studied the phenomenon of education, however, before the research interpreted the silence as a negative word, whether it is a famous Japanese educator Sato, a professor of "dialogue teaching", or the American scholar Mc Keachie advocates "active learning", believed that "a" and "speak" is a kind of good classroom performance. From this, classroom silence is also regarded as a kind of indifference to class. Therefore, this study hopes to find out the positive factors of "Chinese style silence in class" through in-depth cultural analysis of Chinese college students' silence in class, so as to bring positive enlightenment to teaching.

2. The cultural causes of Chinese classroom silence

2.1 An introspective way of thinking

Confucianism is the mainstream culture of traditional Chinese culture. For thousands of years, Confucianism has

advocated “introspection”, that is, self-reflection. This self-reflection mode of thinking makes students more inclined to self-reflection, resulting in students’ introversion and poor expression. This way of thinking has long been thought of as a form of deep learning, associated with concentration. So when the teacher puts forward a question, more students think independently. This kind of classroom is different from that in the west where students discuss and debate with each other. However, this kind of “quiet” class, students do not study seriously? No, as long as the students’ thinking is moving, it means that they are participating in learning, but there is no collision and communication of thinking without expressing it.

2.2 Respect the authority of teachers

China has always been advocating told. The traditional teaching process, teachers and students mainly is the imparter of knowledge with the recipient, teachers in a central position as the owner of knowledge, teacher’s words is the truth, it is absolutely the “authority”, student’s task is to “hear”, question is often considered as a challenge to the authority. Students dare not speak up in classroom communication, because they think it is a challenge to the authority of the teacher, is disrespectful, impolite behavior. It can be seen that the respect for authority makes students afraid of teachers and dare not express what they have to say in class, so they choose to look up to authority and keep silent. Therefore, in Chinese classrooms, teachers teach rather than discuss with students. Although this way of learning restricts students’ thinking to a certain extent, it is also an important way for students to master knowledge quickly. Listening to the teacher’s lecturing does not mean instilling learning, and meeting in the “false lively” class, this silent class does not mean students’ thinking and exploration of knowledge.

2.3 Cultural humility

Local Chinese scholars have found in their studies that more and more open scholars become more and more silent after entering middle schools and universities, and this silence phenomenon is increasingly intensified in university classrooms. Modesty is a traditional virtue of the Chinese nation, which is not only a psychology, but also a custom. Some scholars found through interview survey that almost all the interviewed college students realized that speaking in class could promote learning, but they still kept silent because of many concerns. The culture of respect and humility makes students take low-key and listening as virtues. In class, they always let others talk first, which gradually evolved into only listening to others, and silence became the mainstream.

2.4 Proceed with caution

In Chinese classrooms, we often see such a scene: when the teacher asks the students if they have understood, the students remain silent and no one responds. Is it true that all understand, there is no doubt? The answer is definitely no. Many students felt embarrassed and even lost face because they were afraid that they were the only one in the class to speak, so they chose to remain silent. Some students even pretended to know what they didn’t know for the sake of their own face. Not only do students speak carefully to save face, but some teachers also make choices to save face. This is the Chinese culture of being very careful about what they say and do. It is considered embarrassing and humiliating to say or do the wrong thing in public. In public demonstrations, teachers tend to take care of students who behave “well” and turn a blind eye to those who behave so actively that they disrupt the class order. Over time, those students who express themselves actively in class but do not get positive feedback from the teacher will gradually “quiet”. The emphasis on face makes students hesitant to speak in class, and the fear of failure makes them more likely to remain silent.

2.5 Exam-oriented education

China’s tradition of exam-oriented education is still influential. Parents pay attention to their children’s exam results and rankings, telling their children to do nothing to do with learning; Teachers pay attention to the content of the examination, teaching and examination is not related to the content; Students take a fancy to the score of the exam, and do not learn the content irrelevant to the exam, so that they are too lazy to say the extra words in class. students discuss the most is the “what” on the final exam, when the teacher said to speak can add cent, just can have a little students to express their views, plus task, let the final grade is more ideal. If the teacher misses the point in a class, most students will keep silent and play the role of outsider for the whole class. In class, students aim to pass the exam, focus on learning the courses with many credits, focus on listening to the content related to the exam, and treat negatively the interaction between teachers and students that has nothing to do with the exam.

3. “Chinese style of silence” contains educational enlightenment

3.1 Teachers learn to listen to silence

The cultural content acquired by Chinese students is a “silent virtue view”, which is the important reason for Chinese students to gradually become silent, and it is the unique “spiritual nutrients” brought to Chinese students by Chinese culture. In contrast to the long tradition of eloquence in the West, Chinese culture has a distinct suspicion of “speech”. However, silence in class does not mean a dull mind. According to Lv Linhai, a professor from Nanjing University in China, students’ silence can be divided into two types. The first kind of silence is that students’ minds wander, they neither speak nor participate in thinking in class. The second group were silent thinking participants. They were silent, but their minds were active and engaged in learning, but they were good at thinking, but not good at expressing themselves. Listening is not only to understand the students’ speech, but also to understand the students’ “silent” language, which includes the students’ eyes, body movements and expressions, and to understand their movements. Sometimes a student’s speech will be short. As Professor Sato put it, listening is less about listening to what students say and more about their feelings and thoughts. This kind of deep listening will enable teachers to interpret students’ silence in class and better respond to students’ silence.

3.2 Build a “listening + participation” model of the classroom

College teachers should go beyond the appearance of “silence” and pay attention to the “soul” of college students. How to activate college students’ thinking and open their hearts is the real and eternal teaching way. In fact, even in a Western university classroom, the ultimate goal of breaking the silence and active discussion is still to activate the mind. Compared with the elements such as silence, discussion and interaction, the mental elements such as passion, reason, thinking and imagination conveyed by the teacher in the classroom are more essential educational existence. Similarly, in the eyes of German philosopher Jaspers, the so-called “one-talk-style” teaching with obvious suspicion of “silence” is not completely negative, and the activation of thinking is the eternal value standard for evaluating the classroom. It can be seen that listening does not mean being indifferent. Listening is also a time to think. Only by listening intently can we produce a deeper verbal response later. For Chinese college students, listening is also a kind of participation, which is a kind of silent thinking participation. The problems, questions, thinking and so on poured out from listening lay a solid foundation for the subsequent “sound” expression. Therefore, it is possible for Chinese educators to find a path of classroom teaching reform that is “more in line with local characteristics” by understanding the unique thinking growth mechanism of Chinese students and striving to build a Chinese participatory classroom of “listening + expression”, so as to truly and effectively stimulate the vitality of Chinese classroom.

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