

The Inheritance and Modern Value of Confucius' Confucian Educational View in Higher Education of East Asian Countries

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the inheritance and modern value of Confucian educational view in the higher education of East Asian countries. By analyzing the core principles of Confucius' educational outlook, this paper discusses its inheritance in higher education in China, South Korea, and Japan, and deeply studies its modern social values, including interpersonal relations and social harmony, value shaping and social responsibility, personal cultivation and all-round development, and Confucian values in cross-cultural communication. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the far-reaching influence of Confucius' Confucian educational view and provide useful insights for the development of modern higher education.

Keywords: Confucius' Confucian educational view; Higher education; Inheritance; Modern value; Interpersonal relationships

Introduction

As an integral part of East Asian culture, the Confucian educational view has not only profoundly influenced ancient societies but also continued to play a significant role in modern higher education. The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the inheritance and modern value of the Confucian educational concept in the higher education of East Asian countries, and explore the significance of its core principles in cultivating comprehensive quality talents, shaping values, and promoting social harmony. Through an in-depth analysis of inheritance practices and practical challenges in different countries, as well as the influence of Confucian educational views on cross-cultural communication, this paper aims to reveal its implications for contemporary education systems and provide insightful reflections on the future development of higher education in East Asia.

1. The Core Principles of Confucius' Confucian Educational View

1.1 Kindness and the Importance of Human Relationships

Confucius emphasized "Do not do to others what you do not want to be done to yourself" and advocated the cultivation of benevolence, which is vividly reflected in the inheritance of higher education in East Asia. In modern society, interpersonal tension and indifference between people often arise, and the Confucian educational concept offers a unique solution. By cultivating students' sense of empathy and concern for others, higher education can assist students in better integrating into society and building a harmonious network of interpersonal relationships. For example, Korean university courses frequently emphasize the cultivation of interpersonal skills, highlighting students' performance in various social situations and their ability to maintain interpersonal relationships.

1.2 The Idea of Self-Cultivation and Family Governance

Confucius' concept of self-cultivation, family harmony, governance, and world peace embodies the complementary nature of personal cultivation and social responsibility. This idea is equally important in modern higher education. By nurturing students' moral character and values, higher education can foster more outstanding talents with social responsibility and moral integrity for society. For instance, some universities in China have implemented social practice courses to encourage student participation in public welfare activities, enhancing their sense of social responsibility and teamwork. These practical activities help integrate the Confucian concept of self-cultivation into students' daily lives, cultivating individuals with enhanced social values.

1.3 The Importance of Etiquette and Moral Education

The Confucian educational concept emphasizes the cultivation of etiquette and morality, which plays a crucial role in East Asian higher education. Etiquette is not merely a code of conduct but also a form of cultural heritage that contributes to shaping individual character and maintaining social order. In modern society, the weakening of etiquette awareness and the ambiguity of moral values often lead to social issues. Higher education in East Asia should prioritize etiquette and moral education, nurturing students' self-discipline, respect, and sense of responsibility. For example, certain universities in Japan offer courses in etiquette and ethics to teach students proper social decorum and ethics, enabling them to better integrate into society and enhance social trust.

1.4 The Practical Principle of the Unity of Knowledge and Action

The unity of knowledge and action is one of the core tenets of Confucius' educational view, signifying the integration of knowledge and practical application. This principle also holds significant value in modern higher education. Individuals possessing solely theoretical knowledge and lacking practical experience may struggle to meet societal demands. Higher education in East Asia should encourage students to apply their learning to practical problem-solving, cultivating practical hands-on abilities and innovative thinking. For instance, in China, certain universities utilize off-campus internships and social research to motivate students to apply theory to practice, rendering them more competitive and adaptable.

2. The Inheritance of Confucian Education in Higher Education in East Asian Countries

2.1 China: The Historical Evolution and Current State of Confucian Education

In China, the Confucian educational view is deeply entrenched and influences the evolution and development of the educational system. Ancient Chinese Confucian classics such as the "Analects of Confucius" and the "Collegiate" are not only regarded as classics but also form an integral part of higher education teaching. Confucian values like benevolence, loyalty, and forgiveness are considered foundational to shaping students' moral character.

In modern times, China's higher education has undergone numerous reforms, leading to changes in the inheritance of Confucian educational views. In the early 20th century, Confucian education faced the impact of the New Culture Movement, yet it still retains a significant position in cultural identity. While China's higher education has actively incorporated Western educational concepts through reform and opening up, the Confucian principles of humanistic care and social responsibility continue to influence student development. For example, certain universities offer courses on Confucianism and its relevance to modern society in their core curriculum, guiding students to explore the practical application of ancient wisdom. In China's future-oriented higher education development, greater emphasis is placed on cultivating students' innovative and practical capabilities, as well as comprehensive qualities. The concepts of moral cultivation and social responsibility emphasized in Confucian educational views retain their significance. For example, some universities underscore the guidance of Confucian values in students' social practice activities, providing students with opportunities to experience moral sentiments and social concern through practical engagement.

2.2 Korea: The Incorporation of Confucian Culture in Higher Education

Korean higher education embraces various manifestations of Confucian culture. Within the education system, Confucian culture occupies a prominent position in South Korea's higher education. Certain universities have integrated Confucian thought into their core values and educational philosophy, emphasizing the cultivation of Confucian values such as "benevolence" and "filial piety." Establishments like the "Confucian Research Center" or "Confucius Institute" within schools not only promote the study of Confucian culture but also provide students with an in-depth understanding of traditional values.

Korean higher education has woven Confucian cultural elements into its curriculum, offering courses on Confucianism, traditional Korean culture, etiquette, and more. These courses not only deepen students' comprehension of Confucian culture but also offer valuable support for the development of their humanistic qualities and moral principles. By studying Confucian classics, students can gain a better grasp of topics such as interpersonal relationships and social responsibility, enhancing their ability to navigate future career challenges.

2.3 Japan: The Interplay Between Confucianism and Modern Higher Education

While Confucianism originated in ancient China, its influence on Japanese history has taken a unique trajectory. In modern higher education, Confucianism and its relationship with Japan have undergone both inheritance and development, resulting in a distinctive educational approach. Introduced to Japan in the past, Confucianism gained appreciation among Japanese intellectuals. Unlike its role in China, Confucianism's development in Japan incorporated local cultural factors, giving rise to a unique Japanese Confucian system. Particularly during the Edo period, Zhu Zi learning (Neo-Confucianism) became prevalent, profoundly shaping Japanese society.

Zhu Zixue emphasized personal cultivation and family governance, aligning with the prevailing shogunate regime and becoming a pivotal ideological foundation that supported social order. This Confucian tradition also permeated the education system of the time, producing generations of individuals equipped to meet societal demands.

Despite the course of modernization, Japan's higher education underwent profound transformations, with Confucianism's influence enduring. Certain traditions within Japanese universities still reflect the essence of Confucianism, such as entrance ceremonies and etiquette norms, maintaining a pronounced Confucian ambiance. Some universities continue to offer Confucianism courses, enabling students to explore traditional culture, values, and spiritual connotations^[1].

3. The Modern Value of Confucian Educational Views

3.1 Interpersonal Relationships and Social Harmony

Confucius' educational view underscores the significance of interpersonal relationships and advocates values such as benevolence and filial piety, which remain highly relevant in modern society. The quality of interpersonal relationships directly impacts social harmony and stability. In today's diverse society, people from various cultural backgrounds must understand and respect one another. Confucius' concept of benevolence encourages individuals to uphold goodwill and empathy in their interactions, fostering positive interpersonal interactions and creating a harmonious social environment.

In practical terms, the concept of benevolence holds value in enterprises, communities, families, and other spheres. Harmonious collaboration among employees in an organization can boost efficiency and creativity, enhancing the company's competitiveness. Within communities, residents adhering to the principle of benevolence are more likely to foster a culture of mutual assistance and friendship, contributing to a joyful living and working environment. In families, the concept of benevolence can foster close parent-child relationships and cultivate offspring with positive interpersonal skills. The notion of the "mean" in Confucius' educational view also offers guidance for interpersonal relations. The doctrine of the mean emphasizes moderation and balance, discouraging excessive pursuit of personal interests and advocating consideration for overall harmony. In modern society, excessive focus on individual rights and interests can lead to conflicts, while the idea of the mean promotes equilibrium and conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships.

3.2 Value Formation and Social Responsibility

Confucius' educational view underscores the importance of value formation and social responsibility, holding enduring practical value in contemporary society. Values serve as the foundation for individual behavior, while social responsibility encompasses an individual's impact on and contribution to society. Nurturing talents with correct values and positive social responsibility is a pivotal task in modern higher education. The core values of benevolence, righteousness, sincerity, and courtesy, emphasized by Confucius' educational view, serve as cornerstones for cultivating students' moral character. In modern society, individual behavior and value orientation significantly influence social morality and civilization. Through the inheritance of Confucian values, higher education can guide students to establish a proper outlook on life and values, cultivating citizens with moral sentiments and social responsibility.^[2]

Conclusion

As a repository of ancient wisdom in East Asia, Confucius' educational view not only left a profound historical impact but also carries multifaceted practical value in modern society. From the perspectives of interpersonal relationships and social harmony, value formation and social responsibility, personal cultivation and holistic development, as well as cross-cultural communication, the importance of inheriting and applying this educational view in higher education is widely acknowledged. Confucius' educational view encourages individuals to show consideration for others, uphold morality, establish proper values, actively undertake social responsibilities, cultivate themselves comprehensively, and promote cultural exchange and integration. Faced with the numerous challenges of contemporary society, the wisdom of Confucius' educational outlook should continue to be embraced. Its rich cultural heritage should be passed down and integrated into modern higher education systems, contributing positively to the construction of a harmonious and prosperous society.

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