

On Xunzi's Educational Thought

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Abstract: Xunzi believes that human's natural nature is "evil", and analyzes and discusses human's natural nature of "evil"; He put forward the ideal personality of "sage" and "gentleman" as the value target of education and teaching. He pointed out that through education and learning, human nature can be transformed, human character can be improved, and human status and life prospects can also be improved. He believes that respecting teachers and valuing education is of fundamental significance for the future and destiny of the country and the stable development of society. He emphasized that learning must be persistent; we must have a plan and do something and do nothing; be modest, single-minded and calm. We should take "practice" as the ultimate goal and destination of learning.

Keywords: Xunzi; Ideal personality; Educational and teaching ideas

Xunzi is a famous educator, philosopher and thinker in the history of Chinese cultural development. On the basis of summarizing the popular thoughts at that time, he built a huge ideological and theoretical system. It not only greatly enriched Confucianism, but also provided valuable theoretical resources for the development of later generations' ideology and culture.

1. Theory of human nature

The problem of human nature is a topic that thinkers cannot avoid. Whether it is his educational thought, ethical thought, or his political theory, all need the support of his theory of human nature and social history.

In the history of the development of traditional Chinese thought, Confucius first raised the issue of human nature. He pointed out: "by nature, men are nearly alike; by practice, they get to be wide apart." It is precisely on the basis of this idea of "similarity" of human nature that he put forward the proposition of "teaching without discrimination". This idea fully affirmed the importance and universality of strengthening learning and self-cultivation. At the same time, it also established the basic thinking direction for later thinkers to discuss human nature. Confucianism, on behalf of Mencius and Xunzi, has always followed this path of thinking to analyze and discuss human nature.

Mencius pointed out that people are born with compassion, shame, humility and right and wrong. All men have four hearts, just as all men are born with four limbs. "Four limbs" are the basic elements of human physiology, while "four hearts" are the basic elements of human psychology. The moral qualities of human beings, such as "benevolence", "righteousness", "courtesy" and "wisdom", are expanded and developed from the above-mentioned "four hearts". However, such expansion and development cannot be separated from learning and cultivation. It is precisely on the basis of this understanding that Mencius proposed the idea of "goodness" of human nature. Different from Mencius' thought, Xunzi put forward the idea of "evil" of human nature. It also makes a profound analysis and discussion of the human nature of "evil", thus providing the basis of human nature theory for his education and teaching ideas.

He pointed out that human nature is "the nature of heaven" and "cannot be learned or done". That is to say, human nature is born like this, not formed through learning and practice. It is also pointed out that Yao and Shun, as "holy kings", or cruel "Jie" and "Zhi", or "gentlemen" or "villains", have no differences in their natures. What is the specific content of Xunzi's "nature of heaven"? It refers to "the eyes like to see beautiful colors, the ears like to hear beautiful sounds, the mouth likes to taste delicious, the heart likes benefits, and the body likes comfort and ease." which are inherent in human beings' physiological and psychological instincts and desires. He believes that if human nature is allowed to develop freely, it will lead to a series of "evil" consequences, such as "competition", "mutiny", "licentiousness", and so on. Based on this understanding, Xunzi judged the nature of man as "evil". Therefore, he proposed that the natural nature of human beings should not be "obedient", should not be allowed to develop and expand, and must be controlled and reformed. He called the moderation and transformation of human nature "Wei".

He said: "nature is the natural material of man; Grand laws, etiquette, moral norms are tools for people to process and transform nature. Without nature, there is no object for law, etiquette and moral norms to be processed and transformed. Without artificial processing and transformation, human nature cannot become better by itself." It clearly reveals the relationship between "human nature" and "artificial processing and transformation". "Human nature" is just like raw materials that have not been processed and carved in the factory. "artificial processing and transformation" is a code of etiquette and other codes of conduct used to control and transform "human nature". Without "human nature", "artificial processing and transformation" will lose the object to play its role. Without "artificial processing and transformation", "human nature" is just like raw materials will not automatically become beautiful and practical products. Therefore, efforts should be made to promote the combination and unification of the two. Only when this close combination and unity are achieved, "artificial processing and transformation" has played a full role and "human nature" has been fully transformed, can the "sage", as an ideal personality model, achieve unity in his reputation, moral realm and practical achievements, and be highlighted. Only by doing so can the world achieve stable, orderly operation and development.

He emphasized that human nature is "inborn", but it is "changeable". That is to say, it can be transformed. He said: "by concentrating on taking measures to regulate customs, one can cultivate one's personality; Single-minded but not half-hearted, can gradually become

accumulation. Regulation of custom changes the will, long arrangement will change the nature". The so-called "accumulation" refers to the knowledge and customs formed through continuous learning and summarization in the long-term social life practice. These knowledge and customs can fully play the role of transforming human nature and improving human character. As long as people can study and cultivate persistently for a long time, and strictly follow the rules of etiquette and law, their physical and psychological instincts and desires of "like to see beautiful colors", "like to hear beautiful sounds", "like to taste delicious", "like benefits", "like comfort and ease" will be restrained and reformed. His ideological quality can be constantly improved, thus achieving the "gentleman" personality. This fully illustrates the significance and value of learning and self-cultivation from the perspective of transforming human nature.

2. Theory of ideal personality

Like Confucius and Mencius, Xunzi also proposed "sage" and "gentleman" as the value target of education and teaching and the personality model that people follow.

In his ideological system, "sage" is the highest level of personality image, mainly with the following characteristics.

First, he pointed out that the innate nature of "saints" is the same as that of ordinary people, and there is nothing special about them. That is to say, "Sage" is not born. The formation of "Sage" personality is the result of unremitting efforts to learn and cultivate. Therefore, no matter who studies hard and cultivates himself, he will have a bright prospect of becoming a "saint". Obviously, this kind of thinking of Xunzi can help people to improve their self-consciousness and self-confidence in studying hard and strengthening their self-cultivation. With the improvement of people's consciousness and confidence in learning and self-cultivation, the effect of education and teaching can be constantly improved. The significance and value of education and teaching can be constantly demonstrated. Society will be able to achieve stability and development.

Second, he pointed out that the burden of governing the world is the heaviest, with the most problems and difficulties. What he faces is the broad masses of people. Without extremely strong energy, analysis and discrimination ability and extremely high wisdom, he cannot bear the burden of governing the world. The "Sage" has such energy, ability and wisdom, so only the "Sage" can assume the responsibility of governing the world. In a word, "the sage is a man of complete morality and perfection, who is the standard to measure right and wrong in the world." That is to say, "saints" have reached a perfect and beautiful state in terms of ideological quality, practical work ability, and practical contributions to society. Therefore, "Sage" is the most noble and greatest personality model. However, in the actual social life, there are few people who can meet the requirements of "sage" character. Therefore, Xunzi, like Confucius, put the "gentleman" personality as the focus of his discussion.

In Xunzi's opinion, what qualities should a "gentleman" have?

First, he clearly pointed out that, in terms of innate cognitive and behavioral abilities, "gentleman" and "villain" are the same. The same is true of the psychology of pursuing honor, interests and seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages. That is to say, there is no difference between a "gentleman" and a "villain" in terms of the basic qualities inherent in life. Therefore, he said: "Ordinary people can become saints like Yu". That is to say, because all human beings have the same psychology and basic activity ability, they can become a personality model with noble character, great contribution and respect like Yu. However, in real life, there really exist "gentleman" and "villain", two distinct personalities. Why is this? Xunzi believed that there were two main reasons. On the one hand, it is because of the different purposes of learning. The learning purpose of a gentleman is to "improve". That is, to reform and improve themselves as the purpose and destination of learning. Only when they have been transformed and improved can they make outstanding contributions to society. Therefore, in the process of learning, they are able to use the knowledge and theory they have learned to guide their own practical activities and set an example for others with their noble character and outstanding achievements. The "villain" takes self display as the learning purpose. Therefore, their learning is just regard the knowledge and theory they have learned as a decoration and an exhibit, so their learning is only shown in their mouth. It is precisely because of the difference in learning between the two, which leads to the difference in personality. On the other hand, he pointed out that "a gentleman" and "a villain" have the same mood of seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages, but "the way to seek them is different". The way for "gentlemen" to seek "benefits" and avoid "harm" is completely reasonable and moral, while "villains" are desperate to seek personal benefits, and even take the path of breaking the law and committing crimes. This will inevitably result in a huge difference in personality between the two.

Secondly, the "gentleman" judges the speech theory with "etiquette and justice" as the standard. He pointed out that any speech theory that does not conform to the thought of "the former king" and does not conform to etiquette and justice is "treacherous speech". Such "treacherous words" "although arguing, the gentleman will not listen". The so-called "the former king" is his ideal "holy king". At the same time, he also pointed out that the "gentleman" has the dauntless spirit of dedication to morality.

Third, "gentleman" has different "aspiration" from ordinary people. Once its "aspiration" is established, it is extremely firm. The principle of seeking truth from facts that he adheres to will never waver under any circumstances.

In a word, "words must be reasonable, do must conform to the requirements", that is, words and deeds must be reasonable and objective, which is the character and characteristics of a "gentleman".

3. Methodology of education and teaching

Xunzi had a deep thinking and a more comprehensive understanding of the problems of education and teaching, and thus put forward a more systematic theory of education and teaching.

First, he pointed out that through education, people will not only improve their nature and character, but also their status and life prospects will be improved and better. He stressed that the only way to make himself “status increases, intelligence increases, wealth increases” is to receive education and study well. This fundamentally affirmed the value and significance of education and learning.

Second, he pointed out that respecting teachers and valuing education is of great significance to the future and destiny of the country and the stable development of society. He emphasized that respecting teachers and valuing education is the top priority for the rise and fall of the country. As for how to govern the country and manage the people, Xunzi’s proposition is to “apply both etiquette and law”. The “ceremony” covers three basic contents: first, serve the heaven and earth, which is the basis for the survival of people and all things; second, respect the ancestors, who are the basis for the existence and continuity of the clan; the third is to respect the monarch and teachers, who are the basis for social stability and development. It clearly emphasized that respecting teachers and valuing education is the fundamental strategy of national governance.

Third, he said, “can’t stop learning.” Emphasize that learning must be persistent, but never superficial. He pointed out that people have the ability to know things, and the laws of things’ operation and change can also be known by people; At the same time, he also pointed out that people’s understanding of things cannot be boundless, aimless and unplanned. Because as an individual, his ability, time and life span are limited and short, and the things and problems he faces are infinite and diverse. Therefore, we must plan our study, some things to do, some things not to do. Otherwise, he will become a “fool” who can accomplish nothing. It emphasizes the necessity and importance of teaching by subject and training by category.

Fourth, he pointed out that in the process of learning, we should be open-minded, attentive and calm, so that we can understand and grasp the objective laws of the movement of things.

Fifth, he pointed out that “doing” should be the ultimate goal and destination of learning. First of all, according to his own experience, he emphasized that “thinking” is inseparable from “learning” and is based on “learning”. Secondly, he emphasized that the goal of both “learning” and “thinking” is “doing”, and “doing” must be the foothold. He pointed out that only when we put what we have learned into practice and achieve success, can we understand and grasp the truth of things deeply and clearly, and can we also be called the ultimate goal of learning.

To sum up, Xunzi’s education and teaching thought is the same as Confucius’. The establishment of Xunzi’s educational and teaching ideology greatly enriched the content of Confucian educational and teaching ideology. It has not only made outstanding contributions to the development of Chinese traditional educational thought, but also has its important significance and value today.

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