

A Comparison of Comenius's Pansophia Education and Kūkai's Zenjin Education

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Abstract

In the history of education, Comenius, a Czech educator, put forward the idea of Pansophia education in the 17th century and put it into practice briefly. In the 9th century Japan, a monk educator named Kūkai also implemented Zenjin education, which has many similarities with Pansophia education. The comparison between Pansophia education and Zenjin education is helpful to dialectically understand these two shining educational ideas in the history of education. Whether judged from content of education or target students of education, both Comenius's Pansophia Education and Kūkai's Zenjin education can be said to be idealistic education and their theory and practice are still of great significance for the development of education in the present world.

Keywords

Comenius, Kūkai, Pansophia Education, Zenjin Education

1. Introduction

Comenius, “who can be regarded as the last educator of European feudal society and also the first educator of the new bourgeoisie” (Zhao, 2003), put forward the idea of “Pansophia” or “teaching all things to all people” (Comenius, 1999). This idea won Comenius a high praise of “being the first to pay attention to the educational problems of the ordinary people” (Comenius, 1999), and it also became one of his great contributions in the history of education. Actually, in the Japanese Heian Period, which predates Comenius more than 800 years ago, there lived a religious reformer and monk educator whose name is Kūkai (774-835). Kūkai already paid attention to the education of ordinary people and put it into reality when he practiced Zenjin education (also called Whole Person Educa-

tion) aiming at cultivating talents who could master Confucianism, Confucianism, and Taoism for Japan's future. Comenius's Pansophia education and Kūkai's Zenjin education have many similarities as well as their own limitations. Although they lived far apart in different periods, they both wrote a glorious page in the history of education with their shining educational ideas.

The two educators, who not only guided the advancement of their own national education with their thoughts, but also practiced their own educational thoughts with their own hands, are definitely great masters of education. Comparing Pansophia education and Zenjin education can be of positive theoretical and practical significance for understanding the thoughts of education from these two educators.

This paper consists of three parts, first, the author makes an analysis of the backgrounds of both educators; second, a comparison of both contents of education and target students of both theories are made; third, an introduction of education practice conducted by both educators are made, meanwhile, the reasons leading to their failure are also explored.

2. The Motivation for the Emergence of These Two Ideas on Education—Dissatisfaction with Realistic Education

Comenius has the experience of studying abroad and has been engaged in education for a long time. Through personal experience, he had a strong disgust with the school education at that time, believing that no matter what type of school it was, there were many drawbacks. The drawback may be the inequity of educational opportunities, that is, "where there are schools, they are not established for the whole society, but only for the rich. Unless the poor have some special opportunity, such as gaining some pity from the rich, they cannot go to school" (Comenius, 1999); the drawback can also be educational methods which are so severe and tiresome, "so that the school becomes a place of terror for children, a slaughterhouse of their intellect" (Comenius, 1999); or further it can be the absence of educational contents, "people cannot receive serious or extensive education but absurd and harmful education. The two most important aspects in education, piety and virtue, are mostly neglected" (Comenius, 1999)... Comenius once asserted that "there has not been a perfect school before" (Comenius, 1999).

Comenius's dissatisfaction with the reality of education made himself devoted to the study of Pansophia after the 1630s. The so-called "Pansophia", in his own words, is "to teach all things to all people". Pansophia has become the "core of his life-long educational activities and educational thoughts" (Wang, Xia, & Zhu, 2010) and this idea can be found in his representative works such as *Schola Pansophica*, *Pampaedia*, *Orbis Pictus*, *Didactica Magna* and other writings.

Like Comenius, Kūkai was also very dissatisfied with the education in Japan at his time. Kūkai studied abroad as a monk in Tang Dynasty for two years, i.e. from 804 to 806. He witnessed with his own eyes that in Tang Dynasty, "there is a private primary school for kids in every community; and there is a higher school

for young people in every county” (Teruhiro & Yukatsu, 1965). Therefore, he was extremely dissatisfied with the lagging education in Japan at that time, and criticized it from two aspects: first, he pointed out that in Japan at that time “there was only one higher school, and there was no private primary schools, so the poor or the lower class children could not go to school” (Teruhiro & Yukatsu, 1965), that is to say, except for schools with strict admission restrictions, such as the official training institution and the National School and some private schools set up by nobles to train their own children, there is no school for ordinary people; second, Kūkai believed that school education should integrate knowledge of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, but at that time the monks blindly specialized in Buddhist scriptures, while schools only taught Confucianism. Therefore, as the founder of Shingon sect of Buddhism in Japan, while he was cultivating his own disciples, Kūkai envisaged implementing Zenjin education that opens the door of school education to ordinary people and cultivates generalists who are proficient in Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. His idea can be found in his *Shugeishuchiin-shiki-awasete-jo* (Ideas on Establishing a School for Training Talents with Multiple Arts).

3. Two Ideas about Education

Comenius’ Pansophia education focuses on two aspects, one is the content of education, namely “all things”; the other is the target students of education, namely “all people”. In these two aspects, Pansophia education and Zenjin education have some obvious similarities and differences.

1) Comparison of content of education

Comenius’s “all things” refers to extensive and comprehensive science or wisdom, that is, the so-called “extensive teaching” and “comprehensive education”, which enable people to “learn everything so that they can become wise, virtuous, and religious” (Comenius, 1999). Comenius made plans for an ideal school, the Pansophia School. In his book *Schola Pansophica* (Ren, 2001), he said: “in such a school all people can be educated, and they can learn the subjects necessary for their present and future life to a perfect degree”. “We hope that all the essences in the field of knowledge can take root in the mind”, and the young future wise man “will possess the necessary knowledge, understand the reasons for everything, know how to use all knowledge correctly and how to save it”. Moreover, Comenius believes that training students how to practise should also be included in Pansophia education, emphasizing that knowledge must be coupled with practical activities for their future life, and he also expressly stated that “our students in Pansophia school are not learning for the school, but to learn for their own living”, so that all Pansophia education receivers “can be suitable for everything, skilled and diligent, and can be entrusted with all daily things in the future”.

However, Comenius also set certain conditions for the “all things” taught to “all people”. As a knowledge structure, Pansophia runs through his teaching content and curriculum. According to his Panosophism, the following basic require-

ments for the teaching content and curriculum shall be satisfied: first, they must be useful for the realization of people's "real purpose", that is, they must be useful in practical life; second, they must be liberal; third, they have to be limited in quantity but high in quality (Zhao, 2003). His underlying idea is that "we cannot make one think that we require everyone to know (exactly or deeply) all arts and sciences. Such knowledge in itself is useless, and life is short, and no one can do that" (Comenius, 1999). He hopes such education can help human beings to eliminate superstitions and prejudices, as well as all kinds of chaos and disputes in society, and finally achieve the real purpose of learning for life.

It is clear that Comenius' Pansophia education starts from the individual and serves the purpose of the present life and life in the future. His three principles of teaching content and curriculum show that although he values the importance of "broad education", at the same time he can recognize the limitations of human time and ability, which has a certain dialectical vision. However, because he lived in the transitional period between the old and the new eras, and served as a fraternity pastor, he could not get rid of the influence of religious theology. All these factors make Comenius's idea on Pansophia education consist of "both religious knowledge and secular knowledge; both classical subjects and realistic subjects; both scientific knowledge and traditional teachings of backward superstition" (Teng, 2005). This is due to the limitations of the times and Comenius's personal experience.

Different from Comenius's idea about education which serves the purpose of individual life and study, Kūkai's intention was to cultivate leaders who will be responsible for Japan's future, so he not only planned his ideal school, Shugei shuchi-in (School for Training Talents with Multiple Arts), but also put forward a system of comprehensive knowledge in his *Shugeishuchiin-shiki-awasete-jo*. The concept of "Shugei shuchi" comes from *The Great Nikkei* and *Maha Prajna Sutra* and its purpose is to cultivate every individual to become a person with Bodhicitta as well as multiple arts (Karasawa, 1984). This system mainly includes the "Ten Forms of Understanding" and Pañca-vidyā (or the Five Sciences or Studies of India)¹ and other Exoteric and Esoteric teachings, as well as general knowledge such as Nine Classics², Six Arts³, Nine Schools of Thought⁴, Three Mysterious Books and Three Books of History⁵, Seven Strategies and Seven Dynasties Books⁶, poetry of different styles. In addition, both monks and secular teachers should be recruited to teach Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and

¹Ten Forms of Understanding refers to the social knowledge corresponding to the ten states of mind advocated by Indian Buddhist philosophy; Pañca-vidyā refers to (1) śabda, grammar and composition; śilpakarmasthāna, the arts and mathematics; cikitsā, medicine; hetu, logic; adhyātma, philosophy.

²Nine Classics include *Book of Changes*, *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Rites*, *Legend of Spring and Autumn Century* by Zuo Qiuming, *The Book of Filial Piety*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius* and *The Rites of Zhou Dynasty*.

³Six arts include ritual, music, archery, carriage, calligraphy, mathematics.

⁴The nine schools of thought of ancient Chinese scholars include the Confucians, the Taoists, the Yin-Yang, the Legalists, the Logicians, the Mohists, the Political Strategists, the Eclectics, and the Agriculturists.

other kinds of knowledge, and they should pay attention to the moral education and cultivation of students while educating them intellectually. It can be seen that Kūkai wants to implement an education that allows people to be educated to develop in an all-round way through “Shugei shuchi”, and cultivate a whole person or a person with multiple arts who can protect the country, benefit the Japanese people, and take on the future of Japan. However, due to the large scale of the system and the lack of systematic content, it is difficult to guarantee both its implementation and the realization of Kūkai’s expected results.

2) Comparison of the target students of education

Comenius was a great democratic educator with full love for human beings. He had sympathy especially for the poor and the oppressed. He believes that all people are born equal, having the same nature, and everyone has the right to be educated. His Pansophia education is to “teach all things to all people”. In *Schola Pansophica*, he said, “we want all people to be educated so that every human being can prevent themselves from perishing forever by going astray on the way to the shadow of death” (Ren, 2001).

From the perspective of fortune, Comenius believes that a rich man without wisdom is like a pig full of bran, a poor and ignorant man is like a burden-bearing donkey, and a beautiful and ignorant person is just like a parrot with beautiful feathers or a golden scabbard with a dull knife (Comenius, 1999). Moreover, he advocated that “not only the children of the rich and the powerful people should go to school, but all boys and girls in towns and villages, regardless of being rich or poor, should go to school alike” (Comenius, 1999). “If craftsmen, villagers and porters, and even women are educated, and when they can learn to see, praise, and know God everywhere, they can live happily in this anxious life and have more desires and hopes for the next life” (Comenius, 1999).

From the perspective of intelligence and aptitude, Comenius believes that everyone has the foundation of receiving education and has the ability to comprehend things. In response to the views from the ruling classes of successive dynasties, which slandered the working people as having low intelligence and inability to seek knowledge, he argued that “in fact, there are very few people with extremely low intelligence, as rare as those who were born with disabilities” (Comenius, 1999). He said “there isn’t such a blurred mirror so blurred that it cannot reflect any image at all, and we can hardly find a rough board so rough that nothing can be engraved on at all” (Comenius, 1999). He also emphasized that “Education is needed by everyone. We can see this when we think about the various degrees of ability. Stupid people need to be educated so that they can get rid of the stupidity of their nature. No one doubts that. In fact, smart people need education more because if a lively mind does not engage in useful things,

⁵Three Mysterious Books include *Zhuangzi*, *Laozi* and *Book of Changes*, Three Books of History include *Shih Chi* or *Historical Records*, *Han Shu* or *History of the Han Dynasty*, *Hou Han Shu* or *the History of Later Han Dynasty* or *Shih Chi* or *Historical Records* and *Dongguan Han Ji*.

⁶Seven Strategies include *Jilue*, *Liuyilue*, *Zhuzilue*, *Poetry and Fulue*, *Bingshulue*, *Shushulue*, and *Fangjilue*, Seven Dynasties Histories include 130 volumes of *Jinshu*, 100 volumes of *Songshu*, 50 volumes of *Qishu*, 36 volumes of *Chenshu*, and 80 volumes of *Zhoushu* and *Suishu*.

he will engage in useless, strange, and harmful things” (Comenius, 1999).

From the perspective of gender, there was a traditional belief at that time that women were not only physically inferior to men, but also inferior in intelligence. But Comenius maintains that “there is no good reason at all to think that women are unable to pursue knowledge”, and he believes that women, just like men, “have the same keen perception and ability to seek knowledge (and often much better than men)” (Comenius, 1999).

From the above-mentioned, we can see that Comenius’s “all people” include everyone who is born a human being. He also argued from religious teachings that all human beings were created by God, and that God showed no partiality to human beings, so “if we allow the intellect of some people to be cultivated and exclude others, we are not only hurting those who are of the same nature with us, but also hurting God Himself” (Comenius, 1999). Although in a class society, it is almost impossible to realize the fantasy of “all people” including the poor and women as the object of education, but the view that everyone has an equal right for education was of great progressive significance at the time. “His theory of education, which does not target only a few people, believing that everyone can receive education of scientific knowledge, marks a new stage of the development of education theory” (Jiang, 1984).

Like Comenius, Kūkai’s religious view leads him to believe that everyone is equal in front of Buddha-nature and that everyone can become a Buddha. This makes Kūkai has a broad feeling of education, i.e. “everyone is a disciple of the Buddha, who can understand the teachings of Shakyamuni, and everyone in the world can treat each other with respect, just like brothers” (Teruhiro & Yukatsu, 1965). Therefore, he wanted to implement a practice of education that did not discriminate lower social classes, and all those who aspired to learn, being monks or not, being rich or poor, could go to school and receive education. He also believes that Shugei shuchi-in should provide free living expenses for teachers and students to relieve them from financial worries, which is undoubtedly a great guarantee for poor children to go to school. However, in the Heian period, the Japanese refused to educate women in both public and private schools, this became a hindrance to Kūkai’s view of knowledge and education. Although his idea about Zenjin education reached to such a loftiness of “ignoring people’s social status and financial conditions”, (Teruhiro & Yukatsu, 1965), Kūkai still failed to pay attention to women’s education. This is of course due to the limitations of historical development.

4. The Practice of Two Thoughts of Education

Based on the above-mentioned principles of practicality, broadness, and refinement, Comenius put forward a lot of opinions on reforming the teaching content and curriculum schools at that time. His proposal for curriculum reform not only broke the limitation of the “seven arts” in the early Middle Ages, but also broke the the tradition that Latin schools and liberal arts middle schools

only focused on classical works teaching since the Reformation. In order to reform the teaching content, he also wrote many textbooks such as *Orbis Pictus* and so on. What is particularly noteworthy is that although knowledge of religious theology was still retained in his curriculum system, it was squeezed into a secondary position because of the introduction of a large number of new practical subjects (Zhao, 2003).

Comenius devoted his whole life working hard for the education of the toiling people. When he was in Hungary, he drew up a plan for his ideal school, called “Blueprint for Pansophia School”, which was very rich in content. In 1651, one Pansophia School was established in Sharos-Patek, Hungary, but only 3 of the 7 grades planned to be created were actually opened. Although his Blueprint project was unsuccessful, it was one of Comenius’ influential works, and his greater contribution was to “establish a system of pedagogy and give it a new meaning” (Teng, 2005). He “left his footprints as a pioneer and the fruitful results of hard work in all important fields of education” (Zhao, 2003), which makes him enjoy a high position in the history of education.

Kūkai also set up a Shugei shuchi-in in 828 A.D. as an embodiment of his idea on Zenjin education. *Shugeishuchiin-shiki-awasete-jo* is the blueprint of his ideal school. He wants to target students from a wide range of classes in order to discover and cultivate talents who will be responsible for Japan’s future. When recruiting students, Shugei shuchi-in did not bring the following aspects into consideration: social class, monks or secular people, rich or poor, and for the first time in the history of Japanese education, the door of school education was opened to the common people. However, due to the lack of suitable successors and stable financial support, Shugei shuchi-in only lasted for 19 years.

Kūkai’s Zenjin education in Shugei shuchi-in is characterized by being free of charge, comprehensive in knowledge and equal in opportunity, which is an innovation in the field of education at that time, so it is a symbol for the beginning of civilian education in the history of Japanese education. Therefore, it is called “the pyramid in Japan’s history of education” (Saito, 1978). It has produced profound influence on the changing of the content of Japanese school education and Japan’s education system. It is a great stroke on the picture of the history of Japanese education and it was also unprecedented in the history of world education at that time. It will be remembered forever in the history of Japanese education.

5. Conclusion

Comenius and Kūkai are separated by more than 800 years. As educators, one is a democracy follower and theologian, and the other is the founder and religious reformer of the new sect of Heian Buddhism. Their special identities make it possible that people both from religious and secular worlds can find what they need from their thoughts. Whether to talk about the content of education or the target students of education, both Pansophia education and Zenjin education embody a kind of educational idealism, which makes it difficult for their educa-

tional practice to transcend the constraints of realistic conditions and be implemented for a long time. However, the two educators, who not only guided the advancement of their own national education with their thoughts, but also practiced their own educational thoughts with their own hands, are definitely great masters of education.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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