

Confucius's Educational Thoughts in the Analects

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Abstract

This paper aims to study the exposition of educational ideas such as educational objects, principles and methods in Confucius' Analect. And it also aims to explore the influence and contribution of Confucius' Analects to the history of Chinese education. Finally, it points out the significance of learning the educational thought in Confucius' Analects. This study recommends that Confucius' educational thought in the Analects has a profound and lasting impact on China's educational history.

Keywords

Confucius, The Analects, Educational Thoughts

1. Introducing Confucius and the Analects

1.1. Introducing Confucius and His Lifetime

Confucius, the Chinese thinker and social philosopher, was born in 551 B.C in the country of Lu. Unfortunately, his family was very poor and his parents both were dead in his childhood. However, he began his early political career in his youth. First, he held several government posts and then became the minister of justice. But he held these positions only for a short time because of conflicts with his superiors. From then on, he never returned to political life. Instead, he turned to teaching. He travelled around and taught the disciples all over the country. He had taught 3000 disciples when he died at the age of 72 (Xu, 1993).

1.2. Introducing the Analects

Through his life, he was best known as a teacher, his disciples praised his talent for teaching and recorded these teaching, which were handed down from one generation to another, known as the Analects. The analects of Confucius are one

of the Confucian classics. It is a collection of 20 essays, 492 chapters, 11,705 characters, which in forms of quotations and short dialogues. It mainly records the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples. Analects, together with his philosophy ideas were known as Confucianism. The analects of Confucius are not only a classic work of Confucianism but also play an important role in Chinese ancient traditional culture.

In the Analects, he has many wise saying about nature, the world, humans and the government. Especially, his ideas about education were so advanced. Thus, it had a very important influence upon China's educational history. Confucianism is the central culture of Chinese ancient culture. What's more, the teaching thought of Confucius occupied an important place in Chinese educational history because he had advoked some advanced ideas about teaching and learning in ancient China (Woo, 2018).

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to explore Confucius educational thoughts and its influence.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To analyze Confucius' thoughts on the object of Education.
- 2) To examine Confucius' thoughts on the purpose of Education.
- 3) To find out Confucius' thoughts on the methods of Education.
- 4) To discuss Confucius' thought on the principles of Education.
- 5) To study Confucius' thought on teachers (Bahtilla and Xu, 2021).

2. Literature Review

Relevant domestic and foreign research shows that: 1) in terms of research topics, there are many studies on the theme of "Confucius' educational thought", while there are few studies on the theme of "Confucius' educational thought embodied in the Analects of Confucius". 2) In terms of theoretical research, some theoretical research lacks relevant theoretical basis. 3) In terms of content and quantity, domestic related research is better than foreign related research. 4) In terms of research methods, the proportion of practical discussion and theoretical research is large, but the empirical research is less, and the practical operability needs to be strengthened.

It can be seen that relevant domestic studies mainly focus on Confucius' educational thought, and study the impact of Confucius' Educational Thought on all aspects of Chinese education, such as management education in colleges and universities, ideological and political education in colleges and universities, and the history of Chinese education. However, there are few specific studies on the educational thought in Confucius' Analects and its influence and contribution to the history of Chinese education.

In general, through combing the research at home and abroad, it also lays a

theoretical foundation for this research, clarifies the ideas, provides the research methods and contents, and reveals the development direction of this research.

3. Confucius Thoughts on Education

3.1. Confucius Thoughts on the Object of Education

Confucius advocated public education, particularly free universal education. He once said, "Education should be provided for all people with no discrimination." Before that, in ancient society, only princes and nobles had the right to receive education. The emergence of Confucius' educational thought broke this situation. The object of education expanded from nobility to civilians, and expanded the social foundation and talent source of education. Everyone is equal in front of education and everyone can have the right to be educated. According to the historical records, *Biographies of Zhongni disciples*, among Confucius' disciples are Sima Niu and Meng Yizi who were born into an aristocratic family; there are Yan Lu and Yan Yuan born in poor families; and Zigong, who was born into a merchant family. Most of them are poor and lowly (Guo, 2015).

3.2. Confucius Thoughts on the Purpose of Education

The purpose of Confucius' education is to cultivate a "gentleman". A "gentleman" needs both virtue and talent. On the one hand, Confucius taught students the traditional "six arts" (ceremony, music, shooting, royal, calligraphy and Numeracy), which was the education of cultural knowledge and skills. On the other hand, Confucius also taught students moral education. He emphasized that moral education was the primary goal of cultivating people. He said that "a gentleman cherishes virtue" (Xie and Chen, 2013). Moral education is carried out through knowledge education. Otherwise, knowledge education serves moral education. Moral education is like a lighthouse guiding the way forward, and knowledge education is like a cornerstone. Moral education and knowledge education are unified and complementary. Both of them play an important role in people's lifelong education (Tan, 2020).

4. Confucius Thoughts on the Methods of Education

4.1. Aptitude-Based Teaching Methods

Aptitude-based teaching Methods means esteem the different of individual and teaching students according to their aptitudes. Confucius always paid attention to the individual difference in teaching their disciples. He once pointed out that Zilu was brave and Zigong was understanding. He also recognized some of his disciples may have higher intelligence while others have better skills. So, he uses different teaching methods according to the different characters of his disciples.

4.2. Elicitation Method of Teaching

Elicitation method of teaching is the most important part of Confucius' educa-

tional thought. Confucius once said, “Don’t enlighten the student until he tries to understand but still can’t figure it out; don’t enlighten him until he understands but can’t improve his expression. If he can’t draw inferences from one instance, don’t go on.” Confucius believed that learning was a process of active exploration and understanding. This elicitation method embodies the student-centered teaching methods and let students be subjective and initiative in learning. It also cultivates students’ ability of independent thinking. Confucius is also good at using questions to inspire the students to think. He guided students step by step in finding problems, analyzing problems and solving problems in the process of active thinking.

5. Confucius Thoughts on the Principles of Education

5.1. Constant Learning and Review Frequently

Confucius said: “To learn and practice constantly, is it not a pleasure?” This is the beginning part of The Analects. He believes the way of obtain new knowledge is to put it under constant practice. If we apply theoretical knowledge to practice and train our talents, it is also a happy thing. He also said, “If a man keeps reviewing his old, so as continually to be acquiring the new, he may be a teacher”.

The “Old” is the foundation of “new”, and the “new” is the development of the “old”. That means get inspiration from old knowledge and realize new knowledge. Learning itself is a process of alternating old and new knowledge and practicing it repeatedly. “Review Frequently” means repeat study and practice. It reflects the mutual connection between the “old knowledge” and the “new knowledge”. Only through this way can we firmly grasp the knowledge we have learned (Lin, 2017).

5.2. Think Carefully and Learn Deeply

Think carefully means one should put a great emphasis to think during the process of learning. Learning without thinking means one should not learn without thinking. Confucius emphasized both learning and thinking as one of his famous sayings, “He who learns but does not think is confused; he who thinks but does not learn is lost.” This tells us that learning cannot be separated from thinking, and we cannot understand knowledge without thinking. If you only think and don’t learn, then thinking is also utopian and superficial. So, think carefully can help us better learning and learning can help us think deeply. The two complement each other (Reber & Slingerland, 2011).

5.3. Be Modest and Be Realistic

Confucius said, “To know what you know and what you do not know, that is true knowledge.” In fact, it tells us that students should have a realistic attitude towards knowledge learning. If you know, you admit you know; if you don’t know, you admit you don’t know. We can’t muddle along in learning. We

should point out the knowledge that we don't know or don't understand, so that the teacher can adjust the teaching content according to the students' real reflection and adapt to the students' learning level effectively and precisely. Confucius also said, "When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers. I will select their good qualities and follow them; I will also choose their bad qualities to avoid them." This sentence of Confucius tells us that we can also learn from each other in education and teaching. You can look at the words and deeds of your peers. There must be something worth learning. Choose a place where others have advantages to study; see the shortcomings of others, reflect on whether they have the same shortcomings, and if so, correct them.

6. Confucius Thoughts on Teachers

6.1. Teaching by Words and Deeds

Confucius said, "If he is honest, others will follow him without his orders. If he is not honest, others will not obey his orders." It means that one's own conduct is correct. Even if he doesn't give orders, his subordinates will obey. If his own conduct is not correct and even if he gives orders, thus his subordinates will not obey. So, we can say that the words and deeds of teachers will directly affect the behavior of students. What students are required to do; teachers must do it first. What students are not allowed to do, teachers themselves do not do it first. Teachers should be consistent in their words and deeds, so as to establish prestige of students and play the role of an example.

6.2. Teaching in Motion and Tireless

Confucius said, "never tire of learning and never tire of teaching" means learning without being satisfied and teaching others without being tired. This tells us that teachers themselves should study all their life and keep learning. They can learn professional theoretical knowledge and teachers' skills. More importantly, they should also learn ideological and political education. They shouldn't be satisfied with the current situation. Only in this way can they be competent for teachers' work. It also a concrete embodiment of teachers' morality and style, which means that teachers should love their career, care for students with full enthusiasm and passion, then work hard and devote their whole life to education (Ng, 2009).

6.3. Teaching in Loving and Respecting

Confucius said, "Benevolent people love, wise people love." Benevolent people are those who are full of love. A wise man is a person who knows people and is good at their duties, especially good at identifying people. Confucius always cared about his students and was happy for their progress. He also pities for the students' sadness. Confucius used his words and deeds to practice the Chinese traditional noble ethics and style of teaching. Confucius' words and deeds also tell us that teachers are benevolent and wise. They should love students whole-

heartedly and take care of them, moistening things silently like “spring rain” (Huang, 2011).

7. Contribution of Confucius’ Educational Thought

Confucius was a great educator in ancient China, and his educational thought had a deep influence on the history of Chinese education. The educational thought embodied in the Analects is not only the crystallization of Confucius’ educational thought wisdom, but also the insights gained by Confucius in educational practice (Li, 2014).

7.1. Historical Position of Confucius’ Educational Thought

Confucius advocated that everyone is equal and everyone has the right to education. Confucius’ idea of “education without discrimination” made education popular and also made education face to the general public. Confucius’ educational thought laid the theoretical foundation for the popularization of education in future generations, and created a new century of education in the history of Chinese education.

7.2. Historical Contribution of Confucius’ Educational Thought

Confucius paid attention to teaching students according to their aptitude, so his education was very targeted and effective. Confucius also paid attention to enlightening education, which fully mobilized students’ enthusiasm and initiative in learning. Confucius also stressed that the pursuit of knowledge should be based on a correct attitude, and the pursuit of knowledge should be realistic first. The key to seeking knowledge is to have an open-minded and honest attitude. He also advocated that we should be diligent in thinking and combine learning with thinking. His education and learning methods reveal the basic laws of education and occupy an important position in the history of education in China.

Confucius spent his lifetime in doing educational work—teaching. He influenced his disciples with his personality, patience, loving, kindness, and moral characters. Just like the little rain in spring, helping his disciples quietly and effectively. Confucius’ noble ethics and style of teaching are like lighthouses, which illuminating the way for our teachers to move forward. It points out the direction and bringing strength to our teachers.

8. Conclusion

Nowadays, when we look back—2500 years ago, in ancient China, Confucius has already advoked the advanced teaching thoughts in Analects. These teaching thoughts have passed down thousands of years and it still applicable to China’s education today. How great the Analecta is! How wise Confucius is! Confucius’ educational thought is a valuable wealth of spiritual civilization in the history of Chinese education. We should learn from Confucius teaching thoughts and carry forward.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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