

# The Development History of Confucian Educational Thought and Its Impact on Contemporary Chinese Education

Zeqi Wei \*

School of Shandong Normal University, Jinan, China

## Abstract

Confucianism stretches forward in the long river of history and never fails; it has been given different missions and played different roles in every era; even when it encounters difficulties, it can still survive and revitalize itself, and it has nourished every generation in the thousands of years of the Chinese nation's history by subconsciously nourishing the people. Among them, the educational thought of Confucianism is a bright pearl in the treasure house of ancient thought and culture, which influences students and teachers of every generation silently; for example, Confucius' "teaching all kinds of things, and the six scriptures are all arts" embodies the wide range of educational objects and the richness of the content; its "benevolence" and "love" are the most important words of Confucianism. The idea of "benevolence and love" encourages learners to care for others and promotes social harmony and interpersonal relations; Mencius' "theory of goodness of nature" has shaped the character of the Chinese nation and established the moral foundation of the Chinese nation, which is important and irreplaceable for the strengthening of socialist moral construction. It has an important significance and irreplaceable role in strengthening the construction of socialist morality. By exploring the reasonable kernel and modern value of Confucian educational thought, we can promote modern science to push forward the new, to learn from the past, to change and develop, and to innovate theories; therefore, Confucian educational thought has an important reference value for modern education.

## Keywords

Confucian Educational Thought, Benevolence and Love, Modern Value.

## 1. Introduction

As one of the most profound and enduring philosophical systems in human history, Confucianism has shaped Chinese civilization for over two millennia. Rooted in the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and subsequent scholars, its influence extends beyond philosophy to deeply penetrate education, morality, and social governance. This paper explores the timeless relevance of Confucian educational thought, particularly its core concepts and modern implications for contemporary Chinese education and moral construction. The Enduring Legacy of Confucianism. From its birth during the Spring and Autumn Period to its transformation through successive dynasties—including its challenges under Qin's book burning, its elevation to orthodoxy in the Han Dynasty, and its philosophical evolution into Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty—Confucianism has demonstrated remarkable adaptability. It has survived historical upheavals and continuously reinvented itself, embedding its values into the fabric of Chinese society. Central to this legacy is its educational philosophy, which emphasizes moral cultivation, holistic development, and the pursuit of wisdom. Confucius' "teaching without discrimination" principles and "the six classics as comprehensive arts" advocate for inclusive education and the integration of moral, intellectual, and practical learning. These ideas prefigure today's emphasis on educational equity and the

"Five Educations" (morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor) in contemporary China.

Meanwhile, Mencius' "theory of the goodness of human nature" underscores all individuals' innate potential for virtue, arguing that moral education should nurture and refine this inherent goodness—a concept with profound implications for modern character education and socialist moral construction. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary contexts, this study seeks to illuminate Confucianism's irreplaceable role in cultivating ethical citizens and advancing a balanced, human-centered education system. As General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasizes the integration of "Five Educations" for all-around development, Confucian educational thought offers both historical resonance and pragmatic insights for building a progressive yet culturally rooted educational framework. [1]

## 2. Historical Stages of Confucianism's Development

Confucianism has gone through several stages of development, namely, "the period of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the period of the Qin Dynasty's burning of books and burying of Confucianism, the period of the establishment of the orthodox status, the period of encountering challenges, the period of the new development of the Cheng-Zhu Theory of Philosophy and the period of rejuvenation".

During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the Zhou royal family was in decline, the rites and music were in ruins, the vassals were fighting for supremacy, and the culture of private study was developing rapidly; in such a historical background, a hundred schools of thought contended for supremacy, and "Confucianism" was born in the fierce exchange of ideas and culture; at the time when such a system of rites and music was in ruins, and the collapse of patriarchy, Confucius vigorously promoted the system of rites and music and made the "benevolence" of Confucianism a new concept of the Chinese people, and made the "benevolence" of the Confucian people a new concept. At a time when the system of rites and music was collapsing and the patriarchal system was collapsing, Confucius vigorously promoted the system of rites and music, making the Confucian "benevolence" and "propriety" more in line with the trend of the times, and thus Confucianism was developed and became a unique branch of the Hundred Schools of Thought. Later, Dong Zhongshu put forward the idea of "Divine Right of Kings", which was appreciated and utilised by Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. At this time, Confucianism integrated the spiritual kernels of various schools of thought, and this period of Confucianism was therefore called "Neo-Confucianism". The "unity of the three religions" was put forward in the Sui Dynasty, integrating the three schools of thought of "Confucianism, Taoism and Dharma", and expanding the social and ruling basis of Confucianism; in the Song Dynasty, Confucianism reached a new high level by constantly searching for new ways to achieve it, and gave birth to "Cheng-Zhu Rigaku" and "Cheng-Zhu Rigaku". Cheng Zhu Science" and 'Lu Wang Xinxin' schools of thought, which had a far-reaching influence on later generations.

## 3. Influence of Confucius' Educational Thought

The influence of Confucius's educational thought of "teaching without discrimination and the six sutras are all arts" on contemporary Chinese education.

The so-called "education without categories" refers to the fact that there is no distinction between the objects of education. It means that education is given to all, regardless of whether they are noble or lowly, wise or foolish. In other words, all people have the same right to education. Confucius' 3,000 disciples came from different countries and nationalities, and among them were the sons of nobles and commoners; however, Confucius treated them equally, required them by the same standard, and educated them in the same way. Modern Zhu Ziqing,

in “Classical Commonplace - The Tenth of the Sons,” also commented, “There is one special thing about his teaching, which is that there is no class in teaching.” The methodology of “Teaching Without Classes” is not only full of philosophy and discernment, but also wisdom and love that enlightens life; the idea of democratisation embedded in “Without Classes” was particularly valuable in that era of strict hierarchy, and is similar to what we advocate today. The value of education that “all people have equal rights to education” echoes; this is also a fundamental reason why Confucius' idea of “education for all” can be passed on to the present day. Looking at today's society, education is still facing the uneven distribution of resources, due to the lack of flexibility of the system, resulting in the neglect of the individual differences of students, such as the children of the migrant population of education, primary and secondary schools to choose the problem of charging high fees for the cultivation of excellence and so on; the existence of these phenomena on the one hand, depriving some citizens of the right to equal access to education, and on the one hand, stifling the development of individuality and creativity in the development of the students; Therefore, to solve these problems, we must continue to urban and rural, inter-city, regional three aspects, increase the investment in rural education resources; reduce the urban and rural education differences, to ensure that every student's right to enrollment; at the same time, the education of different students, should be given the same respect and care; in this way, we can truly will be the Confucius of the idea of education without class re-injected into the soul of the river of history in a long history, long-flowing, everlasting. Only in this way can we truly reinject Confucius' idea of teaching all students without discrimination into our souls, which has a long history and will continue to endure.

In today's society, we advocate “five education” and “five education integration”; similarly, as early as two years ago, Confucius put forward “the six classics are all arts”, he emphasized that He emphasized the importance of both “culture and martial arts” and “rites, music, archery, imperialism, calligraphy and mathematics”; he attached importance to both ideology and morality, as well as cultural knowledge; he attached importance to both traditional culture and practical skills, reflecting the views of the “Confucian School” as a representative of the ancient school of thought. This reflects the Confucianism school as the representative of the ancient education of “the educated person's” both “civil and military, and the balance of all education”, which is the early embodiment of the promotion of democracy and the comprehensive development of human beings; at the same time, this is also an important reference for today's society to cultivate comprehensive development of the citizens of the new era. At the same time, it is also an important reference for today's society to cultivate new-age citizens with comprehensive development. Looking at today's society, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the National Education Conference that efforts should be made to build an education system for the all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labor, and to form a talent training system of the highest caliber; and that the “five educations” should be balanced in an all-round way, but also be “targeted”, and play a role in the “moral education” of the people. “Moral education plays a leading role in thinking, intellectual education plays a fundamental role in understanding, and physical education plays a fundamental role in physiology. With the fundamental task of “establishing morality and nurturing people”, we jointly accomplish the task of cultivating socialist builders and successors with all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics and labour.

The “moral education” echoes Confucius' idea of “educating people by virtue”, which divides “virtue” into four levels: “Tao, virtue, benevolence and art”, and “virtue” into “virtue” and “art”. “He divided 'virtue' into four levels, 'Tao, virtue, benevolence, and art', with 'to the Tao' being the highest criterion. The same as socialism with Chinese characteristics. [2]

#### 4. Influence of Mencius' Educational Thought

Influence of Mencius' educational thought of “the theory of the goodness of nature” on contemporary Chinese education

“The heart of compassion is the end of benevolence, the heart of shame is the end of righteousness, the heart of resignation is the end of propriety, and the heart of right and wrong is the end of wisdom.” According to Mencius, human beings are born with four kinds of goodness, which can only be developed into the four virtues of “benevolence, righteousness, reason and wisdom”, and “benevolence, righteousness, reason and wisdom” are the main contents of sexual goodness. Mencius' theory of goodness of nature also has an important significance and value to modern education; Mencius believes that all people are good by nature, but each person's development and potential are different; although students are the main body of learning, but in the process of learning, it is also indispensable for teachers to provide positive encouragement and guidance for the students' personality differences, and should pay attention to the individual differences in personalization, and help the students to form their strengths and specialties. In addition, each of us is pure and good by nature, and we need moral education to explore our “goodness fully” and ultimately realise our “realisation, improvement, and perfection” of human nature. Therefore, the nature of “goodness” is a small bud nurtured in the soil of human nature, which needs to be carefully taken care of by us to grow into a big tree. Therefore, the theory of goodness of nature also holds that moral education is a process of discovering and guiding individuals' inherent goodness and nature, which helps students form correct values and moral judgments. In addition to facilitating the personalized development of students and guiding and exploring the goodness of their innate nature, the Theory of the Goodness of Sex shapes the character of the Chinese nation; it establishes the moral foundation of the Chinese nation, which is gentle, kind, sincere and straightforward; it has indomitable resilience in the face of difficulties, and has the self-confidence and confidence to disseminate its own excellent culture. At the same time, the “Theory of Sexual Goodness” has an important significance and irreplaceable role in building modernised education and strengthening socialist moral construction in China today. [3]

#### References

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