

Cultural Quality Education in Chinese Universities: Rise, Rationales and Approaches

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Abstract: The development of Chinese higher education over the past 30 years cannot be separated from the reform of cultural quality education. The rise of the reform was under the background of emancipating the mind in the whole society and strengthening education reform in educational field. The purpose was to break through the disadvantages of narrow professional education and promote university students' comprehensive quality. Theoretically, it insists that true education is both cultural education and quality education, through which building human's cultural life and improving human's comprehensive quality. It advocates educating man rather than manufacturing tools. It takes culture as an integrity, not being separated apart. It insists on educating man with holistic and integrated culture, not separated culture, or prejudiced, narrow-minded culture. The approaches stress on both heritage and innovation, such as integrating humanistic education and science education, emphasizing national culture education, promoting poetry education, and meeting the needs of the modern, the world, and the future. It tries hard to enlarge and thicken university students' knowledge foundations, to broaden their specialty, to widen their visions, to cultivate their rational principle and thinking ability. On the whole, cultural quality education reform is Chinese innovation of educational theory and practice. It is effective in practice and has improved the quality of higher education in China.

Keywords: Cultural Quality Education, Chinese Higher Education Reform, Theoretical Innovation, Practical Approaches

1. Introduction

If we give a review of Chinese higher education in the past 30 years, we cannot avoid the topic of cultural quality education reform, which has sprung up since 1990s. It has set off the tide of Chinese higher education reform. The rise of the reform was under the background of emancipating the mind in the whole society and strengthening education reform in educational field. The purpose of the reform was to break through the disadvantages of narrow professional education and promote university students' comprehensive quality. It tries hard to enlarge and thicken university students' knowledge foundations, to broaden their specialty, to widen their visions, to cultivate their rational principle and thinking ability. In all, it's in reaction to the problems in education and in accordance with the time trend.

Theoretically, cultural quality education is not only a return to the essence of education, but also bringing new ideas. It insists that true education is both cultural education and quality education, through which building up human's

cultural life and improving human's comprehensive quality. It advocates educating people rather than manufacturing tools [1]. On the whole, cultural quality education reform is an innovation of Chinese educational theory and practice [2]. That is, it is a kind of innovation, not only in practice, but also in theory, and it is a kind of innovation with Chinese educational characteristics.

By now, the reform is still on the way, whereas new problems have appeared in the new time. How to get reference from the reform? How to make it go on? It's a new question. It's necessary to take a review of it. This paper will discuss the rise, rationales and practical approaches of the reform.

2. The Rise of Cultural Quality Education Reform

2.1. Causes and Forces for Cultural Quality Education Reform

Cultural quality education reform has sprung up in China

since the early of 1990s. In order to know better how and why Chinese cultural quality education reform could arise, let's first review the social and educational background of China in 1990s, which conditioned the reform. Of course, the social environments and educational surroundings were different from nowadays, which were as the followings:

- (a) There has been a need to emancipate the mind in the whole society. Since 1978, China has stepped into a new time by implementing "open policy" and "emancipating the mind". In 1992, Chinese great leader Deng Xiaoping made some speeches during his inspections in the southern China, in which Deng emphasized the need to further emancipate the mind and deepen the reform. It led to a new tide of reform in the whole society, including education reform.
- (b) As to education and university students, there was a shortage of knowledge among university students, either on their general knowledge or on their professional knowledge. On the one hand, due to the pressure of examination-oriented education system, university students' knowledge foundations were rather weak. On the other hand, due to the adjustment of faculties and departments at colleges and universities in the 1950s, university students' professional vision and knowledge of were very narrow.
- (c) There was some non-understanding or misunderstanding about Chinese traditional culture among the students. Because of the lack of knowledge, some students knew little about Chinese traditional culture, some criticized Chinese traditional culture without analysis, and some even regarded Chinese traditional culture as a burden.
- (d) The whole society was in a period of big transition, after the "open policy" and shifting from Planning Economy into Market Economy. Some people were becoming too materialistic, being eager for quick success, for getting quick money without hard work. Some young people were depressed and at a loss.

The problems in education were summed up as four aspects, as professor Wen Fuxiang said, "too weak cultural cultivation, too narrow specialized education, too utilitarian orientation and too strong common restrictions" [3]. And the problems among young students were summed up as two aspects: unsound personality and lack of knowledge. As to the unsound personality, it sounded that "personality was not sound enough, feelings were not healthy enough, habits were not good enough". Superficially, some of them hadn't developed good habits on their behaviors. Actually, it was due to unsound personality and unhealthy feelings.

As to the lack of knowledge, it was mainly due to the pressure of examination-oriented education system. The students study only what is relevant to the examinations. There was a popular saying in society, that is, "don't lose at the starting point". It brought much anxiety among students and their parents. There was a phenomenon of studying knowledge ahead of time. Most students studied beyond the natural learning rate, that is, "to study the knowledge of

primary school at kindergarten, to study the knowledge of middle school at primary school, to study the knowledge of university at middle school, and then study the codes of behavior and basic ethics which should be studied from kindergarten." In addition, there were various kinds of so-called crams schools and "superior classes" in society. The students had to go these crams schools and "superior classes" after school. In fact, some of the teaching materials, including the curriculum contents and syllabus, were arranged in advance, compared to many other countries.

2.2. Prevailing of Chinese Cultural Quality Education Reform

University education should respond to the problems and the needs. According to Chinese university situations at that time, there were important tasks for the university to cultivate young people, not only in terms of their knowledge, but also in terms of their behaviors, personal relationships and personality. And at same time, there were "remedial" tasks to help the students with their missed lessons, which should be studied in the lower schools. University quality education reform came into being.

One of the advocating and leading roles of the reform was Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST), which is a famous university in China. At that time, Academician Yang Shuzi, who is a Scientist, and also excellent at Chinese culture, worked as the president of HUST. Yang Shuzi made great efforts to carry out the reform of transmitting from emphasizing professional and scientific education to the integration of professional education, scientific education and humanistic education.

Two events reinforced Yang's decision to carry out the reform. One thing was a conversation with an American-Chinese professor in the US, when Yang was a visiting scholar there in the early 1980s. One day, the professor told Yang that he found that the Chinese students and scholars were good enough at English, but weak at Chinese history and culture. Another thing was a letter from a student after Yang became the president of HUST. The letter said that it was unfair for the university's attitude to English and Chinese. According the regulations of the university, if a student failed to pass College English Band 4 Test, he couldn't get university degree, whereas he could get the degree even if he was weak at Chinese, such as writing many wrong Chinese words and sentences, not knowing much about Chinese culture and history.

The reform in HUST consisted of a series of curriculum reform, including adding the cores of general education, setting up many humanistic lectures for the whole students. The reform achieved good effects, and made the university's cultural atmosphere better and improved the students' quality. And the reform aroused good responses in society, especially the students were welcomed by the society.

The reform was latterly named cultural quality education reform. What's more, the reform got firmly support from the State Education Commission of China (now the Ministry of Education of China). For example, one of the vice directors

of the State Education Commission, Zhou Yuanqing, took part in the leading of the reform. Zhou Yuanqing said that it was an important reflection of Chinese teaching reform facing the 21st century to improving the cultural quality of college students [4].

In September 1995, the State Education Commission organized the first conference of to promote the reform. After that, more and more colleges and universities took part in the reform, including many Chinese famous universities, such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Sun Yat-sen University and so on. In 1998, the Steering Committee of Cultural Quality Education in Higher Education of the Ministry of Education was established. Yang Shizi became the director of the Committee, and two vice directors were from Peking University and Tsinghua University. Since then, The Committee has been doing a lot of work to promote cultural quality education reform at colleges and universities all over China.

"A single flower does not mean spring. Hundreds of flowers blooming brings beautiful spring". Cultural quality education reform has prevailed in China, and has brought a new atmosphere to Chinese education.

3. Rationales of Cultural Quality Education

3.1. Education Is Both Cultural Education and Quality Education

What is the most important and primary work of a university? What kind of students should a university cultivate? How to cultivate? These are the basic questions to a university. Theoretically, cultural quality education gives an answer to the essence of education. Basically, cultural quality education takes true education as both cultural education and quality education. And this is the main and essential idea of cultural quality education, which other principles and their applications in practice are derived from [5].

Education is not only the main form of cultural heritage, but also the necessary foundation for cultural innovation and social progress. In essence, education is to "cultivate man with culture" [6]. The process of education is the process of transmitting, preservation, application, and creation of culture. In this sense, education is cultural education. The goal is to build up man's cultural life.

What distinguishes man from an animal is that man lives a cultural life. As a man, he is not only vastly different from an animal on material aspects, but also fundamentally on spiritual and cultural levels. Generally speaking, man's cultural life contains two aspects. One is of human nature, the other is of human spirituality.

Human nature is man's first essential attribute, which distinguishes man from animal. It mainly refers to the moral and ethical concepts, and various behavioral norms. The behavioral norms are reflected as human values, which are in line with the interests of the nations and human beings. Human spirituality mainly refers to man's intelligence and

wisdom. Human spirituality contains human's feeling, consciousness, understanding, thinking, and creativity. The fundamental reason why human can transcend his natural attributes is that he has spirituality. Human nature and human spirituality are inseparable. They are intertwined and sublimated into the spiritual realm of human beings. Education is to cultivate the cultural life of human beings through culture, which has been accumulated over thousands of years.

At the same time, education means quality education. The fundamental purpose of education is to improve the comprehensive quality of a person, and the advanced purpose is to improve the comprehensive quality of a whole nation, by means of improving the comprehensive quality of each person [7].

Human's quality is a whole. Analytically speaking, it can be summarized as four aspects, such as ideological and moral quality, cultural quality, professional quality, physical and mental quality. As to their relationships, they connect with each other and depend on each other. Firstly, ideological and moral quality is the soul. If the soul is lost, or makes a wrong way, the whole life of a person will be at a lost, or on the wrong way. Secondly, cultural quality is the foundation. If the foundation is not firm, the ground will be shaken. Thirdly, professional quality is the main trunk. If the main trunk does not exist, there will be no branches and leaves. Fourthly, physical and mental quality is the guarantee. If there is no guarantee, there will be no way to success.

Cultural quality education involves both education and culture. It is the foundation of building up human's cultural life and comprehensive quality. In the process of education, it emphasizes to deal with correctly the relationship among knowledge, ability and quality, and promote the coordinated and harmonious development of the three. It is integrated with imparting knowledge, cultivating ability and improving quality [8].

3.2. Educating Man Rather Than Making Tools

Originally, the conception of quality education was proposed against examination-oriented education in primary and secondary schools. Later on, it was expanded and got acknowledged into higher education, although at first there was a voice that university education was not examination-oriented education and thus no need for quality education. In fact, the idea of quality education at universities was against excessive utility-oriented education in a deeper sense. Examination-oriented education was only a manifestation of excessive utility-oriented education. In fact, there was excessive utility-oriented education in universities.

In reality, the excessive utility-oriented education was manifested as the problems of "too weak cultural cultivation, too narrow specialized education, too utilitarian orientation and too strong common restrictions", as above said. And the problems could also be expressed as "paying more attention to science and technology than humanities, paying more attention to professional knowledge than basics, paying more attention to book-learning rather than practice, paying more

attention to commonality than individuality, paying more attention to utility than quality” [9]. All these problems were unfavorable for the all-round development of students. Herein, universities did need quality education. And according to the special conditions in higher education, cultural quality education has become the breakthrough of promoting quality education in an all-round way. And carrying out cultural quality education is to solve the problems and emphasizes educating man with high quality.

Cultural quality education takes true education as both cultural education and quality education, as above said, so it insists that education is to educate man, not to make a tool [10], as Yang Shuzi said. It contains two levels of denotation. One is of “educating man”, and the other is of “not making a tool”. It emphasizes that the goal of education is to educate man, to cultivate man. As to “not making a tool”, it is the counterpoint of “educating man”, which is used here in order to further emphasize the idea that education is “educating man”. Theoretically, it is an important transformation concerned with educational thought, aiming at cultivating a man, as a man, to be a man, not a tool.

There is a great difference between those of “educating man” and of “making a tool”. In terms of “educating man”, it takes man as the object of education, the start of education, and the end of education. As a man, he is alive, not a dead thing. He has human flesh, blood, thoughts, feelings, kindness, beauty, personality, creativity, spiritual realm. And what’s more, he is different from the other. “Educating man” means to treat a man as a man, make a man as a man, and also means the way of humanistic and humane. It emphasizes man’s all-round development, not one-sided development.

However, “making a tool” means to treat man as a tool, or a device, or an instrument, or as a dead thing. A tool has no feelings, no perception, no thinking ability, no personality. A Tool can be made with a uniform standard, or can be manufactured in a large scale without considering the differences. A tool is to be made for special purposes, special uses, special cases, and without regarding its feelings and thinking.

3.3. Educating Man with Integrated Culture

In terms of educating man with culture and build up human’s culture life, it takes culture as an integrity, not being separated apart. It insists on educating man with holistic and integrated culture, not separated culture, or prejudiced, narrow-minded culture.

What is culture? To some extent, culture is humanization of nature. From the view of classification, the whole domain of culture can be classified into two classifications. One is of humanistic culture, and the other is of scientific culture. After the industrial revolution, more and more attentions were paid to scientific culture, and thus led to “the separation of the two kinds of culture”, and thus led to a lot of disadvantages of modernization. In fact, Humanistic culture and scientific culture are harmonious in nature, though they are different. Scientific culture lays the foundation for humanities, and humanities guide science [11].

Education should promote the integration of humanities and science. For example, in the days of high-tech, the development of science and technology has huge potentiality of both doing goodness for mankind and doing harm to mankind. Which way to choose? It needs humanistic culture and humanistic education to guide the correct way, by leading science and technology on the way to do goodness for mankind, not harm to mankind. Thus, it emphasizes humanistic education. And the integration of humanistic education and science education is the trend of education, especially in the days of High-tech [12].

On the other hand, from the view of construction, the cultural totality contains at least these five forces and factors, which are taken as knowledge, thoughts, methods, principles, and spirits. As to their relationships, they depend on each other. Knowledge is the foundation, and there will be no culture without knowledge. Thoughts are the keys and cores, which must be emphasized in learning knowledge. Methods are the ways and bridges, by which knowledge is used effectively into practice. Principles are the roots, which guide knowledge, thoughts and methods. Spirit is the soul, which governs knowledge, thoughts and methods and principles. Without the soul, everything will be at a loss.

These five forces and factors are combined together and work as a whole. The more advanced and excellent the culture is, being with advanced and powerful knowledge, creative and profound thoughts, feasible and effective methods, firm and clear principles, good and noble spirits, the more helpful to educate people. The more advanced and excellent culture used to educate people, the higher quality of people can be educated and attained. In education, knowledge is power. Cultivating of thinking ability and methods, principles is important. The elevation of spirits and the cultivation of good and high-qualified people is the most important.

4. Approaches of Cultural Quality Education

4.1. Emphasizing Humanistic Education and the Integration of Humanistic Education and Science Education

The reform of cultural quality education was originated and rooted in Chinese education practice. The successful lessons lie in the combination of practice and research. That is, practice and research are closely integrated, and theory and practice interact and promote each other, which is regarded as an important guarantee for the lasting and vigorous vitality of cultural quality education [13].

Firstly, the reform values humanistic education and the integration of humanistic education and science education. it regards humanistic education as the core of education, which aims at educating man with sounded personality. Thus, it emphasizes the integration of science education and humanistic education, which involves in the intermingling of the two kinds of culture---science culture and humanistic

culture, and serve the sustaining development of society.

A series of curriculum reforms are conducted, including adding the subjects and cores of general education, setting up humanistic lectures and scientific lectures, advocating good habits and daily ordinary activities. In addition, it regards campus culture as an important function in nurturing talents and pays attention to the construction of campus culture [14].

There is a saying in China, as a famous philosopher Wang Yangming in Sung Dynasty said, "Dao (or the way) is not divorced from daily ordinary activities, yet it goes straight to what antedated Heaven". This means that the development of the perfection of a man's personality is reflected in his daily activities. The reform strives for a kind of harmonious state, which is helpful to the sustaining development of a man, even mankind. This state may be called "greenness", as Yang Shuzi said, and this kind of integrated education may be called "greenness education" [15].

4.2. Emphasizing National Culture Education and Advocating Students to Read and Recite Classic Works

In the implementation of cultural quality education, national culture education, especially Chinese history and culture education, are regarded highly, which aims at cultivating Chinese people. As well known, China is a country with five thousand years of historical culture. Its historical culture is the root of Chinese, or the gene of Chinese. Certainly, education should emphasize the inheriting of Chinese five thousand years of excellent historical culture. In practice, it strengthens Chinese history and culture education, and advocates students to read and recite classic works.

Classic works have long-lasting charming, which manifest themselves with far-reaching influences in the tests of long history, different regions and repeated reflective thinking and practices. As to a nation's classic works, they are the roots of a nation. Classic works are of great benefit to students, including the edification of feelings, the development of thinking capacity, the understanding of the world, the improvement of spiritual realm, and the improvement of national cohesion. In terms of a person, it is a person's "cultural identity card" by mastering national culture.

In the implementation of cultural quality education, classic works, especially Chinese great classic works, such as *Tao Te Ching* (or *Laozi*) and *Analects of Confucius*, are asked for the students to be read and recited. For example, Yang Shuzi has read a lot of Chinese classic works since his childhood. He benefits a lot from Chinese classic works. He has made a rule that all of his doctoral candidates, though majored in mechanical engineering, must read *Analects of Confucius* and recite *Laozi*, otherwise they cannot graduate and get PH.D. He thinks that doctoral students need not only rigorous logical thinking and empirical methods, but also smart imagination and intuition. *Tao Te Ching* (or *Laozi*) and *Analects of Confucius* are not only of the wisdom of Laozi and Confucius, but also of the wisdom of the Chinese nation. They contain profound philosophical thoughts, which are beyond the times, beyond national boundaries [16].

Herein, as a president of a university, and as a director of Steering Committee of Cultural Quality Education of the Ministry of Education of China, he has advocated and implemented university students to read and recite the classic works.

4.3. Promoting Poetry Education

Poetry education has a long history in China. Poetry education promoted first is Chinese education tradition. In the old days, when a child went to school, the first education he received was poems. Sometimes when a child was just beginning to learn characters, he was given a sort of textbook to read and recite. The well-known textbook was the *Three Characters Classics*. The book was so called because each sentence consisted of three characters arranged so that when recited they produced a rhythmic effect. The *Three Characters Classics* was in reality a poem. For example, the very first statement in it is that "the nature of man is originally good." This is one of the fundamental ideas of Mencius philosophy [17].

The poetry of each nation is the refinement of its language, writing, and culture. "It seems that the highest proof of every nation is its own poetry", as a famous American poet once said. Chinese poetry contains one of the most essential parts of Chinese traditional culture, radiating the bright light of Chinese philosophy. It has the features of "few words, artistic mood, beautiful rhyme; true love, sweet taste, elegant style". To some extent, the soul of poetry is the soul of a country.

In the implement of cultural quality education, poetry education has been clearly proposed as an important aspect of cultural quality education [18]. In addition, poetry education is regarded as an important content of patriotism education. During the course of promoting poetry education, the Ministry of Education of China, Chinese Poetry Committee and the Steering Committee of Cultural Quality Education of the Ministry of Education of China, have made great efforts to promote Chinese poetry enter into different levels of schools, including kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and universities.

4.4. Meeting the Needs of the Modern, the World, and the Future

Education is not only the main form of cultural heritage, but also the necessary foundation for cultural innovation and social progress. In practice, both heritage and innovation are regarded as highly importance.

Based on China's national conditions, two principles are put special emphasis. One is to inherit Chinese five thousand years of excellent historical culture, which is regarded as the root of a nation. The other is to insist on "the three orientations", which were proposed by Chinese great leader Deng Xiaoping, and which means that education should be geared to the need of the modern, the world, and the future. The three orientations are regarded as the basic guides of all Chinese education reforms in the new time.

In fact, these two principles are indispensable. Without

inheriting Chinese five thousand years of excellent historical culture, “the three orientations” will have no support and foundation. Without “the three orientations”, there will be no goal or direction about inheriting Chinese five thousand years of excellent historical culture. This is also a kind of holistic, linked and developmental viewpoint of looking at the world. Combined together, they make great efforts to cultivating modern Chinese with global vision and concerning the fate of mankind.

5. Conclusion

Cultural quality education is an innovation of Chinese educational theory and practice. Theoretically, it takes true education as both cultural education and quality education. Practically, the reform meets the needs of Chinese education and is rather effective, which is described as a kind of humanistic wind blowing at the universities, and also described as the spring rain bringing the spring of education. It has effectively solved many problems in education, and has improved the quality of higher education. It is helpful for students to develop good comprehensive quality. In the long run, it is helpful for the country's prosperity and national flourishing.

For instance, poetry education, which is an important part of cultural quality education, has been very effective. In recent years, CCTV has launched "Chinese Poetry Competence and Show" program. The program is very welcome and has attracted thousands of people taking part and millions of people watching. It shows that more and more people, especially young people, love Chinese culture and poetry. Its success has proved the effect of poetry education. If this show were placed at twenty years ago or more than ten years ago, it would probably not be as popular as it is now, because of the lack of poem lovers at that time.

Nowadays, there are still some problems unsolved or not completely solved. In addition, new problems have emerged in the new time. Certainly, cultural quality education still has an important significance. Cultural quality education still needs to go on. How to promote the reform further more? It is necessary to “develop the education of quality” or to take “quality education” as an educational system or model^[19].

In fact, cultural quality education is not only a new educational idea, but also a mode of education, with operable mode of operation. It needs both to conduct further research on the theory of cultural quality education and to promote it into practice. Thus, theory and practice elevate each other and promote cultural quality education reform with lasting and vigorous vitality, and finally promote the quality of fostering talents.

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