

A Comparative Study of the Metaphorical Thinking in Eastern and Western Educational Writings: Based on a Comparison of Record on the Subject of Education and Great Didactic of Comenius

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Received 17 September 2014; accepted 25 November 2014
Published online 26 December 2014

Abstract

Metaphor is a rhetorical device as well as a way of thinking. *Record on the Subject of Education* and *Great Didactic of Comenius* extensively used metaphors. The similarity of the two classics in rhetorical methods does not mean the consistency of Western and Eastern metaphorical way of thinking in a deeper level. To explore the differences in the way of Western and Eastern metaphorical thinking, the study selects part of the content of *Record on the Subject of Education* and *Great Didactic of Comenius* to conduct a comparative analysis of the text.

Key words: Metaphor; Difference in way of thinking; Record on the subject of education; Great didactic of comenius

Zhang, Y. F. (2014). A Comparative Study of the Metaphorical Thinking in Eastern and Western Educational Writings: Based on a Comparison of Record on the Subject of Education and Great Didactic of Comenius. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(6), 96-100. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ccc/article/view/5851> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5851>

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is the most common phenomenon used in languages. Linguistic study regards it as a rhetorical method. Metaphors can be more intuitive to vividly describe specific or alleged things. The most representative studies are that of German cognitive linguists Ungerer.F and Schmid.HJ. A new direction for contemporary metaphor research is to extend metaphor from linguistics to the cognitive domain, and metaphor is regarded as a unique and the most fundamental cognitive

way of humans. American cognitive linguist George Lakoff and Mark Johnson believe that metaphor reflects a deeper level cognitive mechanism. Metaphor is widely present in the human language system and the conceptual system and it is an important way to communicate and to understand as well as the foundation of our language and behavior. Metaphor is deeply rooted in the cultural environment and it is also the foundation of our history and culture. Metaphors we use are not just metaphors, and they can represent a particular language community or cultural behavior or patterns (Su, 2005).

Record on the Subject of Education is China's first educational monograph as well as the world's first educational monograph. *Great Didactic of Comenius* was written by a Czech educator Comenius in 17th century. It is regarded as the foundation of Western education. *Record on the Subject of Education* and *Great Didactic of Comenius* each played a groundbreaking role in the development of educational thought in the East and West. The Two books were generated though with different historical conditions and cultural background, and yet reflect the same purpose: the contents are related to the educational purpose, teaching principles and the role of teachers and so on; on the rhetorical ways, they both heavily used metaphors. However, whether these similarities represent a deeper problem, namely, the Western way of thinking is consistent with that of the East? If not, their differences are reflected in which aspects?

1. THE ORIENTATION OF THE TWO WAYS OF METAPHORICAL THINKING IS DIFFERENT

1.1 The Metaphysic Feature of Metaphors in *Record on the Subject of Education*

That "the jade uncut will not form a vessel for use; and if men do not learn, they do not know the way (in which

they should go)” is the first metaphor in *Record on the Subject of Education*. From a rhetorical point of view, it belongs to a materialized metaphor, with this tangible thing and event of that “jade cut will form a vessel for use” which people are familiar with to metaphorize the invisible and relatively abstract truth of that “men don’t know the way if they don’t learn”. The use of metaphor makes the expression more vivid and more specific. However, from the point of view of its expounding the truth, that “men don’t know the way if they don’t learn” focuses on reasoning rather than practice. Specifically, it does not further elaborate on how to “learn”, and there is no detailed explanation to know what “way”. What is the “way”? “One yin and one yang is called the way” (*The Book of Changes • Xici Book 1*). How can we know the “way”? We can only get it through the “investigation of things and extension of knowledge” in the process to slowly feel and ponder the perception. Such is not the unique case of, *Record on the Subject of Education*. It is precisely because sages’ way of thinking is “outstanding”, making classic works represented by *Tao Te Ching*, *The Four Books* and *The Five Classics* would naturally prefer to pursue ideological universality from the generation and to a certain extent out of practice, not focusing on the specific operation. Take another metaphor in this book as an example. “However fine the viands be, if one does not eat, he does not know their taste; however perfect the course may be, if one does not learn it, he does not know its goodness.” From a rhetorical point of view, it uses complex structured metaphor. The author uses a more familiar and specific experience of people as in “however fine the viands be, if one does not eat, he does not know their taste” to metaphorize the unfamiliar and abstract concept of that “if one do not learn it, he does not know its goodness”. The use of metaphors vividly expresses the author’s emphasis on the importance of education. These concepts, to look at today’s context, are still applicable and reasonable, and at the same time they are also macro and metaphysical. It would be difficult to put them into actual practice. In addition to the above examples which reflect the “metaphysical nature” of the metaphorical way of thinking in *Record on the Subject of Education*, we can say that the author’s creative orientation is “focusing on reasoning rather than practice”. Another example: Thus in his teaching, he leads and does not drag; he strengthens and does not discourage; he opens the way but does not conduct to the end (without the learner’s own efforts). It also uses metaphorical method to indicate the way of “education”, i.e. the heuristic teaching principle and approach. These statements often offer some universal principles and directions rather than specific methods to solve problems. In the specific practice, educators can only try to realize it according to actual situations and then in accordance with the situation of their own explore and practice. In fact, this “metaphysical” way of thinking still affects our thinking and understanding of educational

issues today. For example, the “Pupils Code” provides that “ a). Love the motherland, love the people... b). Comply with laws and regulations, enhance the legal awareness...” From a practical effect, its value in theory is higher than that of its practical application.

1.2 The Physical Feature of Metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius*

The overall structural system of *Great Didactic of Comenius* is intact. From Chapter IV to the Chapter IX, it explains the importance of education and how to implement the importance of education. From Chapter VIII to Chapter XIII, it explains that everyone should go to study in schools and how to solve problems of school education. From Chapter XII to Chapter XIII, IT presents in detail and demonstrates a range of teaching principles, methods and content. Comenius thinks “Great didactic” is “the art of all things to teach all people” and it is not only to provide macro-thinking direction, but also to specifically teach people how to do it. As can be seen, the author’s creative mindset and philosophical orientation is “physical”. Take “Six Principles” in Chapter XVII “The Principles of Facility in Teaching and in Learning” as an example:

Sixth Principle (Comenius, 1999)

31. Nature does not hurry, but advances slowly.

For example, a bird does not place its eggs in the fire in order to hatch them quickly, but lets them develop slowly under the influence of natural warmth...

32. Imitation.

The builder, too, does not erect the walls on the foundations with undue haste...

33. Nor does the gardener expect a plant to grow large in the first month...

34. Deviation.

For the young, therefore, it is torture

(i) If they are compelled to receive six, seven, or eight hours’ class instruction daily and private lessons in addition.

(ii) If they are overburdened with dictations, with exercises, and with the lessons that they have to commit to memory...

35. Rectification.

The ease and the pleasantness of study will therefore be increased:

(i) If the class instruction be curtailed as much as possible, namely to four ‘hours, and if the same length of time be left for private study.

(ii) If the pupils be forced to memorize as little as possible, that is to say, only the most important things; of the rest they need only grasp the general meaning.

(iii) If everything be arranged to suit the capacity of the pupil, which increases naturally with study and age.

In this teaching principle, Comenius uses “bird hatchery”, “builder building home”, “gardener planting”

to metaphorize “teachers’ educational activities”. From the rhetorical perspective, he uses physical metaphors, with tangible and all kinds of things and behaviors that are commonly seen by people to metaphorize invisible truth, so that such an all-encompassing but abstract argument of “teachers’ educational activities” becomes more intuitive, vital and emotional. The use of metaphors not just provides macro truth, and based on this it deduces “deviation” and “rectification” which are real management and teaching skills in classroom teaching situation. By Comenius; words, *Great Didactic of Comenius* will make teaching a “confident”, “pleasant” and “thorough, not superficial” art. For such purposes, *Great Didactic of Comenius* is bound to provide some workable, specific recommendations. Such as the above sixth principle in the thirty-fifth principle, teachers do not even need to comprehend, as long as these principles and methods are used into their actions. Metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius* reflect an important practical and “physical” way of thinking. Under the influence of this way of thinking, phenomena like the generation and popularity of pragmatic educational thoughts in Western education and the popularity of action research in education seem very natural.

2. THE ATTRIBUTE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO WAYS OF METAPHORICAL THINKING

2.1 Metaphors in *Record on the Subject of Education* Reflect Overall Harmony

Metaphor is a “imagery” way of thinking. “Sages express meanings through images” (*The Book of Changes • Xici Book I*) and this is how ancient people described “imagery” way of thinking. *The Book of Changes* is known as “the leading book of all classics and the origin of important Taos” and there is also a saying that “from Buddhism to Confucianism, the origin is the *Book of Changes*”. Therefore, the appearance of metaphors in *Record on the Subject of Education* is not accidental. We can find the heritage of ancient Chinese educational thoughts. Take a metaphor from it as an example for specific analysis.

However fine the viands be, if one do not eat, he does not know their taste; however perfect the course may be, if one do not learn it, he does not know its goodness. Therefore when he learns, one knows his own deficiencies; when he teaches, he knows the difficulties of learning. After he knows his deficiencies, one is able to turn round and examine himself; after he knows the difficulties, he is able to stimulate himself to effort. Hence it is said, “teaching and learning help each other”.

This statement contains two parts. The function of the first part of metaphors has been analyzed above in detail and I am not going to repeat it. The second part is to demonstrate “teaching and learning help each other” based on the use of metaphors. “Teaching and learning

help each other” and the relation between them is not what we understand today that “teachers’ teaching” and “students’ learning” promote each other. Originally it means “educators’ learning” contains two forms: “teaching” and “learning”. This thought of “one deriving two” can be tracked back to Yin-Yang in *The Book of Changes*. The so-called yin-yang refers to the opposing sides like yin and yang are interdependent and mutual attracted to coexist in a single entity (Baidu, 2013). *The Book of Changes* takes the whole world as an entire entity. It uses yin-yang, the three powers, the five elements and eight diagrams theory to explain changes in the world and the relationship between things. This whole harmony ideology of *The Book of Changes* has deeply affected the development of entire Chinese culture. There is a feature in Chinese traditional way of thinking and that is holistic thinking (Zhang, 1988) which weights harmony rather than contention and values harmony rather than disputes.

The emergence and development of Confucianism are deeply affected by *The Book of Changes* and so does *Record on the Subject of Education*. Its relationship with *The Book of Changes* can be described as interlinked. Take another metaphor as an example.

The drum has no special relation to any of the musical notes; but without it they cannot be harmonized. Water has no particular relation to any of the five colors; but without it they cannot be displayed. Learning has no particular relation to any of the five senses; but without it they cannot be regulated. A teacher has no special relation to the five degrees of mourning; but without his help they cannot be worn as they ought to be.

From the rhetorical perspective, materialized metaphors are used to metaphorize intangible and abstract things or events. Look further to the use of the metaphors and check the realm it pursues: “harmony of five notes”, “five colors displayed”, “five sense regulation” and “five mourning realization” are intended to emphasize the harmony of perfection, which ideologically reflects the five elements thoughts of *The Book of Changes*. *The Book of Changes*, as the representative of the overall harmony of thinking, emphasizes the overall system of the world (universe), and there is no distinction between subjects and objects and people don’t take nature as the object. Therefore, Lao Tzu thinks we should “connect the earth, the heaven, Tao and nature”; Confucius tends to “know the destiny, without transgressing; Mencius tends to be “dedicated, intellectual, knowing the heaven.” Ancient sages regarded “the harmony between the heaven and humans” as the highest state of the world and the harmonious life. The origin of Chinese traditional philosophy, calendar and medicine, etc. is all affected by the overall thinking of harmony.

2.2 Metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius* Reflects the Binary Separation

During the period that Comenius lived, European society was still under the control of Christianity. Christian

thoughts believe that there is “good and evil” and “God and the Devil” in the world, which is the most fundamental religious dualism. The creation and use of metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius* are also deeply marked by the stigma of dualism. From Chapter 16 to Chapter 18, Comenius introduced a total of ten teaching principles. The writing of these teaching principles uses metaphors, with the most common natural phenomenon, the phenomenon of life to metaphorize “principles of classroom teaching”. Take the above “sixth principle” as an example. Comenius uses “gardener” to metaphorize “teacher”, “seeds and plants” to metaphorize “students”, “cultivate” to metaphorize “education”, and “germination and growth” to metaphorize “development” and so on. The worldview behind these metaphors fundamentally is dual discrete between “people” and “nature”, specifically manifested in binary oppositions of the subject and the object: “gardener – plant”, “teacher – youth”, “bird – hatchery”, “builder – building walls”. In the binary opposition in man and nature, Comenius believes that “men dominate everything” and “men become rational animal...test everything in the world.” People should analyze, observe, experiment and research nature as it is the object. This test should divide the whole into the smallest and simplest elements as far as possible, and then to track their roots one by one to discover or reveal the mysteries where the law lies. Russell also believes that

objects can be analyzed or broken down into several parts, in other words, individual part can be understood independently and individually. If each part has to be understood through the whole, otherwise it cannot be understood, then the part cannot be understood independently, so that there is no scientific truth. (Mou, 2010)

This is the analytical way of thinking further interpreted from binary separation and it emphasizes elements rather than the whole. Therefore, essentialism, naturalism, scientism and other educational thoughts later developed in the West are inseparable from this binary separation way of thinking.

3. THE CHARACTER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO WAYS OF METAPHORICAL THINKING

3.1 Metaphors in *Record on the Subject of Education* Reflect an Intuitive and Perceptual Way

“People who are good at asking questions are just like cutting hard wood. They start with soft and easy parts, slowly expanding to harder parts. Over the time, the wood would natural decompose.” In this metaphor, it explains teaching methods. From the rhetorical perspective, it belongs to the more complex metaphors, with “cutting hard wood” and “easy and hard” experience as well as

“first and second orientation” to metaphorize asking easier questions first, in which the experience metaphor belongs to structured metaphors and the orientation metaphor belongs to the space metaphors. Through a complex metaphors, people perceive the reason of “easy things first” in doing everything. In this metaphor, “moths (‘ants’) know the importance of persistence”, it uses the phenomenon of ants moves soil endlessly to build barriers” to metaphorize the truth of “insisted and continuous learning, from small achievements to big one”. These two metaphors are in line with the Chinese traditional view of “ways varying but the principle the same”. The ancients believed that although there are different forms, but its essence contains the same basic philosophy, that same “Tao”. How to know the “Tao”? It needs the subject’s “intellectual intuition, non-intuitive feelings” (Mou, 2007) to “perceive”. This way of thinking is not unique for *Record on the Subject of Education*. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism have paid attention to the “Zen enlightenment” to perceive the universe, thus achieving telepathy and the harmony between heaven and men. “Intelligent enlightenment” in *Inner Canon of Yellow Emperor (Questions • On Eight Gods)*, “I reflect on my own behavior three times daily” (*The Analects • Learning*), and Tao Yuanming’s “enlightenment of the past” (*Homeward Bound I Go*) and so on are all taken the intuitive enlightenment as the best way of learning and personal literacy. Both Lao Tzu and Wang Yangming regarded it as the most reliable and the only viable way of thinking to obtain truth. This “imagery” way of thinking which emphasizes intuitive understanding has affected the development of entire Chinese society, history and culture. Chinese painting and calligraphy is the best example: First, it is believed that Chinese calligraphy and painting have the same source, and that is to emphasize the “imagery” way of thinking; second, Chinese painting and calligraphy emphasize enlightenment the most, and believe it is the only way to superb.

3.2 Metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius* Reflect a Logic and Rational Way

Western metaphorical way of thinking adheres to ancient Greece and ancient Rome. In ancient Greece, Aristotle founded formal logic. The most typical form of Aristotle’s formal logic is three-stage deductive system, namely: The major premises + minor premises → conclusions. Major premises are general principles or axioms which don’t need to be proved; minor premises are special circumstances which need to be studied and determined; conclusions are judgments of the minor premises based on major premises. Logical reasoning has had a significant impact on the later development of Western thoughts, history and culture. Even in the Middle Ages when religious thoughts dominated everything, logic rationality was still a unique presence and influenced Christianity. *Great Didactic of Comenius* is significantly affected

by this way of thinking. The explanation of each point, demonstration of every principle, and the use of every metaphor is a process of logical reasoning. Take the above text of “sixth principle” as an example. Comenius’ metaphorical reasoning process is “bird hatchery” → “builder to build” → “gardener planting” → “classroom teaching”. These metaphors from “nature does not hurry”, through layers of metaphors and diffractions of relationships, and finally deduced that in the specific context of classroom teaching, the conclusive “deviation” and “rectification”. On the surface, although the above metaphors are not a typical three-stage deduction of Aristotle, in fact there are apparent traces of formal logical reasoning, namely: starting from general principles, and then deducing the individual conclusions. Not only in the “sixth principle”, the use of other metaphors in *Great Didactic of Comenius* generally follows the logical sequence of “nature (plants or animals) — social events (human behavior) — educational (school) event”, from the nature and general principles to deduct individual educational event. Logical and rational way of thinking globally influenced the development of European society, and it brought great prosperity of Western culture, sciences, and thoughts after the Renaissance and they continue today.

Through comparative analysis, we can see that metaphorical way of thinking on education in orientation in China and in the West exhibits difference: one is metaphysical and the other is physical; on the attribute, they reflect the difference between overall harmony and dual discrete; on the character, they reflect the difference between intuitive and perceptual way and logic rational way. This difference is just like what Norman Crowe says:

When we use this metaphor rather than that metaphor to describe things, we actually construct reality in this way rather than another way. Metaphor is a very basic way with high penetration power to construct the way we think and act and our knowledge and belief systems. (Doll, 2004)

In this paper, it does not argue which is better in the two kinds of metaphorical ways of thinking, but the difference in the educational way of thinking in the West and East is an objective reality. The same “education” can be conceptualized as different educational awareness and different educational theories, and therefore lead to different educational practices. Studying from foreign countries, especially from Western theories of education and experience, has long been a thought and choice in educational reform and development in China. When “referring” or “transplanting”, it is necessary to carefully analyze the cultural differences and different way of thinking behind these educational theories and experience.

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