



## New Exploration on Chinese Traditional Morale Education and Modern Characteristic Morale Education

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### Abstract

Ideology of moral education has both historical inheritance and time dependent variability. Chinese traditional moral education is a main component of Chinese traditional culture, as well as valuable resource of Chinese characteristic modern moral construction in the new period. For research and study sharing point of Chinese traditional moral education and modern moral education, and to cite the elegant spirit of traditional moral education ideas is of great importance to construction of Chinese characteristic modern moral education.

**Key words:** Traditional moral education; Modern characteristic moral education; Sharing point; Inspiration

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### INTRODUCTION

China has a moral education tradition of long history and rich connotation. It is a behavior regulation and life concept that developed from long period of living practice. It values both ritual and music, prefers morality to intelligence, requires people to be organized and ordered, and be harmonious both alone and as group, values moral practice including knowledge, emotion, idea and behavior. It forms a comprehensive regulation system, which has great value to Chinese characteristic modern

moral education work. China has entered a comprehensive and profound social transformation period feathered by modernization fundamentally. Practical requirements of social modernization need support from modern value and moral principles, as well as corresponding moral education idea and operation system. Base on practical requirements of modern society, constructing Chinese characteristic moral education theoretical system in a new view to provide powerful spirit support and intelligence support for economic development and comprehensive social improvement is a reflection of the socialist modernization practice on modern moral education theory requirements, as well as theoretical conscious of educational theorists.

### 1. SHARING POINT OF TRADITIONAL MORAL EDUCATION AND MODERN CHARACTERISTIC MORAL EDUCATION

Only if modern moral education is rooted in the national culture, critically inherits and creatively goes beyond traditional moral education, it will have a strong vitality. Traditional moral education refers to education from society to its community members in aspects of moral knowledge, moral character, moral beliefs, moral, ethical behavior, moral realm, and many others in the past, and leave systematically influences in terms of ideology and politics, and nomocracy education, which is able to make those members follow social regulations consciously and perform their moral duties to society and other members. Chinese traditional moral education is the core of Chinese traditional culture, as well as valuable resource and major content of constructing Chinese characteristic modern moral education theoretical system. To correctly master the spirit of traditional moral ideology, study and explore the sharing point of Chinese characteristics modern moral education theory is an important path to improve the level and effectiveness of moral education works.

## 1.1 A Matching Ideology: Moral Education Is the First

Confucius once said that

A youth, when at home, should be filial, and, abroad, respectful to his elders. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good. When he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies.

*Confucian Analects · Hsio R* emphasizes that one should leave morality the highest priority. “If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.” *Confucian Analects · Wei Chang* states that one should use his morality to make him well-behaved consciously. It also indicates importance of moral education for political domination. “Moral education the first” and “ruling by morality” are upper and bottom levels of Confucian political ethics. “Moral education the first” reflects the core role of moral education in Confucian politics. It regards morality as the foundation of domination. In two thousand years, Confucianism educates and trains generations of elites, who have high moral character and make contribution to the survival and development of the Chinese nation. Due to the idea of “moral education the first”, China is called country of politeness.

Confucius believes that moral education is the basis of governance. At the same time, moral consciousness of each member of society is the foundation of social order and stability. “Governing is correcting”, as a governor, one should make himself to correct the first. *Confucian Analects · Tszé-Lû* is a summary of ancient governing rules, as well as a reflection of current regulation. Political morality needs to strengthen politicians’ morality and political requirements of “being kind and loyal”. It was concluded in long period of feudal society, which makes limitation to it. However, it is, after all, the result of rational thinking on governing the country from generations of the ruling classes and groups. “To rule by morality” reflects Chinese feudal society’s political civilization, as well as the reason for continuous development.

Valuing moral education is both a fine tradition of Chinese nation, but also an elegant style of the Party, as well as CPC’s political advantage. Comrade Zedong Mao once said the “if one has no correct political point of view is the same as one has no soul.” (Mao, 1957) In 1980, Xiaoping Den at the CPC Central Committee Work Conference pointed out that “it needs to strengthen political education, situational education, ideological education in schools at all levels, including outlook on life, and moral education.” (Deng, 1994, p.369) On May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002, Jiang (2002) clearly pointed out that

we should insist on integrating law and morality to rule the country. In process of constructing China’s socialist

modernization, both law and morality have their own important use. We have to keep applying law to ruling, at the same time fully utilizing morality. (p.337)

In “the opinions on further strengthening and improving ideological and moral construction” he pointed out that one important principle of moral education of youths is to follow traditional Chinese virtues. This shows that the historical inheritance of moral education and construction, as well as “source” and “root” of moral development. While facing the impact of diverse cultures around the world, fissile views of value, and constantly enhanced independence, as well as selectivity, variability and difference of ideological activities of education objects, our moral education is unprecedentedly challenged and innovated. It needs to strengthen the important role of moral education in education, highlight core role in moral education in the all-round development, adhere to the “morality the first”, “moral education the first”, and constantly create new situation of moral education.

## 1.2 The Matching Content: Kind-Praised Education

Education is kind-praised and kind-toward enterprise. It aims at leading people to be kind. Ancient education focused on morality. Knowledge lies in “to praise morality and study, stop by the most”, which means focusing on formation of personality and moral character. As Mencius said that the purpose of studying is “national and personal interests”. Mencius said that “sympathy is the start of humanity, shame is the start of loyalty, and humility is the start of polite, judgment is the start of intelligence. Those starts are like our bodies”, “humanity, loyalty, polite and intelligence is rooted in the heart.” Those four characters in *Mencius · Vila* are owned by human only, but animals. They are source of morality and are birth-given. Zhang (1990) once said that “so called real person is not possible to be a selfish person, even less likely to be an overweening person. A real person should be sympathy and responsible for society.” Thus humanity is kind. Preferring kind is an eternal theme. One important mission of moral education is to keep and promote kindness of people’s gift.

“To educate by kindness” is an inevitable path of education modernization. Education Enterprise is entering a new developing period, which is followed by moral education problems. Issues of “moral education decline”, unfair education and so on are current hot issues in education. People who have insights strongly call for the elimination of evil education, return us pure education. These calls and attentions actually desire for the moral education. Only with education filled with kindness is able to lead people and society to be kind, which is valuable. To make education an enterprise of kindness, promoting and enhancing kind education and eliminating evil education, are basic

path to promote educational value. It is an objective requirement of people who are facing to 21 centuries and developing a happy future. It is an internal requirement of comprehensive development and promotion of humanity.

### 1.3 A Matching Method: “Three Dimensional Mechanism”

Personal morality is the expression of social moral regulation and rules in personal idea and behaves. It is the stable character and trend in moral activities, the formation is highly related to morality. Chinese traditional moral education believed that family, school and society should collaborate, promote and improve personal moral development together.

“One in ancient time who wants to rule the world should govern his country the first, who wants to govern the country should support his family the first, who wants to support his family should improve himself.” *Book of Rites · Great learning* believed that “personality is more important than family, family is more important than country, country is more important than world” since “person forms family, family forms country, country forms world.” This fully shows the relationship between individual, family and country. To rule a country one should start from family, to support a family one should start from teaching the child. In aim of “support family and rule country”, ancients regard family education as “foundation of country”. Family-oriented education should be based on morality. However, the range of family education is limited. Ancient Chinese sages also proposed the idea of “enlightenment” that ruling starts from education. “A jade needs be sculptured to be an artwork; a person needs to be taught to have knowledge. Thus ancient kings who want to build country and govern people would do education the first”. *Book of Rites · Record on the Subject of Education* governs people and makes education as the highest priority. Ancient scholars believed that social environment has an important effect on the formation of individual moral quality. Good social environment can encourage people to be kind, and poor social environment can lead humanity to evil. Yi Jia said that “people are like silk. They are colored as what you paint.” On the point of moral formation, people’s living environment is very important in forming personality. Chong Wang pointed out that

when weed is growing among grass, it will be automatically straight; when white silk is mixed with black, and it will automatically be black. Weed is not straight originally, silk is not black originally. It is grass and black pigments make them straight and black. People are the same to weed and silk. Their personality will be affected.

*On Judgment · Whims* illustrated how social environment affects personality vividly.

Marxist doctrine on comprehensive development of human claimed that it should be full and free development

on both intelligence and physical strength. Society is the product of interaction between people. The nature of human is the sum of all social relationships. Personal development is related to school, family and social environment. “Only if outside promotion to personal development is able to be handled by the person himself, it is not a dream anymore.” (Marx & Engels, 1979, p.330) In some aspect, it has to improve moral education environments of school, family and community in order to fully optimize students’ overall ideological and moral quality. It can keep promoting students’ ideology and morality only if we keep enhancing students’ moral immunity and self-discipline in wide range of activities of moral practices. Modern moral education pointed out that the formation and development of young people’s ideology and morality are governed by a variety of social conditions, and dependents on their own psychological and levels of physiological development. “Three dimensional” moral education systems, containing school, family and community, is able to form moral education environment and force to promote comprehensive optimization of moral education environment. Therefore students’ formation of ideology and morality are promoted and the effect of it is enhanced.

### 1.4 A Matching Principle: Personality Practice

Human is the subject of morality. Its subjectivity is inherent basis of all moral activity. Human’s subjectivity in moral activity constructs subjectivity of the human as a subject of morality. Moral education in nature is a subjective activity which is self-construction from interaction between educators and students with moral culture as an intermediate. Subjective moral education reflects the periodic requirement it regards educators and students’ subjectivity as precondition, democracy and equal education relationship as guarantee, focuses on personal requirements, based on developing moral subject in life. In ancients’ view, practice is both start and end of morality progress. Final result of morality progress should be tested by practice. Ancient sages prefer practice in precondition of “intelligence and practice”. In Confucius’ moral education ideology, purpose and practice are highly related. He especially valued practice, said that “when he has time and opportunity, after the performance of these things, he should employ them in polite studies”. “Is anyone able for one day to apply his strength to virtue? I have never seen the case in which his strength would be insufficient.” *Confucian Analects · Le Jin* makes an important contribution on practice and intelligence in the pre-Qin period. “Personal development” and “practice”, as methods of developing morality, change outer constrain into inherent consciousness. Therefore it keeps promoting and constructing oneself.

## 2. INSPIRATION OF TRADITIONAL WISDOM TO MODERN CHARACTERIZED MORAL EDUCATION

Theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics is leading the great modernization way. It is important to complete Chinese characteristic modern moral system by obtaining wisdom form traditional moral education culture and applies it to modern moral education work in school. We also believe that reformed traditional moral education wisdom is important to Chinese characteristic moral education development and able to provide active effect.

### 2.1 Leveling Objects: Gradual Content of Moral Education

Sequence character of content of moral education is conducive to the formation of morality of the younger generation; our country attaches great importance to traditional moral hierarchy and system of moral content. Ideologists from pre-Qin to Min and Qing period, on one hand, they keep designing and completing ideal personality. On the other hand, “to teach differently according to different people”, they set coil-up content in moral education. As Xi Zhu’s statement, “minor learning is superficial, great learning is deep”, “minor learning learns the fact however great learning learns the reason behind it.” *Xi Zhu · Minor Learning*. A higher level of study is repeating and promoting lower level. Every progress makes students have a better understanding in their moral desire, until it is perfect. Moral education in school should have different content at different stage. Moral education must be designed and edited according to the best period for students’ understanding on morality. The content of it should start from the easy part, low level to difficult part, high level and one should keep optimizing the order of those contents. An ideal personality is not achievable for everyone, however people should not give up faith on it and education should not give up leading. Chinese ancients’ separation on moral education structure is only based on ancient scholars’ common understanding on humanity and personality. If it is beyond the common sense, we are unable to achieve real science. Thus we need to come back to common sense and face to ancient sages, keeping humility. In condition of deeply understood ancient and modern literatures, one can explain traditional books in a modern and creative way. This should be an important source of Chinese characteristic modern moral education innovation.

### 2.2 Think and Practice, Practical Method of Moral Education

Developing students’ morality is not only studying on morality regulation, but also promoting students’ subjective effect. In aspect of moral education, it is to encourage students’ activity and subjective spirit in moral

practice and make students able to recognize themselves, manage themselves, serve themselves, encourage themselves and complete themselves. Chinese Confucian moral cultivation of self-observation emphasized introspection. Introspection moral cultivation and moral methodology are very obvious, focusing on introspection, self-cultivation work. It valued the importance of external behavior and the importance of inner moral cultivation, which is an important and consistent feature of traditional moral education. Ancients used “gain” to explain “morality”, “morality is what you gain from yourself”. “Gaining” is a process of making an external change to internal change, which is outside gaining changes into morality, which comes from the conscious pursuit of morality. Confucius said that “when internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about, what is there to fear?” *Confucian Analects · Yen Yüan*. “The superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.” *Confucian Analects · Hsien Wan* talks to introspection and self-correction. Mencius claimed that one should use ambition to introspect himself. Xi Zhu provided moral education method such as “respect”, “ambition”, “introspection”, “practice”. Jiuyuan Lu believed that one can gain knowledge from himself. In a long period of time, due to effects of western and anti-ancient ideology, our moral education is over weighing teaching moral knowledge, which leads to minor effect. In overall view of our tradition of moral education, they cooperate on ideology, content, process, and method, which construct a system already. Thought they served aim and content of ancient moral education, after idealism factors and subjects they served are excluded, they are worthy of study and inheritance as outstanding heritages of the Chinese nation.

### 2.3 Pursuit Kindness and Truth, Harmonious Relationship Between World and Human

Clarity and tolerance are total principle and spirit when our traditional culture is processing varies from relationships, which is available for us to use on moral education. People’s activities are characterized by value and truth. Due to western tradition of “truth and intelligence”, philosophy is regarded as knowledge of truth. Thus truth is the basis of Westerner’s behavior. However, Chinese culture regards kindness as tradition. Thus kindness is the foundation of Chinese behavior. In the value system of Chinese traditional philosophy, there are six groups including loyal and greed, moral and power, sacrifice and alive, moral and intelligence, rational and lust, generous and selfish to describe specific value. There are group and alone, world and human, two groups to describe lofty ideals. In addition, there are real, kind and beautiful three points to express harmonious between group and individual, world and human. Those above construct a complete and comprehensive system. They have systematic and rigorous relationships between

them. Thus human is prior to matter, loyalty is prior to interest, morality is prior to power, group and individual are harmonious, world and human are harmonious, kindness will lead to truth and beauty, morality is prior to intelligence, public is prior to private. This traditional philosophy system keeps dominating Chinese moral education.

Harmony between world and human is an important content of Chinese traditional moral education. It includes harmony of nature, which is between human and nature, harmony between people, and harmony between mind and body. Those are no doubt important positive value of modern moral education. Human is one composition of nature, thus all human's behavior should follow nature rules. Human grows together with all other creatures without harm. Thus kind human should love both human and other creatures, which make human and all other creatures harmoniously grow together. This important moral principle is maintaining profit of all human and their posterities. To promote harmony between group and individual, world and human are necessary to help modern people to establish environmental protecting sense and sustainable development of the national economy.

#### **2.4 Knowledge, Emotion, Will and Behavior: Ordered Moral Education Pattern**

The order of moral education can be concluded as promoting moral knowledge, developing moral emotion, exercising moral will and training moral behavior. Knowledge means moral knowledge, emotion means moral emotion, will mean moral will and behavior is moral behavior. Knowledge is the foundation, behavior is the key. When ancient educators were processing moral education, they concluded order of education, which are knowledge, motion will and behavior. They emphasized those four points to process moral education. The traditional moral education is a process to grow those four points. Confucius proposed process of learning, thinking, reviewing, and practicing, which pointed out order and method to learn. He said that "hearing much and selecting what is good and following it; seeing much and keeping it in memory: This is the second style of knowledge", "learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous" *Confucian Analects · Shu R*, *Confucian Analects · Wei Chang*.

Mencius specially emphasized growth of will of the students. He said that "thus, when heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. It exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty. It confounds his undertakings. By all

these methods it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetency". *Mencian · To All Xun Zi* provide elegant opinion on moral education, which is what you learned should be used in daily life, and expressed in behavior. He said that "sage who learns a new knowledge, from ear, into the heart, expands to the whole body, related to behaviors. One should behave properly, talk properly, which can be considered as rule....Knowledge of sage can be used to decent himself." *Xunzi · Quanxue* Sages after that all used Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi's moral education theories as foundation to develop.

Our traditional moral education is filled with knowledge, emotion, will and practice. Ancient educators uncover the effects, cooperation, integrality and diversity of those four aspects, which are worthy to study and cite. Moral education process is not able to be moved by human will. Vivid activity of moral education will only effect when it follows moral education pattern. This inspires current moral education practice, which is only if one inherits Chinese ancient excellent moral tradition and follows basic regularity of moral education, he can promote Chinese characteristic modern moral education practice to achieve a larger effect.

Chinese traditional moral education theory is one important component of Chinese ethics culture. It inspires generations of Chinese people and grows and promotes Chinese national ethics spirits. The duty of constructing modern country asks us to explore moral spirit and educational pattern that match the time. Chinese traditional moral education has rich resource and content, which are well-organized and ordered. Selectively exploring traditional education resource, discovering periodic value covered, rationally and objectively analyzing advantages and disadvantages of Chinese traditional moral education are no doubt helpful to current moral education construction and truth exploring.

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