

The Study on Humanistic Educational Thought during Renaissance in Europe

YAN Wen-juan

Institute for Advanced Study of European Culture, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, China

As economics' development, society's progress, mankind accumulates much wisdom about life and existence. Philosophy appears when the wisdom sublimation. Then, how to pass on it from generation to generation? Education plays an immeasurable role. In this regard, education has closed relationship with philosophy. To say education, it must be the teaching of wisdom; to say philosophy, it has to pass by through education. This paper tries to study the educational thought of humanists during the period of renaissance in Europe and probe its aim, contents, methods, features and significance.

Keywords: renaissance, humanists, education

Background

As the Cultural Revolution, renaissance happened from the beginning of 14th century not only Europe, even the whole world's development from many aspects such as to that of 17th century. This revolution played a very important promoting part on cultural, education, economic, society and so on. Humanistic education occurred in this background.

Origin-ed from Italy, the renaissance spread to other countries in Western Europe about the later 15th century. And it offered a prosperous phenomenon during 16th century. This is a cultural renewal launched by European emerging bourgeoisie in the field of ideology. It towards to feudalism and Christian theological system. The new bourgeoisie appealed came back to ancient Greek. They claimed to revive classical cultural which had been past already. And the Cultural Revolution happened in this sense. Generally speaking, the new views toward cultural and world in this stage was called humanism. Which expressed on education by philosophers at this time was named humanistic educational thought. And that humanistic educational thought was not depend on a single humanist but the whole humanists thoughts in that period. It has the features of not only epochal character but also continuity.

Although the humanists in that period were different from each other according to the time and fields, they had some common thoughts characteristic. That period's new concepts and ideas were reflected by these ideological characteristic, and practiced through education. The spring up of humanistic educational thought indicated establishment of western education theory. To be specific, it made up of two parts. One is humanistic educational thought in Italy and the other is that of North Europe. Italy humanistic educational thought was composed by earlier stage's educational thought and later period's thought.^[1] The earlier thought formed under the background which based on civil culture and republican opinion, while the later shaped on the time

^[1] Jerry Brotton, Zhao Guoxing, *The Renaissance*, Shanghai: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2011, pp. 27-49.

when civil cultural declined, the monarchism predominant-ed and religion's research was enhanced. The former had been took shape about between 14th century and the end of 15th century, and the representative figures were Vergerio, Vittorino, Guerino, Palmieri etc, while the later had been formed from the end of 15th and to the middle of 16th century, Partridge, Cascadia and the like as the typical representatives at that time.^[2] As the development of economic and freedom cities in North Europe, the influence of new bourgeoisie and nobility had been enhanced. People paid more attention on the education of cultural. Gradually, Italy turned to the situation of monarchy, also constantly close to the monarchy system in North Europe. As the widely spread of humanism, the progress of philosophy, humanistic education quickly emerging and developed in North Europe. The prominent feature in this period was that humanism paid more attention on religious. And the representative personage were Erasmus in Holland (ancient Nylander), Vives in Spain, Merle in England, Bud in French and so on. Among them, Erasmus was not only the most famous humanistic educator, but also the classical humanitarian critic.

Humanistic Educational Thought

The Aim of Humanistic Educational Thought

Before renaissance, the educated aim of missionary school in middle Ages was to believe in God and seek next world. But the humanistic educational thought was strongly apt to common views. No matter the citizen that was educated in former Italy's humanists, nor the monarch or courtier who were cultivated during the later Italy and North European humanists, they both served for reforming realistic society.

Humanists valued education's part in the development of person. They highly praised education should be based on classical human education and proposed it should foster people whose ability could develop from every aspects. Furthermore, In their opinion, the attention to education was also it was to the force of human being. They claimed people's comprehensive and balanced development could be cultivated through learning classical cultural. For example, Vergerio, the former Italy's humanist, proposed the aim of real education should trained not only people's mind but also body. In Palmieri's opinion, education should cultivate perfect citizen who had knowledge, breeding, and could cope with social affairs.^[3] The humanistic educators in later Italy and North European asserted to train wise and able monarch and courtier who served for monarchy system. They believed that there was closed relationship between perfect education and ruler. The key point of running a country well lied in ruler's virtue. And a perfect courtier should gain wisdom, elegance, honor, accomplishment. Beside these, they should be good at the arts of war, all kinds of physical activities, to help monarch deal with social affairs and had life-long beliefs. On Cascadia's point of view, the aim of education was to bring up "Gentle knight" not only skillful at classical cultural but also excel in military sports. Rabelais proposed that the goal of education was to bring up fully developed people from the sides of physical, knowledge, and virtue. Montaigne stressed the development both mind and body. In his opinion, a person could treat himself and society rightly just when he had already formed his independent judgment. Thus, he would not be seduced by authority and superstition.

Through the analysis about aims of humanistic educators in different time, it is found that these aims have a common feature which claims to develop from fully aspects. From their point of views, education should let

^[2] Zhu Jingren, Liu Zhaoyu, Yao Yunbiao, *The Brief History of Foreign Education*, Anhui: The Educational Press of Anhui, 2011, pp. 57-58.

^[3] Zhang Binxian, *The History of Western Education*, Beijing: People's Education Press, 2011, pp. 150-197.

people feel freely and make progress from every side. They thought education was not only served for God and the Kingdom of Heaven, but also served for country and life in his time.

The Contents of Humanistic Educational Thought

The renaissance spirits of classical cultural were fully expressed through humanists' educational contents. Among these contents, classical language and works were the core parts. For classical language, it mainly included Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages. About classical works, it mainly covered ancient Greece and Rome's culture, history, philosophy, ethic, medicine, law and so on. In the middle Ages, the main learning course was also the seven liberal arts. However, the strong religious elements was abandoned while common customs appeared. In the later renaissance, the contents of education turned more and more modernize, and absorbed native language, nature science, P.E etc. This paper is mainly talk about it from the aspects of intellectual education, moral education, art education, and physical education.

Intellectual education

Firstly, Classical language and works.

At first, Humanistic educators paid attention to the learning of classical Latin, which was also named ancient Rome's language. In their opinions, the key point to understand ancient works well was mastering their language. And the language was also the road to the nice ancient world. Then, compared with Latin, the learning of Greek language was a little late. The study on Latin, Greek language gradually became prevail under the influence of Italian humanism. Pursuing on Greek cultural advanced philosophy's progress. The chief accomplishment about ancient Greek cultural lied in the fields of myth and drama, while the ancient Rome's literature achieved in the fields of drama, essay and poetry. And these works conveyed secular spirit vividly. Also, the spirit which was expressed by classical cultural was just the thing that the humanists pursued. The humanists' views toward world and life showed clearly in the classical literature. In this sense, all the humanistic educators thought classical literature and writing were very important during the course.

Secondly, "three arts". The three European traditional subjects were grammar, rhetorical and dialectics. They composed the three arts. The grammar mainly indicated Latin method. During the period of renaissance, the study of grammar combined with that of classical cultural. The works of Cicero, Virgil, etc. Were the typical ones in grammar? In humanistic educators' opinion, the learning of grammar was the basic step for studying language. Teaching grammar was useful to train students' spirits and intelligence. Greenow played an important influence on this side. He thought grammar was the basic thing for education, the further study would be difficult if one's grammar was not well. In this course, many humanists against ed the over stressed on form at one time for the teaching of Latin lured into formalism. Erasmus was not agreed with studying grammar in isolation. He required combined the learning of grammar with reading works and studying it in certain context. Vives thought the existent meaning of grammar lied in describing things. It is important to learning grammar, logic and rhetorical. But they were not the aim of study.^[4] Students could gained abound knowledge about society and life just when they learned these three together. To talk about rhetorical, there were two teaching methods at the beginning of renaissance. One was practical method that seeking quick success and instant benefits, the other was learning it through works. In was interesting that the former viewers thought the later assertors were superstitious and ridiculous. From Vergerio's point of view, rhetorical was useful for training eloquence. Vittorino proposed that the teaching of rhetorical should combined with writing. From this, students

^[4] Xu Yingjin, Melville Y. Stewart, *Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010, p. 58.

could writing beautiful script in Latin and Greek languages. Guerino stressed the united studying of rhetorical and eloquence. He thought it was meaningful to read Cicero's *rhetoric* and Quintilian's *the theory of eloquence*. Also, Cicero's *rhetoric* carefully described every aspect of eloquence, and it is the typical work to use rhetoric. From Vives' point of view, the aim of rhetoric was not decorating characters but to express things clearly and convinced. The bounding were not so clearly among dialectics, oratory, and logic and so on during the time of renaissance. Erasmus treated dialectics equals to logic, while Guerino required to learn logic. In Vives' opinion, it was needed to reform the teaching method of dialectics (logic). Through learning dialectics, students could make good preparation for useful and tangible life in society. In addition, the school course which was set up by brotherhood in 1496 was also include the contents of classical language, works and three arts.

Thirdly, native language and nature science. There were not any native language in the course of subjects which were designed by humanists' educators at the beginning of renaissance. The Italian Vergerio and Guerino never talked about the teaching of native language. Erasmus proposed to set up a unified common culture through Latin in Europe. However, he ignored that Latin was not the native language in the north of Alps.^[5] Vives overcame this disadvantage. In his book *imparting knowledge*, he advised fathers and elementary school teachers took the responsibility of teaching children mother language. In addition to let students learn how to say native language, teachers should taught them how to write in mother language. It was necessary for students to understand their native language's history. In the later renaissance, native language to-warded mature as development. In the description of courtier, Cascadia viewed perfect courtier should be able to use native language skillfully. England influenced powerfully among those European countries. In *Utopia*, More required to teach citizen in mother language in order to raise the cultural level of his nation. Nevertheless, it was a long way to join native language into school course. After the religious reform, English became the main method in daily communication and expression gradually. Also, in France, Montaigne talked about write in French during his book *theory of education for children*, and Martin. Luther in Germany translated New Testament into German and advised to teach it in German. The fact that position of native words had been raised reflected the upsurge of national spirit. Also, it indicated that education began to vulgarization. The status of Latin declined as mother language's raise.

Besides trivium, there were also quadrivium during renaissance. It referred to arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. Except music, the other three had closed relation with nature science.^[6] For nature science, many achievements had been gained in the later renaissance. While at start, trivium was paid more attention than quadrivium. Vives put quadrivium into the course of teaching contents. And during the later period, nature science began to gain its position in the school course. For example, Rabelais especially valued the study of nature science in his *gargantua and pantagruel*. Montaigne affirmed the importance of science in his *theory of education for children*. Baconic divided science into three parts and opened a new comprehend on world for human being.

It is necessary to refer that although natural science had been advised during the renaissance, the importance of it was less than nowadays.

Moral education

The classical ethics and moral philosophy also the important subjects in renaissance. Humanistic educators

^[5] Li Deming, *History of Western Education*, Beijing: Development of Humanistic Education, 2008, pp. 92-99.

^[6] Wang Jie, *Humanism and Modern Life*, Dalian: Liaoning University Press, 2012, pp. 50-87.

took virtue seriously and emphasized the moral value of classical literature and history. Besides justice, will, moderation, wisdom, virtue was also stressed by educators in North Europe. In their opinion, the aim of life was to obtain fame, glory and reputation. And virtue was the basic condition for them. Furthermore, virtue was the essential element for eliminating conflict between parties, clearing corruption and establishing orderly, harmonious country. At this time, Erasmus required study hardly, Vives proposed absorbing the quintessence and giving up dregs when learning Paganism. Vittorino advised choose right moral content to teach students, pay attention to develop students' personality and their own self-government ability. Rabelais required students to learn *the New Testament* and *the Old Testament*, longing and loving God. He put moral education and knowledge education the equal status and underlined religious faith as the basis of moral education.^[7] More put moral education at the first place in overall development education. Particularly, he thought highly of the awareness of patriotism and happy outlook on life. He advised children's moral training should be practiced as soon as possible.

At the same time, during the whole period of renaissance, humanistic educators proposed the study of religion and believing of it. Those in North Europe claimed pious and ethics more. Erasmus valued the teaching of them and took them as the standard to comment people's behavior. He chose classical works in ancient Greece and Rome, regarded *Bible* as the expression of God's will. From his point of view, only through this, people could reach to religiosity.

Art and Physical Education

For art education, Vittorino supported students chant ancient Greece's songs, play their musical instrument. He thought art education had the direct relation with the form of children's morality. Rabelais demanded students to learn sing, dance, instrument, painting, sculpture etc. More realized music's educational role. He thought through listening music, people could enjoy themselves and feel relaxed. He proposed the art of nature and the art of health.

For physical education, the earlier humanistic educators took it seriously just because they pursued for a kind of perfect educated idea. The later ones valued it for the aim of practice and the surpass of chivalry in medieval. Both Vergerio and Vittorino regarded healthy body as the basis of developing intelligence. They demanded students insist on physical activities. Rabelais combined P.E with military training and labor. He requested students follow reasonable studying system strictly. Montaigne against who could just learning and advised training both mind and body.

It is necessary to point out that in addition to intellectual, moral, art and physical education, the contents of More also referred to labor education, academic research, women's education and so on. He was the first person who claimed the points that education should combined with labor, girls equal to boys, moral education was the first, nature science and cultural communication should be valued in western educational history.

The Methods of Humanistic Educational Thought.

Different from midlevel's asceticism, fideism and authoritarianism, educational methods in renaissance were founded on the basis of new human nature theory and cognitive ways. Specifically, there were following points:

Firstly, they uphold-ed the spirit of freedom, while against-ed authoritarianism and physical punishment.

^[7] Zhang Qiong, Zhang Chong, Zhi Shunfu, Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2012, pp. 15-69.

Rabelais said the ideal state of life was that everything obeyed one's own will and wish but not law, regulations and rule. Erasmus emphasized that people had the right of thinking freely. He proposed teachers should not let students trust things according to authority but as their own judgment. Vittorino agreed with Plato's notion that free people could not teach using forceful and severe methods.^[8] Vives required teachers respect children. Montaigne valued teaching without tears. In his opinion, severe punishment had no benefit while just destroy students' learning will.

Secondly, the educational and philosophical views in this period paid attention to children's development not only from mind but also from body. The educators in renaissance had already realized that whether obey children's development features or not was the key point which leads to successful education directly. Vergerio claimed that learning subjects should be suitable for students' hobbies and age. Erasmus realized students' individual difference. He thought teachers need to use different teaching methods according to children's personalities. Rabelais advocated inspire and respect children. He valued that the effective teaching method was the way that could let the whole teach course relaxed and happy. Montaigne's view was similar to Erasmus', he advised teach children as their own ability. Among them, Vives cognition about children's psychology carefully and deeply. He tried to set up education on the foundation of psychology and his opinion toward children's minds reflected modern spirit.

Thirdly, the new ways of understanding things had been brought in the humanistic educational thought. Rabelais valued the methods of observing, talking, playing games, studying in some other place or abroad and so on. These methods also be agreed with by other educators at that time. Among them, Vives and Bacon criticized scholastic approach thoroughly. In Vives' opinion, the thing scholasticism did was boring reasoning from individual experience. This was the root that lead to academic pedantic.^[9] And the right method was induction. He thought highly of sensory experiences' part and regarded them as the beginning of intellectual activities. Bacon demonstrated inductive method intimated from philosophy's height. He disagreed to recognize things subjectivity, blindness, authority and fuzziness. He proposed to unite perceptual and conceptual knowledge, use rational ability to divide and tidy material, and then deduce science conclusion. This philosophical cognition was the strong foundation of new teaching theory and the famous intuitive teaching principle by Comenius was produced on it.

Forth, humanistic educators paid more attention to training ability, while disagreed pedantic learning style. In this aspect, Rabelais pointed out knowledge was trash of soul without understanding. Montaigne thought both ability and knowledge were important for education, and ability even more significant. In his point, the aim of education was to train students' ability through knowledge. From Bacon's point of view, intelligence must be trained just as will and body. He believed that not only character became perfect as learning, but ability also enhanced as time passed. Both Montaigne and Bacon emphasized practical knowledge. But compared with each other, Montaigne ignored valueless subjects, while Bacon valued nature science for he thought it could give people more force to conquer nature.

The Features of Humanistic Educational Thought.

Although there were differences among the different humanistic educators in renaissance, it could be

^[8] Leopold Leed, *English-Chinese Summaries of Western Classics Volume IV 100 Classics from the Renaissance and Baroque Periods*, Shanghai: The Press of World's Books, 2012, p.2-63.

^[9] Kun Tiliang, *The Works of Kun Tiliang*, Beijing: People's Educational Press, 2006, p.64-79.

found some features alike. This paper will express them from the following aspects.

Firstly, they regarded humanism as the foundation of educational concept. During renaissance, humanistic educators expressed their thought based on the notion of human-centered though their ideological ideas were not the same.^[10] At that time, the philosophical educators emphasized human and its status and value vigorously. They claimed respect people and sent them free, bring up full developed human. From their point of view, people's mind and body could developed well only through education. Personal growth was paid the most attention, and it was the essential feature during humanistic educational thought of renaissance in Europe. Everything was arranged by God was denied. They believed that by education people were able to defeat fate, change material world through fulfilling extraordinary potential. This was totally different from the notion that God is omniscient in medieval.

Secondly, the aim of education tended to the common customs and utility. Besides proposed training full developed people, the educational thought at that time declared education should serve for real society. And this was not the same as medieval's educational aim of seeking rebirth.^[11] They required education should relate with real society and play role in reforming society. No matter the citizen which were brought up by early Italian humanists or the monarch or courtier trained by later ones, they all served for real society. At the same time, moral education was not served for gaining God's favor but for reforming society, reducing the corrupt and immoral phenomenon.

Thirdly, the contents of education based on classical cultural, and gradually tent to nature science as developing. Classical cultural played an important role during the whole humanists' education. Most of the educators at that time treat Latin, Greek, ancient history, philosophy, literature etc. as the educated subjects. They believed learning these course could help people absorb wisdom from ancients, shape virtue and rational, cultivate practical talents. During the later renaissance, as nature science developed, native language and nature science walked into educational contents.

Forth, they viewed to use flexible teaching methods according to children's character and guided them to study autonomy. The humanistic educators advised that teachers should familiar with students' mind and body. They could use different teaching ways in the light of students' age and individuality in order to shape their creative ability and personality.^[12] At the same time, teachers had the duty to respect children, understand their interests and hobbies, try to mobilize their enthusiasm and initiation and let the teaching course become vividly and interesting. They against-ed mandatory educational. In this sense, they questioned and criticized old teaching methods, required explore new ways of teaching and learning from theory to practice.

To observe the humanistic educational thought in renaissance, it is easily to found that these ideology were advanced and precocious. Meanwhile, their thoughts possessed fierce religiousness for they did not disagree religion in essence although non-authoritative idea was pointed out. Also, as the emerging of capitalism, the renaissance was launched by nobility. Their educational thought was not equal and democratic totally but hierarchy in some sense.

^[10] Mgobe B. Ramose, *The Death of Democracy and the Resurrection of Democracy*, Journal of Moral Education, 2010, 39(3) pp. 291-303.

^[11] Jiang Yan, *the Development of Western Humanistic Education*, Technology Outlook, 2015, Vol. 31, No.5, pp. 27-29.

^[12] Lin Yu, *The Renaissance's Meaning towards China*, Northern Cultural, 2015(8), p. 146.

The Historical Significance and Practical Meaning of Humanistic Educational Thought

The Historical Significance of Humanistic Educational Thought.

Firstly, the humanistic educational thought changed God-centered educational theory into human-centered. On one side, no matter the perfect citizen or monarch or courtier, the aim of humanists' education was served for this life, real society and individual happiness but not for God. Through this way, people liberated from the bondage of God. On the other side, humanistic educators at that time began to research children. They pointed out that children's development were different not only because of innately different but also for the reason of age features. They proposed that teachers should consider children's personality, try to arouse their initiative, enthusiasm and subjectivity. All these views showed that the teaching notion in renaissance was founded on the basis of human-centered.

Secondly, the humanistic educational thought renewed the educational contents and its teaching methods tended to humanization and diversification. For the educational contents, the humanistic educators emphasized the study on classical culture in the early renaissance. In the late time, as national countries' appearing and nature science's developing, native language and nature science gradually became the contents of education.^[13] Meanwhile, they paid more attention on the learning of music and physical training. For educational methods, humanistic educators at that time opposed compulsory teaching and dogmatism intensively. They viewed that teaching methods should base on the respect of children's age features, individual differences, hobbies and so on. And educational ways should be flexible and vivid in practice. Teachers could teach children by the way of observing, talking, letting them study in other place or aboard. In order to raise their enthusiasm, they also could let children go to factories, stores to learn practical knowledge. At the same time, humanistic educators pointed out good environment's part for children.^[14] They proposed that school should be the place in where children's minds and bodies could develop happily.

Thirdly, the humanistic educational thought provide theoretical and practical foundation for the development of modern western education. They started a new direction for European modern education both from theory and practice. Specific, in the early Italian renaissance, humanists Vittorino, Guarino etc. advised to set up new schools in order to realize humanistic educational thought in practice. In the late renaissance, humanists Wiesel proposed to explore new school system for the humanized subjects and scientific management. Also, Erasmus, Martin. Luther etc. pointed out to probe school's new organization.

The Practical Meaning of Humanistic Educational Thought.

Although past many years, as one of the most important cultural movements in Europe, renaissance still has practical meaning in modern education. Also for the contemporary western education, it is useful to draw on experience from renaissance's humanistic educators. Their educational views shed light in the developing road of today's education. The most outstanding contribution renaissance had made was that it sent people free, changed God-centered into human-centered, claimed respect children. This view reflected their esteem to human being. The opinion that living in this life and pursue temporal happiness also have enlightened meaning for today's western. Only the current is well, human beings could develop better day by day. At the same time, for today's China, the philosophical educational thought has great enlightening meaning. The views of respect to children and teach as different personality provide useful reference for junior education in China. The

^[13] Yang Heyong, Tang Wei, *the Enlightening Spirit and Its Historical Meaning of Renaissance*, 2010(7). pp. 167-170.

^[14] Wang Zhen, *European Renaissance and Its Modern Meaning*, 2012(6), pp. 180-181.

proposition that education served for real society is suitable for professional talents training. The thought of human-centered inspires our country's educational notion of people-oriented.

In a word, although renaissance happened in ancient Europe where it is far from contemporary China, its humanistic philosophical educational thought plays a significant part both in today's western world and the highly developed China. Through studying the culture of renaissance and absorbing its cream, Chinese and world's education will be better and better and the whole world's development will be more harmonious as time goes by.

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