

A Comparative Study of Confucian Junzi Education and John Locke's Gentleman Education*

DAI Cong-cong, LI Ju-yuan (Corresponding author)

Guangzhou University, Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, 511400 China

Both in ancient China and Western countries educators emphasized cultivation of students' emotions, personality and character, among whom Confucius, the great Chinese thinker and educator and Locke, the famous British political thinker, philosopher and educator are two representative figures. The former contended the primary concern on cultivation of Junzi, an idealized personality with virtue and righteousness and the latter pushed the modern Western gentleman education to the summit under the unique British noble system and the tradition of elite education. This paper makes a contrastive study of Confucius's Junzi education and Locke's gentleman education. Through analyzing and comparing the unique Confucian moral principles and Locke's insights into gentleman education, the study finds that although there are common grounds and similarities between Confucian Junzi education and Locke's gentleman education, they are different from each other in teaching target groups, teaching methods and teaching contents. This study helps to bring a significant rethinking for character cultivation and enrich the contemporary educational ideas from a cross-cultural perspective.

Keywords: Confucius, Locke, junzi education, gentleman education

1 Introduction

The term, *junzi*, which literally means "son of a ruler or noble lord", was originally used to describe princes or aristocratic people. It has appeared in many classical literary works, such as *Book of Changes*, *Tao TeChing*, and *The Analects of Confucius*. In *The Analects*, however, Confucius extended the term with an ethical meaning. Junzi not only had its connotation of exemplary person, but also was a goal to be achieved. Although the ideal of junzi embodied numerous virtues, including wisdom, modesty, moderation and simplicity, the cardinal notions of Confucianism are *ren* and *li*. According to Yang's statistics (1980), the term *ren*, as the most frequent word, appeared 109 times in the book, while the word of *li* was mentioned 75 times in different chapters. *Ren* refers to benevolence or humanity, denoting an inner sense of considerations for others. *Li* is rather broad in content, including etiquette, rituals, and rules of proper manners. Confucius believed that the practice of *li* on the premises of *ren* would make one regulate himself or herself internally and create harmonious interpersonal relationship

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DAI Cong-cong, postgraduate student, School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou University, China.

LI Ju-yuan (Corresponding author), Ph.D., Professor of English, School of Foreign Languages, Guangzhou University, China.

externally. It indicates that *ren* and *li* are the roots of fundamental characters that a junzi must cultivate. Without *ren*, one does not even deserve to be called a human being at all.

Dating back to the Renaissance era, the term of gentleman first appeared in the works of Pietro Paolo Vergerio. In his *On the Manners of a Gentleman and Liberal Studies*, he comprehensively illustrated the purpose and approaches of humanistic education (Wu & Ren, 2007). Ever since then a lasting discussion on gentleman education has been aroused in the West. During the transition from religious education to secular education, John Locke assimilated and developed educational theories from predecessors, such as Juan Luis Vives, Baldassare Castiglione, Thomas Elyot, Milton and so on. Finally, in the 17th century, Locke pushed the modern Western gentleman education to the summit under the unique British noble system and the tradition of elite education. His educational concepts are mainly reflected in the book *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* written in 1692. As is stated by Locke, to become a gentleman, one should strengthen physical exercise, moral education as well as intellectual education and a new type of gentleman must be endowed with the four qualities of virtue, wisdom, etiquette, and learning.

2 Similarities in Junzi Education and Gentleman Education

2.1 Similarities in Social Background

First, let's look at the social background under which Confucius (551 BC-479 BC) lived. During the Zhou dynasty, centralized power weakened throughout the Spring and Autumn period until the Warring States period in the last two centuries of the dynasty. Later, the Zhou court had little control over its constituent states and twelve states were in recurrent wars with each other. Rivalries among various political powers brought more opportunities for upward mobility for common people. In the era of "the Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought", many philosophers, such as Confucius and Mencius, offered their political advice to the rulers and called for a harmony society. Confucius believed that government and education were inseparable. Without ethical values education, it was impossible for leaders to run a government.

In the 17th century, England experienced two revolutions. In 1649, after years of civil war, King Charles of the Stuart family was executed and a Commonwealth was established. In 1688 the Glorious Revolution occurred. Locke was a promoter of both the European Enlightenment and the constitution of the United States. Much of what he advocated was accepted in England after the Glorious Revolution. Russel stated that Locke was the most fortunate of all philosophers. He completed his work in theoretical philosophy just at the moment the government of his country fell into the hands of men who shared his political opinions (Russell, 1993, p. 605). In terms of education, he said, "Of all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind" (Locke, 1824, p. 10). In short, Locke clearly recognized that prosperity of the nation depended on the well education of children.

2.2 Similarities in Moral Education

Lifelong learning is the path to the virtues of both junzi and gentleman. It has to be admitted that the intellectual knowledge can contribute a lot to the formation of the characters. What matters more is the moral will. Just as Master Zeng said, "A man of honor makes friends through his learning and looks to friends for support in cultivating humaneness" (Lin, 2017, p. 83). Similarly, Locke convinced that moral education and good manners were more important than knowledge. The goal of education was not to create a scholar, but to create a virtuous

adult. The English philosopher described that education meant discipline, and good morality was closely linked to a certain refusal to free indulgence in one's own desires. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he described that human beings are born with minds that are like "blank slates" (Locke, 1975, p. 325). That is, human knowledge and moralities are acquired from experience. An early turn to morality is most excellent for the forming of children's minds.

3 Differences in Junzi Education and Gentleman Education

3.1 Differences in Target Groups

Though the examples discussed in the *Analects of Confucius* exhibit a specific concern for training Chinese elites in the art of governing well, Confucius made it clear that the way forward is open to anyone who is willing to study hard and practice the art of self-cultivation. As the Master said, "In teaching, I take disciples of all background without discrimination" (Lin, 2017, p. 302). He started a private school that was accessible to all the people who could afford their tuition, regardless of their social ranks. However, education was a privileged existence among the upper class in Britain. Unlike common education, upper-class families often hired tutors to educate their children at home or sent their children to private schools. In line with such views of Locke's time, the proposals of his education were class-specific, mainly for upper-class boys of a relatively small elite.

3.2 Differences in Teaching Methods

The cultivation of the self is an issue that the Confucius was always concerned about. *The Analects* answers how to practice self-cultivation spontaneously, that is, always keeping *ren* in mind and responding to others through *li* are as natural as breathing for them. Besides, Confucius encouraged children to ask questions as he noted "Learning without reflection will end up in confusion; reflection without learning will end up in peril" (Lin, 2017, p. 104). Nevertheless, there is little in *The Analects* specifically relating to parent's roles in moral cultivation of children. Fathers still maintained distance from their sons by remembering their roles as teachers, guides. Likewise, children acknowledged this distance by respecting their parents and following this kind of distance.

Conversely, Locke preferred family education than school education, because family education tended to preserve a child's innocence and modesty through acquiring good qualities from near kin. He criticized, "It is impossible he should have 50 or 100 scholars under his eye... nor can it be expected, that he should instruct them successfully in anything but their books; the forming of their minds and manners requiring a constant attention and particular application to every single boy" (Locke, 1824, pp. 56-57). Educators were urged to carefully inquire into the children's personality in order to help them form their positive natural tendencies. He held that parents and tutors are not only supervisors but also friends. As he referred in his book, "Nothing cements and establishes friendship and good-will, so much as confident communication of concerns and affairs" (Locke, 1824, p. 89).

3.3 Differences in Teaching Contents

In ancient Chinese, to promote all-around development, young ruling elites were required to master the Six Arts as ancient curriculum and read the Six Classics. The Six Arts includes rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy and mathematics. The Six Classics refers to six classical books: *the Book of History*, *the Spring and*

Autumn Annals, the *Book of Music*, the *Book of Changes*, the *Book of Rites* and the *Book of Songs* (Graham, 1990). Men who excelled in Six Arts and Six Classics were thought to have reached the state of perfection.

Locke's hierarchy of values in the education of a gentleman is contained in four elements: virtue, wisdom, breeding, and learning. Firstly, virtue, for Locke, is of supreme importance, far more hard to be got than a knowledge of the world. Secondly, wisdom was not about superficial thoughts or much reading, but the effect of experience and observation in men and surrounding world. Then, Locke believed that the purpose of education was to bring children up to be virtuous, using the power of reason to overcome desire. Parents played a severing role in supervising children's behavior. Finally, the educator advocated for the earliest forms of student-centered learning as well as the educational idea of differentiation. As soon as children speak English, they should quickly begin to learn a second language, such as French and Latin. Other subjects which Locke commended for a gentleman's son included geography, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, history and so on.

4 Conclusion

As we have seen, Confucian ethics has provided us with a great many insightful ideas, such as teaching the characters on the basis of practical moral wisdom, focusing on the practical meaning of learning in the process of character education, and emphasizing the importance of the life-long education. Locke promotes the view of talent of all-round development of physique, morality and intelligence. Habit, truly, is continually emphasized by Locke. He agrees to teach students in accordance with their aptitude.

Given the length of Confucian history, it is not possible in the space of this article to review all or even most of the Confucian and Locke's texts. However, to improve the effectiveness of modern character education, undoubtedly, we need to not only rethink parent-children relationships in the earliest stages of children's lives but also take the students' different personalities into consideration while teachers help them develop the corresponding characters.

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