

Confucius' Education Without Discrimination

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Good afternoon, respected Provost, Miss Deng, and my fellow students. Today I am going to talk about the verse in the *The Analects of Confucius*, which is ‘The Master said, “From the man bringing his bundle of dried flesh for my teaching upwards, I have never refused instruction to any one.”’¹

In this sharing, I will mainly share with everyone my inspiration of Confucius' teaching in *the Analects of Confucius*, and my thoughts about some of the qualities that a teacher should have in today's society. The sharing was divided into the following three parts: first, an analysis of the content of *The Analects of Confucius*; second, an observation of two sages, Confucius and Tao Xingzhi 陶行知; third, a reflection on the virtues that one should possess if one becomes a teacher in the future.

In fact, as early as the time of Confucius, only the nobles had the opportunity to receive education, and only the children of the emperors and princes had the opportunity to receive higher education. Gentlemen like Zichan 子產, Jizha 季札, and Zhougong 周公 are actually the sons and ministers of their respective states. Therefore, before Confucius, children from ordinary families had no chance to receive education. However, at that time, Confucius accepted his pupils to give lectures. He was not influenced by other people's words, and was not interfered by the previous aristocratic education system. He was always adhered to provide education for all people without discrimination. Confucius hoped that he could turn into a beacon himself, and taught more people with his knowledge, so that more people could understand etiquette, so as to manage himself, improve his character, and help more people.

So the next question is, how much is Confucius' tuition? Was the tuition he

¹ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), vol. 1, p. 197.

charged in that era very expensive? Can children from poor families afford it?

‘The Master said, “From the man bringing his bundle of dried flesh for my teaching upwards, I have never refused instruction to any one.”’²

As we all know, there are a large number of Confucian pupils. There are rich ones like Zigong 子貢, and there are poor ones like YanYuan 顏淵. *Shuxiu Li* 束脩禮, bundle of dried flesh was just a kind of etiquette at that time. Confucius's idea was to let pupils develop a respectful heart towards their teachers and focus on their own hearts through this kind of etiquette.

There is also such a chapter in *The Analects of Confucius*, which reflects the attitude of Confucius in accepting pupils.

‘The people in Huxiang were not good at taking advice, but Confucius accepted a visit by a teenager there. However, Confucius' students doubted it. Confucius said, 'I encourage them to improve themselves, but not in favour of the opposite. Why do you ask too much of them? When they prepare themselves for taking advice, we should encourage this good attitude instead of keeping in mind what they did wrong before.’

In fact, it is widely known that Confucius had three thousand pupils. If Confucius' tuition fees are slightly increased, he could have been as rich as Buffett and lived a wealthy and fortunate life in the suburbs of Shandong.

What Confucius thought was that as long as a person has the idea of getting rid of his bad habits, he should help such person to this. He should be given a chance to study.

But the purpose of Confucius' teaching is very simple. He just hoped that ‘they are, in regard to the aged, to give them rest; in regard to friends, to show them sincerity; in regard to the young, to treat them tenderly.’³ Although he cannot be an official of the Lu State to manage the country and benefit the people, he hoped that his pupils can inherit their own knowledge and spread culture. Therefore, Confucius'

² James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, p. 197.

³ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, p. 183.

tuition fees were low, as long as bundle of dried flesh, whether rich or not, as long as he was willing to learn from the good, he will do his best to teach him. Confucius had been writing books and educating students throughout his life, and had been selflessly igniting others and illuminating the world with his own light.

In this study of *The Analects of Confucius*, I was reminded of a modern Chinese educator, Mr Tao Xingchi, when I read that Confucius always adhered to provide education for all people without discrimination.

Tao Xingzhi was born in Anhui in 1891. He graduated from Nanjing Jinling University, graduating with the first overall score. Later, Tao Xingzhi did further study in the United States, majoring in education at Columbia Institute of Education, in order to find a new way for Chinese education.

He returned to China in 1917. He saw the China at the time was extremely poor. Among the 400 million Chinese, 200 million were illiterate, and 70 million Chinese children had no opportunity to receive education. Mr. Tao said that the root of this problem lies in education.

At that time, Mr. Tao could teach in any university based on his study experience in Europe and the United States. However, all his attention was focused on the poor society in China. He said eloquently, 'China is based on agriculture, and eight out of ten people live in the countryside. Therefore, Chinese education is education in the countryside. If the countryside does not improve, the country has no hope.'⁴

Mr. Tao does what he says. He resigned the superior treatment of his university professor. But what was his salary at the time? At that time, his monthly income was four hundred oceans. In his time, if he wanted to buy a whole courtyard house in Beijing, it would cost him three months' salary, but Mr. Tao did not need all this. His idea is simple, he wants to find a new way for China's education through his own practice and his own exploration.

⁴ Qingtong 青桐, Tao Xingzhi: He entered the children's hall at the age of 6, dropped out of school at the age of 11, and studied abroad at the age of 23. He is known as the master of all ages (2018) <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1598004904681398299&wfr=spider&for=pc> [accessed 5 November.

After that, Mr. Tao overcame many difficulties and moved to Xiaozhuang outside Nanjing, a very backward and impoverished village in China at that time. He lived in a temporary tent. He made friends with the local farmers. Gradually, he had a wish that seemed impossible to fulfill, and that was to train one million rural teachers for China at that time. The ambition of Mr. Tao said his ambition was, 'To recruit one million people, to establish one million schools, and to transform one hundred villages.'⁵

I read 'The Book of Learning' in *The Book of Rites* before. I remembered a passage in it, 'Only memorising knowledge is not enough for one to be a teacher.' Mr. Tao's teaching goal is also like this. He did not want to cultivate scholars who could do nothing. Who he wanted to cultivate were those teachers who were willing to endure hardship and were able to do practical things. At Xiaozhuang Normal University, Mr. Tao led the students to work in the fields together. He said, 'Plant your own fields and eat your own food. Doing your own business, relying on people, and ancestors is not a hero.'⁶

He often walked in the street. He wanted to help the poorest Chinese to learn Chinese characters. Mr. Tao also personally compiled books called *A Thousand Characters Course for Common People* and *A Thousand Characters Course for Old and Young People* which were distributed nationwide to teach farmers to learn Chinese characters voluntarily, and he gave these two textbooks free of charge.

These teachings of Mr. Tao are free and compulsory. His lifelong dream and purpose was only one, and that is to change the education in China at that time so that more children can receive education. The circulation of these two books is very wide, and the circulation among civilians exceeded 3 million in an instant.

Mr. Tao has been on the journey to do the education throughout his whole life.

⁵ Qingtong 青桐, Tao Xingzhi: He entered the children's hall at the age of 6, dropped out of school at the age of 11, and studied abroad at the age of 23. He is known as the master of all ages (2018) <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1598004904681398299&wfr=spider&for=pc> [accessed 5 November.

⁶ Qingtong 青桐, Tao Xingzhi: He entered the children's hall at the age of 6, dropped out of school at the age of 11, and studied abroad at the age of 23. He is known as the master of all ages (2018) <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1598004904681398299&wfr=spider&for=pc> [accessed 5 November.

Just like Confucius, he did not receive any money from the underachievers. Although he was tired, he did not complain from beginning to end and insisted on teaching. I am impressed the two saints are brilliant. They used their words and deeds to set a standard for each teacher in the future generations; they exerted a conducive influence on this land and these people with their own virtues and words. They used their lives to redefine the grand weight of the word teacher all their lives. Although I cannot behave about the two saints, I yearn for them.

However, in China today, education has gradually become a way for some people to earn a living. The annual net income of major educational institutions reaches hundreds of millions. The relationship between teachers and students has gradually changed, just like employees and employers, who receive and pay money. Some teachers have forgotten their responsibilities, attending classes inefficiently, and counting money after class, which has slowly evolved into a general phenomenon.

In recent years, many of my classmates who have just graduated from university have been asking me if I am interested in going to some place in Yunnan to be a teacher together in the future. There the benefits to be a teachers are very good, the scenery is very beautiful, and the teaching facilities in all aspects are very complete. Of course, the tuition fees for students every year are also very fairly high. These money and the management of the school are controlled by several shareholders of the company. There is a strong commercial atmosphere in the school.

I remember my mother once told me that if education is operated in a commercial mode, the teaching goals of teachers will become more and more utilitarian. The goal of teaching will gradually change from educating children's knowledge to earning students' tuition fees. I think it is quite true.

In fact, I have always had an obsession in my heart. I always think that when people live in the world, I should enjoy themselves. As we are young, we make a lot of money to enjoy life. But this time I studied *The Analects of Confucius* and I read a lot of stories about Mr. Tao. I was impressed by his philosophy of teaching without

distinction, not changing his intentions due to tuition and money. It reminded me of a TV series I watched before— ‘The Way of A Doctor’.

In the film, what impressed me the most was what Liu Yitai said, ‘Doctors are not to make money. If you want to become prosperous, you should learn Chinese and become an interpreter; if you want to make money, you should become a businessman. The doctor's responsibility is to take care of those who are sick. That is the doctor's first responsibility, and only this is the second and third responsibility.’ I think this sentence also applies to teachers. The purpose of a teacher is to impart students knowledge and to indicate learning and life problems, turning them into a beacon when the students are young, and giving them a good guide. If you want to make money, you can become a businessman; if you want to become an official, you become an official. A person who is a teacher cannot regard taking profit as righteousness.

The Master said, ‘ A scholar, whose mind is set on truth, and who is ashamed of bad food, is not fit to be discoursed with.’⁷

Indeed, first, a gentleman does something and does not do something.

Second, if I become a teacher in the future, I hope I can always follow the example of Confucius and Mr. Tao, not forgetting the motivation of being a teacher, memorizing what I can do what I cannot do, and continuing on this road.

My presentation today concludes here. Any feedback and suggestions would be appreciated. Thank you for listening.

⁷ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, p. 168.

Bibliography

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