

Confucianism and Chinese Education

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Culture Influencing Learning and Communication

- One of the things that has fascinated me as a scholar is the relationship between the cultural manifestation of politics and learning and communication
- In my research the cultural manifestation of politics strongly influences how learning and communication operates in a society and how that situation operates in a globalized society, as noted by President Xi Jinping, when he stated “Many of the problems troubling the world are not caused by economic globalization. Whether you like it or not, the global economy is the big ocean you cannot escape from” (CNN Money, 2017).

Culture influencing Learning and Communication

- One of the impulses for working on how culture affects communication and learning is a recent policy paper by AECT (Policy Brief No. 2016.1)
- In that brief AECT declared that all people and organizations involved in the educational process across the spectrum of schooling need to rethink and re-conceptualize how new technology is used in the educational process.
- One cannot ignore the growing influence and embracing of new technology in the educational process, but at the same time realize “that using new technology in the educational process will automatically result in increased student achievement.

Confucian Philosophical Influence on Twentieth/Twenty-First Century Chinese Society

- In that vein I would like to begin my take on how the cultural manifestation of politics is affecting and will affect Chinese education; I realize such an effort is like a tick landing on an elephant and trying to figure out how large this object is. I hope that you will respect the effort of a Westerner who lives thousands of miles away in a different country, and who respects the “Chinese miracle” of the last one hundred and twenty years.
- China has existed in many forms over the last 4-5 millennia—tribal, monarchy, vassal, “democratic,” and socialist/communist “democracy.” It is a country rich with cultural history that has not been truly appreciated or highlighted by scholars or the West. As I begin the discussion today,
- The focus for this discussion is the last 130+ years—from the nineteenth century to the middle of the twenty-first century. In that timespan, China has transitioned from:
 - a monarchy that ended in the first part of the twentieth century
 - to the Nationalist “democracy” that ended in the first half of the twentieth century
 - to a socialist/communistic “democracy” that has existed in some form for close to 100 years

Confucian Philosophy's Influence on Twenty-First Century Chinese Society

- In this century there is or there has to be a scholarly analysis of how all narratives have contributed to the development of Chinese society, and how that discussion must be reflected in Chinese education, if Chinese education is to prepare the next generation to active and competent leadership in this globalized society, as noted by President Jinling in Davos, Switzerland, this past January.
- With the recent retreat of the United States government into a self-absorbed isolationist hostility towards the rest of the world and China's public declarations and intents (support of The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and of The Paris Agreement) about engaging with the rest of the world, the necessity of a cultural construct that can guide and support all human activities in Chinese society, particularly education, must be developed, and in my opinion, that cultural construct should be Confucianism.

Confucian Philosophy's Influence on Twenty-First Century Chinese Society

- Why Confucianism?
- Confucianism is a cultural construct that has existed in China for 2,500 years +. It is a cultural construct that has had an on-again/off-again relationship with whatever type of government has been in power at certain times. As stated by Mu (2013), "Confucius, the Chinese thinker, philosopher, and educator, advocated the idea of education for all, though he did not use the term "educational equity."
- Confucianism is a cultural construct that could bridge the inclusion of all narratives that have contributed to, are contributing to, and will contribute to China's contribution to human existence in the twenty-first century. Mu (2013) points out that Confucius's ideas on "educational equity" are in sync with modern opinions on universal access to education, but also in accord with the current Chinese discourse, "which emphasizes the development of well-rounded individuals through a learner-based approach"(State Council 2010). Dello-Iacovo (2009) state that the "concept of a well-rounded person is embedded in the long-standing Confucian thought.

Confucian Philosophical Influence on Twentieth/Twenty-First Chinese Society

Confucianism is a philosophy that asks all participants in Chinese society to recognize their role and contribute to the betterment of Chinese society. It has waxed and waned in terms of its recognition and influence on Chinese society over the past 2,500 years. Recently, its influence has been on the rise for various reasons and the time is perfect to analyze its potentiality:

- Recently, Chinese and Western Intellectuals have focused on the renewed emphasis given to Confucian philosophy and its presence in modern Chinese society. Wah (2010) notes two things in the discussion of the importance of Confucianism to Chinese society; one, he claims that Confucianism has contributed to the economic performance of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, the four dragons of East Asia (Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, and now China and Vietnam; two, that in 1988, 75 Nobel Prize winners made a statement in Paris that if humankind is to survive in the twenty-first century, they must draw wisdom from Confucius.

Confucian Philosophy's Influence on Twenty-First Century Chinese Society

- Wa (2010) and Mu 2013 both agree on the value of Confucian philosophy to potentially aid the development and guidance to various parts of Chinese society:
- Wa states that Confucianism helps Chinese businesspeople to maintain and revere such principles as loyalty, benevolence, compassion and altruism.

Mu states that Confucius was one of the first philosophers anywhere to emphasize education for everyone; up until then, “only aristocrats were entitled to education. Other citizens, ethnic minorities, and slaves were excluded from education.” Confucius’s effort broke the ruling class monopoly over education and transformed “education for aristocrats into “education for all.”

Han (2013) in his abstract to “Confucian Leadership and the Rising Chinese Economy,” notes “since the 1990’s China’s burgeoning economy has drawn worldwide attention” and that “much research has focused on the formative role of Confucianism in the development of Chinese culture and its ongoing influence in motivating Chinese leaders past and present.”

Clearly, a situation exists where many individuals involved in the different aspects of Chinese society view Confucianism as an asset for Chinese society in the twenty-first century. The devil is in the details in terms of how such an asset should be used and guided in different aspects of Chinese society, particularly education.

Confucianism Philosophical Effect on Chinese Education

- Han (2013) in his abstract to “Confucian Leadership and the Rising Chinese Economy,” notes “since the 1990’s China’s burgeoning economy has drawn worldwide attention” and that “much research has focused on the formative role of Confucianism in the development of Chinese culture and its ongoing influence in motivating Chinese leaders past and present.”
- Chu (2013) notes that in understanding Chinese educational efforts in the twenty-first century one must be aware of its past historical strands of influence and thought (Imperial China, Nationalist China, China under Mao Zedong, reform era Communism—Deng Xiaoping, Len Peng, Zhao Ziyang) and the increasing influence of Confucianism on Chinese social activities.
- Chu also notes how it is paradoxical that Confucius and his philosophy about relationship, power and society is reappearing in Chinese social practices with greater influence through the blessing of the current government with the intent by “today’s China as an additional tool in presenting its image to the world as an egalitarian society with everyone participating in an evolving market economy under a benevolent political collective.
- Wang (2014) insists that an inclusion of the efforts, benefits and problems of the past governing entities must be appraised, such as reappraising the state-building of the Guomindang (the Nationalist Party) such as its commitment to modern technocracy and administration

Research Questions and Methodology

- The research methodology for this project will be that of a qualitative approach and the design will be a qualitative case study approach.
- The attempt will be made to begin gathering information through case studies about the potential/philosophical influence of Confucianism in the political interaction with learning and communication (technology) in China today.
- A qualitative research method is appropriate for this situation because it focuses on gathering perceptions, stories, and phenomenological awareness through interviews with individuals in such situations

Research Methodology and Questions (cont.)

- An exploratory case study design is appropriate because it is research conducted for a problem that has not been clearly defined. It often occurs before we know enough to make conceptual distinctions or posit an explanatory relationship.
- If a case study is done correctly, according to Professor Paul Lawrence, it can be “the vehicle by which a chunk of reality is brought into the classroom to be worked over by the class and the instructor. A good case study keeps the class discussion grounded upon some of the stubborn facts that must be faced in real life situations” (quoted in Christensen, 1981.)

Research Questions

- R1) Does Confucianism philosophy have merit in understanding, interpreting and influencing the learning environment in Chinese education?
- R2) What would be some of those philosophical ideas that would be helpful in Chinese education?
- R3) What must Chinese entities that govern the Chinese educational process do in order to use these principles to guide Chinese society?

Observations- Question 1

- Each society has a certain potential guiding principle or idea that serves as a unifying principle for that society. In China, that unifying principle could be Confucianism; the question is will the spirit of Confucianism be allowed to operate unfettered in different parts of Chinese society activity—such as learning and communication.
- In China's history, throughout the many manifestations (Chinese Empire, Mongol Empire, Western/European domination, Nationalist, Communist), Confucianism has served as a touchstone for holding Chinese society together.

Observations- Question 2

- In the twenty-first century, Confucianism brings certain ideas to realization that can serve as a stable influence in Chinese society; Mu (2013) points out that Confucius and Confucian thought “considers educational quality not only important at the individual level, but also critical at the family, national, and global level.”
- The chief idea in Confucianism is the owing or acknowledging one’s debt to the concept of the Five Pillars, which detail the individual’s relationship with society on a governmental level, community level, and familial level.
- Two of the most powerful that can have an impact on learning’s interaction with communication are the obedience to the leader, king, governmental relationship and the benevolent, favorable oversight of the educated king, leader, government entity to members of society under that oversight.

Observations- Question 3

- The question that I have focused on as a scholar in my research on the relationship between learning and communication is how the cultural manifestation of politics affects this situation. The question is not how to transmit information in the most efficient and effective way possible, but in what content will be mentioned and highlighted for students in education. If education is to prepare Chinese students to compete, function, and interact with other societies, then the following must happen:
- All stakeholders in Chinese society, particularly its educational process, must realize that the benefits and spirit of Confucian philosophy must be honored by all participants.
- Proclaiming one's fidelity to Confucianism and failing to realize the spirit he sought for it to promote in Chinese society is simply false.
- Ignoring one particular person's influence on Chinese society because their identity and presence is out of favor is not being faithful to the spirit of Confucianism and shortchanges Chinese children, youth and young adults out of potential educational development.

Conclusion

- The thoughts of all contributors to Chinese societal development must be acknowledged if learning's interaction with communication is to be effective for social development. From philosophers like Confucius to Nationalist leaders (Sun Yat-Sen and Chang Kai-Shek) to Communist leaders (Mao Tse-Tung, Deng Xiaoping, Hu Yaobang, Zhou Zi Yang, Li Peng, Xi Jinping) to Jason Fong, Tibet, the Ughers, factory workers in Guangdong, Taiwan, etc., an effort must be made to present the vices and virtues of each individual's contribution to Chinese social development through transparent educational practices.
- If Confucianism declares the importance of a competent and beneficial relationship between a government and its people as part of the Five Pillars, then one of the ways in which that relationship is maintained and supported is by hearing and analyzing all voices (past and present in Chinese society)
- One of those examples is the work and words of past premiers and presidents, such as Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Both of these leaders, in their own Chinese way, understood the necessity of working to maintain a beneficial and supportive relationship between the government and its people, specifically with students.
- Both gentlemen had survived the excesses of a radicalized relationship between the government and its people.

Conclusion

- Britannica Online (2017) notes that Zhao was born into a landlord family in Henan province, Zhao joined the Young Communist League in 1932 and became a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1938. He served in local party organizations in northern China during the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, he was moved to Guangdong province in the south, where he became provincial first party secretary in 1965.
- It also notes that along with Deng Xiaoping, he was purged in the Cultural Revolution; in fact, during the Cultural Revolution, when he fell out of favor, Zhao spent four years as a [fitter](#) in Hunan, at the Xianzhong Mechanics Factory. Zhao Wujun, the youngest of his four sons, worked with him (Zhao also had a younger daughter). While in political exile, Zhao's family lived in a small apartment close to his factory, with a small suitcase in the living room that served as a dinner table. [\[8\]](#)

Conclusion

- Britannica Online (2017) notes that Hu Yaobang was born into a poor peasant family, Hu received little formal education. At age 14 he left home to join the communists, and he became a member of the CCP in 1933. A veteran of the [Long March](#) (1934–35), he worked closely with the future party leader [Deng Xiaoping](#) in the 1930s and later served as political commissar under Deng in the 2nd Field Army during the Chinese Civil War (1947–49). In the late 1940s he and Deng moved into Sichuan province when their army took over the area from Nationalist forces. In 1952 he followed Deng to [Beijing](#), where he became head of the Young Communist League (1952–66).
- Like Deng Xiaoping, Hu was purged in the Cultural Revolution (1966) and in 1977, before he made it back into power in 1980.
- During the [Cultural Revolution](#), Hu was purged twice and rehabilitated twice, mirroring the political career of Hu's mentor, Deng Xiaoping.^[10] In 1969, Hu was recalled to Beijing to be persecuted. Hu became "number one" among the "Three Hus", whose names were vilified and who were paraded through Beijing wearing heavy wooden collars around their necks.
- Hu was sent to an isolated work camp to participate in "reformation through labour" under strict security. While in political exile Hu was forced to work hauling large boulders by hand.^[9]

Conclusion

- Hu Yaobang was eventually stripped of his power as head of state in the mid-1980's for inciting instability, but allowed to remain on the standing committee. When he died in April, 1989, the student protests began in many cities, culminating at Tiananmen Square in May-June, 1989. Zhou Ziyang sought to address the students' criticisms of the government, which led to the crackdown in June, 1989 and his internment under house arrest until his death.
- Through their lived experiences, they understood the importance of developing and refining the spirit of Confucianism in the relationship between the government and its subjects. That spirit must exist in all aspects of Chinese society, especially in Chinese education.
- The failure to understand that principle, may maintain order, but it inhibits Chinese education from blossoming into the potential process it contains for Chinese society.
- The jury is still out on President Xi Jinping; I would hope that he would re-examine the potential path pointed to by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang and see if it would help China fulfill its developing role in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

- In the twenty-first century, China faces extraordinary demands as a nation. It faces the expectation of becoming a responsible world leader in this century; it faces political instability like many other countries in this world.
- Confucianism can be a cultural construct in which to bridge all narratives concerning Chinese society, particularly through the vehicle of education, and help to lead the country in a proper direction for the twenty-first century.
- All voices and narratives with a stake in China must be allowed, through Confucianism or any other cultural construct, to express their support, criticism, etc. to this situation.

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