

# Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Western Ancient Education

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## ABSTRACT

The development of Chinese and Western educational thought has taken two completely different paths. Both Chinese and Western educational thoughts have their deep historical and cultural backgrounds. Education is an indispensable part of the cultural field. This paper takes the characteristics of the educational thoughts of Confucius and Mencius, the famous educators in ancient China, as well as those of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, as examples. And analyze the similarities and differences between China and the West in ancient times from different angles.

**Keywords:** Ancient educational concept, Similarities and differences, China and the West.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The word "education" first appeared in the literature of Mencius in China, while western education starts in the ancient Greek era. In ancient times, Chinese culture and education created education for the country to cultivate the ruling class, while western education paid more attention to the improvement of personal knowledge, so their schools of education were relatively scattered, and Chinese education was more concentrated and cliquish due to the need of governance. Chinese ancient education and western ancient education both belong to the product of the continuous development of human civilization, there must be numerous links between them, but because they are produced in different social and cultural backgrounds, of course, the differences are also very significant. The research on the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western ancient educational concepts is of great practical significance to the development and innovation of contemporary world education.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT CHINESE EDUCATION

The ancient Chinese educational thought began with

Confucius and Mencius, their thought has influenced China for more than 2,000 years.

Confucius and Mencius were the most important representatives of Confucianism during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, as well as early educators in ancient China. Confucius' teaching thoughts of teaching students by their aptitude, inspiring and inducing, combining learning and thinking, and Mencius's teaching thoughts of non-teaching, self-sufficiency in further studies, and independent thinking have profoundly affected the education of future generations. Even today's education after more than two thousand years can still be followed. Learn from their thoughts.

Confucianism represented by Confucius: Confucius is the greatest educator and educational thinker in ancient China. The Confucian culture represented by him has exerted a profound influence on the development of Chinese culture and education, and his educational thoughts are concentrated in the Analects of Confucius. Starting from the discussion of human nature, Confucius believed that there was little difference between human nature, and personality differences were mainly formed after birth. Therefore, he attached great importance to after-birth education and advocated "teaching without distinction".



Figure 1: Confucius (551-479BC) - Authority and assessment [1]

Mencius’s teaching ideology is the inheritance and development of Confucius’s teaching ideology. From the perspective of educational purposes, the comparison of the cultivation of men, the comparison of teaching method principles such as teaching students by their aptitude, not only clarifies that teaching is carried out

around the purpose of education, and also shows Mencius's innovation and creation based on the predecessor Confucius. The teaching ideas of the two people not only have a very important reference meaning for today's teaching work but also give us new enlightenment. [2]



Figure 2: THE MOST COMPLETE MENCIUS TIPS 2021 [3]

### 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF WESTERN ANCIENT EDUCATION

In the West, the ancient Greek Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle are the "three sages" of the West, which have had a profound influence on the development of western educational thought for more than two thousand years.

#### 3.1 Socrates’ thought on education

Socrates’ thought on education is based on teleology, morals, and intellectual. Firstly, the teleology of

education: the earliest governance theorists who specialized in training talents for the country in history; A talented person running a country must have virtue and talent. Secondly, moral education theory: put forward the proposition that "knowledge is morality", the primary purpose of education is to cultivate morality, and thus put forward the proposition that "virtue can be taught"; Knowledge education is the main way to cultivate morality. Lastly, the theory of intellectual education: the ruler must have a wide range of knowledge, including astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, and other practical courses into the teaching system. [4]

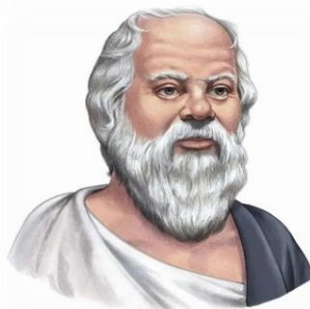


Figure 3 The Life and Times of the Ancient Greek Philosopher Socrates [5]

### **3.2 Platos' thought on education**

Plato thinks that "To learn is to remember": to learn is not to get something from the outside, but to recall the knowledge already in the soul. Plato's educational view in the book "Republic": the book constructs an

educational system to cultivate philosophical Kings. In the preschool education stage, they believe that education should be controlled by the state and that the state should set up early childhood education institutions and provide public care for children, whose main contents are games and storytelling. [6]



**Figure 4:** Plato, Ancient Greek philosopher - Stock Image - H416/0435 [7]

### **3.3 Aristotles' thoughts on education**

Aristotle's educational thought of harmonious development of body, morality, intelligence, and beauty is based on his theory of the soul. He divided the human soul into a vegetal, animal, and rational parts. Among them, the soul of plants is the lowest level, which is

mainly manifested in the body part, refers to the body's nutrition, growth, and development; The animal soul expresses the human instinct emotion and desire, and so on. The rational soul is the advanced part, which is mainly manifested in thinking, understanding, and judgment. By his theory of soul, Aristotle put forward the educational thought of harmonious development of body, morality, intelligence, and beauty. [8]



**Figure 5** The Philosophy of Aristotle [9]

## **4. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN ANCIENT EDUCATION**

### **4.1 State control of education**

In ancient times, Chinese educators paid more attention to the inseparable relationship between education and politics and ignored the role of education in production, so politics and education have always been closely linked. To facilitate and pay more attention to the training and selection of talents of the ruling class, the school-based education model emerged. School education is only a tool for the ruling class to cultivate

and select political talents to consolidate its rule.

In ancient western society, due to the different control and intervention of the state on education, school education gradually presents a pluralistic and liberalized situation in terms of educational objectives, educational content, educational means, and school administration. When education is called an independent existence in the whole society in an era, it can easily break away from the control of politics and form a unique existence according to its development law, which is well combined with productive forces to promote the development of the society.

## 4.2 Educational content

Chinese school education always puts the moral education of "Ming Ren Lun" (the purpose of school education proposed by Mencius) at the core. But other education is for moral education service, dispensable.

Western education pays more attention to a person's morals, intelligence, sports, and aesthetic comprehensive quality, so the school curriculum is also set around these four points to focus on cultivation.

## 4.3 Education and teaching ideas, education system and school management, and the establishment of educational science

Western educators (Plato and Aristotle) advocated universal education, while Chinese scholars, led by Confucius, advocated education for all people without discrimination (Proper education levels all social classes). The starting point of western scholars' education is the educational proposition advocated by the national quality and national defense power, while the traditional education in China is the educational proposition advocated by the factors of wisdom and class classification. In ancient China, there was a complete educational system in the Western Zhou Dynasty. After the change of dynasties and the continuous evolution of the educational system, the strict system of private education in the Tang and Song dynasties gradually developed and matured.

The ancient western educational system lacked coherence and rigor, so with the replacement of countries and nations, the development of education was interrupted many times and started from scratch many times. In the period of Plato, education gradually broke away from politics and developed into independent existence. After the baptism of humanism and utopianism, education gradually became an independent science and developed into a modern education model.

In the Spring and Autumn Period of China, due to the decline of official schools and the development of private schools, education as science also found a trend of separation from politics. After the Qin and Han dynasties, education became more and more dependent on politics. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, school education served for the imperial examination and completely lost its independence.

The historical development of Chinese education is not continuous, there is a process of partition in the middle, while the historical development of western education is continuous, and has its system.

## 5. Similarities between Chinese and Western ancient education

The similarities of ancient Chinese and Western

education has the following: first education is divorced from productive labor. Second, ancient Chinese and Western education both attach importance to the cultivation of students' moral accomplishment. Third, both attach importance to cultivating students' thinking ability. And in the last, they all believe that if you excel in your studies, you will be an official.

But the main common point of ancient Chinese and Western education is that they advocate harmony. Both harmony theories have flashed dazzling brilliance in literary theories, thus becoming the precious spiritual wealth of mankind. It is the crystallization of the aesthetic ideals of human society and expresses the individual's yearning and desire for a peaceful and happy life. It can be said that "harmony" is the idea that human beings dream of. The pursuit of "harmony" stems from human nature.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the ancient Western and ancient Chinese education, education is influenced by many factors, such as economy, war, politics, and so on. Therefore, there will be differences in education theories and methods, but education itself and the essence of education are all the same. Those ancient Chinese and Western educator, they have attached great importance to the education of human morality and human nature. Many ancient methods of education can still be used today, but because of the above factors, the concept of education is changing with the times. In modern society, maybe everyone is too impetuous and there are too many things to learn because comprehensive talents are needed in this era. You see, we have to learn mathematics, piano, physical education, and history since childhood, and there are too many things to learn, but we often lack moral education like in ancient times. So we should make use of the characteristics and advantages of Chinese and western education, learn from each other and innovate constantly. Take its essence, discard its dross, and better promote the development of Chinese and Western culture.

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