



Chinese Culture and the Cultivation of Humanistic Literacy in College English Teaching

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Abstract. The cultivation of humanistic literacy plays a crucial role in developing qualified talents in higher education. Through analyzing important concepts in Confucianism in Chinese culture, this article emphasizes the integration of Confucius's thoughts on “Ren,” morality and virtues into college English teaching, which helps to build moral character of college students. The English course design, also integrating ideological and political elements, aims at strengthening students' humanistic literacy and cultural awareness through improving their understanding of Confucian philosophy and providing them with practicable ways to fulfill Confucianism.

Keywords: humanistic literacy · Confucianism · Chinese culture · ideological and political elements

1 Introduction

Confucianism has been regarded as the mainstream thought in Chinese culture. It influences the self-cultivation of individuals, Chinese lifestyle and the development of Chinese society. Although some critics argue that Confucianism has been used by those in power as a means to curb their subordinates or subjects after Qin dynasty, [1] the pursuit of Confucianism is to fulfill social harmony through practicing “Ren.” Confucius's core concept “Ren” can be interpreted as love, humaneness, benevolence and goodness, and his thoughts encompass not only the cultivation of personal and governmental morality but also the correct relationships between an individual toward others, family and nation.

All human beings share a community of destiny. Humanity education is accordingly very important to college students while they forge a bond with the world. The Guiding Outline for Ideological and Political Construction of Courses in Colleges and Universities and the College English Teaching Guidelines (2020 Edition) places a great emphasis on cultivating college students' moral character. Therefore, this study focuses on the discussion the relationship between humanistic literacy and Confucianism, and

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its integration into English course design. The course aims at promoting students' language skills and cultivating students' humanistic literacy at the same time. With good humanistic literacy rather than insensitive humanistic knowledge can students cultivate good character, enhance social concerns as well as care for whole human beings.

2 Humanity Education

2.1 Humanistic Literacy and Higher Education

Humanity education, including the cultivation of skills, knowledge and attitude, is aimed at teaching people to understand the world with a broaden mind. The emphasis on humanity education, especially the highlight of humanistic literacy, can be seen from the curriculum requirements in colleges and universities worldwide. The term "literacy" means "particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing" [2]. Before 1950 the concept of "literacy" referred to the alphabetical literacy, namely, the ability to read and write; after 1950 its meaning began to widen to social and cultural aspects of reading and writing [3]. Nowadays, literacy is no longer confined in its traditional meaning but extends to the social and cultural concerns because an individual's learning of reading and writing can never be separated from the social context he exists. Today humanistic literacy is getting more and more attention and occupies an important position in course reform in higher education.

When it comes to the cultivation of humanistic literacy, Long Yingtai said that "Knowledge is something outside of you, it is a material, a tool, and a quantifiable knowledge. Knowledge must enter a person's body and permeate his life and behavior before it can be called literacy (my trans)" [4]. She argues that there is an ultimate concern in the study of humanity, that is, the concern for "people." Long suggests that "Without caring for people, you can only have humanistic knowledge, not humanistic literacy" [4]. In other words, without humanistic literacy, people might turn to utilitarian and sacrifice other people's rights and happiness for their own benefits. The knowledge people acquire become the means for them to fulfill personal interests and ignore the fact that they live as a member of society, of the world. This is the reason why higher education put a lot of effort to the cultivation of college students an attitude of caring for people around them, the society they live and the world they exist. With a correct attitude and values, young people would not become selfish and do things that harm others and benefits themselves.

2.2 Humanistic Literacy and Chinese Culture

Chinese culture has a long history and flourishes in aspects of philosophy, Chinese characters, art, literature, architecture, food, drama, etc. Chinese values humanistic spirit which is embodied in Confucianism and various cultural activities. Ancient Chinese classics like Four Books and Five Classics are the foundation of Chinese cultural thoughts which highlight benevolence, sincerity, filial piety, justice, harmony and unity. From Duke of Zhou to Confucius and to intellectuals of all dynasties, they devote themselves pondering over the relationship between man and nature, the relationship between man and groups as well as the relationship between man and himself.

Confucianism has always been the mainstream philosophy among diverse Chinese philosophical thoughts. In the highly developed modern society, the more people indulge themselves in material comforts, the more people are want of spirit. Confucian philosophy is the treasure for an individual to seek the meaning of his existence and what he should do to make the society better. It is valuable educational resources for higher education to cultivate talents and good citizens for the country. This is also the reason why shaping college students good character, correct values and proper behavior as well as sense of morality has always been emphasized in the ideological and political education in colleges and universities in China.

Raising students' cultural awareness is one of the meanings in college English teaching. Students acquire not only humanistic knowledge about English language but also humanistic literacy in the domestic and foreign cultures. The following chapter discusses the integration of Confucianism into English teaching and the enhancement of students' humanistic literacy through the course design.

3 Confucianism and Cultivation of Humanistic Literacy

3.1 Humanistic Knowledge and Confucianism

Modern people constantly meet the value dilemma during the rapidly development of society. Liang Li argued that the development of the market economy causes hedonism and money worship in China; as a result, college students may be misled to the deviation of the value orientation [5]. Today college students are inclined to consider and judge matters from their utilitarian values under the influence of market economy and capitalism. Too much utilitarian tendency of colleges students is not good for the development of a country.

Confucius has been viewed one of the most influential individuals in shaping Chinese history as well as human history. His thoughts affect the cultural and social developments in Sinosphere which encompasses countries in East Asia and Southeast Asia. He concerns human reality and discusses few mystical questions. He thinks if one cannot understand life, he should not think much about death. In other words, Confucius cares people a lot and his "Ren" is the way to fulfill his ideal of harmonious society. *The Analects*, a collection of Confucius's teachings, elaborates not only his core concept about "Ren" but also his ways of reaching social and political order and cultivating an individual's virtues through "Ren." Confucius explains the meaning of "Ren" is "to love," which tells the meanings of humanistic literacy and meets the ultimate end of humanity education. The "love" Confucius mentions is generated from filial piety. Children's true feelings of love and reverence to parents are the basic connotation of filial piety. To realized "Ren," one should extend the love to other intimate people and then to all human beings [6]. This "universal love" is Confucius's ideal, which helps to establish harmonious relationships between individuals and a harmonious society.

Confucius claims that only when "Li", namely, ritual propriety is exactly practiced can "Ren" be fulfilled. Ritual propriety is the norms of social life and thus can maintain the order and harmony of society. Confucius's wishes 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" [7] which in line with the purpose and spirit of humanity education.

Therefore, integrating *The Analects* in English course design helps to enrich college students' humanistic knowledge, motivate them to seek continuous development in their moral character and cultivate the spirit of caring for all human beings.

3.2 Shaping Values and Self-cultivation in Confucianism

College teachers should integrate Confucius's humanistic thoughts in the course design. Long Guo suggests that Confucianism education method help to cultivate young people moral character and correct values which enable them to practice virtues like honesty, sincerity in friendship and filial piety to parents [8]. Confucius emphasizes "Ren", which he regards as the very way to fulfill the ideal of being a gentleman, "Junzi." He asserts that a gentleman should be a benevolent and sincere person.

That the proper behavior a gentleman conducts is explained in Confucius's teaching to his disciples Yan Hui. Confucius indicates the rules of practicing humaneness, "Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety" [9]. These are the rules for young people to cultivate good behavior in dealing with people. Any mental or physical actions that do not observe the ritual propriety should not be done. Confucius further suggests that "disciplining the self and observing ritual propriety" [9] is significant method to realize self-cultivation. He thinks the practice of perfect virtue is on one's own initiative. When an individual is willing to and decide to conduct ritual propriety himself, he can practice humaneness immediately.

The practice of humaneness also presents in the relationship between individuals. Confucius said that "Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others" [9]. Establishing others while one establishes himself expresses the idea that a virtuous person is altruistic. A person who practices the act of selfless concern for other people's welfare means he understands the meaning of humanistic spirit.

He who concerns for the human social activities would be more motivated to practice "Ren" in his daily life. Filial piety is the basis of Confucianism to practice humaneness. Therefore, the next chapter discusses how to integrate "Ren" and rules of ritual propriety in Confucianism into English teaching activities.

4 Humanistic Literacy and College English Teaching

4.1 Chinese Culture and English Teaching

In China, "Introduction to Chinese Culture" has been listed as one of the core subjects in the Teaching Guide for Undergraduate Foreign Language and Literature Majors in Ordinary Colleges and Universities. The purpose of the teaching Chinese culture is aimed at raising the cultural awareness and cultural confidence of the college students while they enhance their English language abilities. Chinese culture contains rich humanistic knowledge which is the best resource for cultivating students' humanistic literacy. However, teaching Chinese culture in English is a challenge for teachers. The course design has to reach the requirements of enhancing students' language abilities, raising national spirit, cultural confidence and developing humanistic literacy simultaneously.

To enhance students' humanistic literacy through Chinese culture courses, high-quality textbooks can do more with less. Teachers should choose a good quality textbook which encompasses multiple Chinese cultural themes and provides various perspectives to introduce Chinese culture. Teachers have to empower themselves in the knowledge about Chinese culture and cross-culture because they play the role of facilitator in the process of students' learning. Teachers' consciousness of humanistic literacy, cultural awareness and teaching strategies influence the effect of students' learning.

In teaching methods, traditional teacher-centered approach has shifted to student-centered teaching, which provides students with more opportunity to decide what they learn and how they learn. This teaching method pays close attention on students' needs, abilities and learning styles, and thus it motivates students in learning more effectively. Teachers design classroom activities based on student-centered learning which can stimulate students' interest in learning Chinese culture and learn the humanity spirit behind the language. The course design and teaching activities should coordinate and unify the language knowledge and humanistic literacy. It helps students acquire language, cross-culture awareness and social concerns at the same time.

As digital natives, today's students have many opportunities to access a large amount of information on the Internet. Teachers can make good use of the Internet to cultivate students' innovative ability and practical ability. Through various class activities, students can make full use of network resources to finish their assignments which contain the parts of language knowledge and humanity education. By doing so, introducing Chinese culture in English is not only a means of improving language abilities but also the key to strengthening humanistic literacy of college students.

4.2 Course Design Based on Confucianism

To promote students' humanistic concerns for the society and cultivate their humanistic literacy, this course design is based on Confucius's teaching of filial piety. Family reverence is the root of "Ren" and family is the starting point for the youth to practice love. Confucius thinks if one wanted to cultivate and fulfill himself, he should start from performing filial piety. For college students, to cultivate themselves as a virtuous person, establishing a good relationship with their parents is the most practical starting point to fulfill humaneness. Frequently showing their respect, true feeling of love, and care for parents' health is the practice of filial piety. From the love with their parents will they gradually extend such love to other people and then reach universal love. In Confucianism, self-cultivation starts from an individual's practice of filial piety. A good example is found in Confucius's teaching:

The master said, "A young man should be a good son at home and obedient young man abroad, sparing of speech but trustworthy in what he says, and should love the multitude at large but cultivate the friendship of his fellow men. If, after all these activities, he has any energy to spare, let him use it to make himself cultivated" [10].

In the course design, the teacher conveys the core concept of "Ren" through traditional teaching method and discusses with students the relationship between "Ren" and filial piety. Through class discussion activity, students have an opportunity of practicing English expressions related to "Ren" and filial piety. Then the teacher introduces

passages about filial piety in *The Analects* and shares her personal experience of practicing filial deeds with students. Students are divided into groups to do team discussion about Confucius's teachings about filial piety, and reflect its meanings and filial deeds in current social context.

After the class teaching and discussion, the teacher assigns Confucius's words about filial piety as homework. Students make films to explain the passages and sentences in English and take personal experience or social news as examples to elaborate their understanding about the passages. The evaluation of students depends on their understanding and interpretation of Confucius's filial piety. The humanistic literacy is presented in how and what they can do to realize "filial piety" in modern social context and reach the goal of "Ren"—from filial piety to the love of others. Accordingly, the teaching also reaches the purposes of the ideological and political education to develop college students sound in mind and body.

5 Conclusion

Humanistic literacy means one's concerns not only about people but also about the surrounding creatures and environment. Confucius shows great consideration for human reality instead of mystical questions. In Chinese culture, Confucianism represents Chinese people's humanistic spirit and serves as the treasure for higher education to cultivate humanistic literacy of young generations in China. The English course design based on Confucius's thoughts on self-cultivation and "Ren" helps college students broaden their cultural horizons and increase cross-cultural communication skills. What's more, understanding the humanistic spirit behind the knowledge they learn helps them devote themselves to self-cultivating, caring for people, and making the society they live better, which fulfill the ultimate concerns of humanity education.

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