



# Analysis of Chinese Family Education Perspectives from the Perspective of Noddings's Caring Ethics Theory

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**Abstract.** Family education is the starting point of one's education, and one's way of thinking and behaviour can often reflect the parents' concept of education to a certain extent. This paper takes the caring theory and the happiness education theory of Noddings' Caring Len theory as the perspective, compares the differences between the concepts of family education in ancient modern China and modern China, analyses the common misunderstandings existing in modern family education, and provides solution countermeasures for resolving the family conflicts triggered by the misunderstandings.

**Keywords:** Noddings care theory; home education; educational approach; educational concepts

## 1 Introduction

The family is the smallest unit of society and the first school for children. As the process of reform, opening up and globalisation continues to accelerate, China has made great strides in its economic and social development, and the focus of education is no longer confined to the school, but has gradually shifted to the concepts and methods of education within the family.

Noddings Caring Len Theory is a 20th-century homeschooling idea centred on caring and relationships developed by ethicist Nel Noddings.

Noddings believes that caring is a reciprocal behaviour, children are the root of family education, so family education can play a key role in shaping the growth of children, at the same time, parents as educators should recognise the subjectivity of their children as individuals, establish a relaxed and comfortable caring relationship with their children and carry out educational activities with a caring attitude of respect to enrich the children's experience of caring, and encourage their children to learn and respond to caring behaviours to form a virtuous caring cycle [1]. The caring behaviour of children can be learnt and responded to, forming a virtuous caring cycle [1]. Parents should follow the principles of moderation and difference in the education process, not only to give their children moderate care, but also to provide space for their children to stimulate their own talents.

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The previous research on Noddings' caring theory focuses on its role in shaping students' moral concepts in school education, teachers' educational activities, and the transformation of teacher-student relationships. The core content of the caring theory is "caring", which is similar to "benevolence" in the traditional thinking of Confucianism. Therefore, most of the experts and scholars in China focus on the comparison between the Confucian idea of benevolence education and that of Noddings's caring theory of education in the hope that, by comparing and complementing the strengths and weaknesses, they will be able to make a better comparison between Noddings's caring theory and the Confucian idea of caring education. Therefore, most experts and scholars in China focus on the comparison between the Confucian idea of benevolence education and that of Noddings' idea of caring education, hoping that through the comparison, they can make up for the shortcomings of the Confucian idea of caring education and better integrate Noddings' idea into the development of China's concept of family education.<sup>8</sup> Or they may focus on their humanistic values, hoping that parents' educational activities will be both humanistic and social [2].

## **2 Development of the concept of family education in China**

The family is the most stable unit of Chinese society, and the ancient concept of education that emphasises filial piety was born out of farming in primitive societies, and became the most basic content of family education in ancient Chinese families with the continuous improvement of the feudal system out of the requirements of reproduction of heirs and stable development of production.[2] It became the most basic element of family education in ancient Chinese families as the feudal system improved [3]. In ancient families with large populations and strict hierarchies, moral education became an important part of the family's internal order and highlighted the level of family education. The "love" advocated by Confucianism is closely related to "filial piety", which emphasises the order of equilibrium, believing that people should show different degrees of love to objects of different status. In order to stabilise this orderly "love", ancient families made use of strict family rules to ensure the implementation of education, which ensured family harmony and in turn promoted the orderly development of society and even the state.

Modern family education places greater emphasis on respecting the wishes of the individual, and pays more attention to the role of the child's psychological health as a guide in the process of growth. Parents will pay close attention to the psychological state of their children in the process of education and make timely adjustments to the educational measures and methods according to their children's responses. This coincides with the core content of Noddings' theory of caring, which stresses that parents should carry out educational behaviours out of natural care for their children, and adjust their educational methods appropriately according to the needs of the social environment, their own experience of family education and their children's personality traits, so as to create a more suitable educational environment for their children.

## 2.1 Changes in the nature of the family

The many levels of intergenerational sequences, the complex structure and the large size were the basic characteristics of the traditional family in ancient times. In ancient China, the patriarchal dyadic family, which was predominantly patrilineal, was gradually formed into smaller, independent families, as permitted by the conditions of private ownership, and was contained within the larger clan family, becoming a small linkage connecting the clan families. Feudal patriarchy originated from this and used the veil of kinship and blood to hide the inequality between the authoritarian patriarch and the members within the family; this unequal interpersonal relationship was regarded as a law of nature and was limited by the common interests within the family, and if the children's behaviour exceeded the limits they were denigrated as violating filial piety, which could be used by the great patriarchs of the clan as a ground for punishment, ranging from admonition to expulsion to deprivation of life.

Most modern families are nuclear families consisting of parents and children, with reduced layers of intergenerational sequences, simple structures and relatively small populations. In modern society, people have widely accepted the modern concept of education, and their sense of independence and self-consciousness has been increasing, so that three-member families and two-member families have become the mainstream family structure and size nowadays. The concept of equality and freedom in education has become mainstream, and people no longer rely solely on the resources allocated to them by blood kinship for survival, but more often rely on their own resources and adjust their lifestyles according to their own development.

## 2.2 Changes in the functioning of the parental role

The parental role is a multidimensional structure of content, including the parents' own perception of their own gender-specific qualities and external patterns of behaviour, and the division of labour and the way in which the parents are educated in their educational activities are influencing the exercise of their respective functions.

The ethical relationship of bloodline determines the authoritative status of parents in the minds of their children, and the parents' prior knowledge and rich accumulation of life experience make it easy for their children to develop a mentality of admiration for them, so that parental discipline of their children has the effect of personality sensitisation. Influenced by the Confucian ideology of study and ritual and the development of the imperial examination system, in ancient traditional family education, parents often acted as the masters of the family and supervisors of their children's education, with the core purpose of serving the interests of the family as a whole, firstly, to perpetuate the bloodline and secondly, to preserve the family's property.

In the face of cultural feedback and intergenerational transcendence, the requirements of modern society are no longer confined to excellent performance, but also require people to have higher qualities. Communication and consultation is a common method of modern family education, the role of parents in front of the child has lost the advantage of absolute authority, the two sides are in the same starting line to receive information, which requires parents to change their concepts, no longer only as

a child's learning supervisor, but also as a companion of the child's life, behavioural observers! This requires parents to change their mindset from being mere supervisors of their children's learning to being companions and observers of their children's behaviour [4].

### **3 Common Misconceptions of Modern Family Education in China from the Perspective of Noddings' Caring Len Theory**

#### **3.1 Over-critical education and alienation of care**

Criticism is a common educational method in family education and serves as a warning, but its core should not be reprimand and punishment, but care and education. Moderate criticism can promote the physical and mental development of children, while excessive criticism will cause children to lose, fear and even resist contact with their parents, so the misuse of criticism often fails to achieve the purpose of education. Many parents fall into a misunderstanding when they criticise their children.[5] .

Criticism of the content of the point is not clear: "rehash old scores" is the habit of criticism of many parents, hoping that through the superimposed impact of multiple events to cause their children to correct the attention of the wrong. In fact, this kind of unclear criticism blurs the focus of the criticism, and is likely to make the child frequently generate self-denial. Parents into a highly emotional state: parents emotional management out of control will make the children in the wrong instinctively fear, shame and avoidance of emotions, when both sides are in a highly emotional state, the lack of rational judgement of the incident, so that the criticism of the education to lose the persuasive power and impartiality. Criticism without regard to occasion and time: Parents do not place their children on an equal footing in the family, but subconsciously believe that children are the property of their parents and discipline them at will without regard to time or occasion, but in fact, this will seriously hurt their children's self-esteem and lead to feelings of self-doubt.

Noddings sees caring as having a circle hierarchy. In a caring relationship, the caregiver and the cared for will form concentric circles with the caregiver as the centre of the circle, which vary in distance. For the concentric circles centred on parents, children are the closest circle to the centre, and parents tend to focus more attention and energy on their children, paying close attention to every move of their children to see if they meet their own expectations[1]. The centre of the circle is the centre of the circle. However, there is a distance between the circle and the centre of the circle, and this distance is a reasonable and appropriate boundary between people, once the distance is narrowed or expanded to more than the limit of both parties can bear, the harmonious order between the circles will be broken. Therefore, when parents use excessive criticism to educate their children, the caring behaviour will be alienated, reversing from pure concern to pure venting of anger, anxiety and impatience. For children whose cognition and thinking are different from those of their parents, this kind of criticism will be distorted by their parents' aversion to them and their dislike

of them, and from then on, they will be afraid of committing mistakes and getting along with their parents.

### **3.2 Imbalance of care in education by favouring material over psychological care**

Since the 1980s, sustained economic development has led to significant progress in the level of education in China, and children have become the centre of the modern family, with greater access to educational resources. However, ideological and cultural development has often lagged behind the development of material life, and children's wishes for personal development are still entangled with the traditional family's desire for secularised success.

Noddings denies the true "equality" of parent-child relationships in reality, and when care is biased in favour of only one of the material or spiritual aspects, the trajectory of the child's development may be deviated. Children are afraid to voice their personal needs out of admiration and fear of parental authority, and parents are immersed in the mentality of being the head of the family, ignoring the developmental needs of their children as independent individuals, which may lead to precociousness, rebelliousness and even more serious psychological problems in their children.

### **3.3 Misalignment of spousal and parental roles and inappropriate care**

Misalignment between the roles of husband and wife and those of parents is manifested in the substitution of problems arising from the relationship between husband and wife into parenthood and the projection of conflicts onto the children. In real life, this kind of misalignment of family roles often occurs during the adolescent period, when children's values and interpersonal skills are being shaped, and is manifested in the transfer of conflicts arising from spousal discord by scolding, humiliating, or intentionally belittling and neglecting the children, which can lead to the children's self-worth becoming doubtful and having an inferiority complex.

According to the "Happy Education Idea" of the Noddings Caring Theory, a happy and harmonious family comes from the parents' thinking about the nature of education, that is, the purpose of education is to achieve happiness. Suffering that inflicts pain on others and perpetuates guilt in oneself is called "unhealthy guilt". In the process of education, parents often urge their children to cherish the "happiness" that they have brought to them by recalling their own "unhappiness", but different definitions of "happiness" in different times and life experiences can bring different results. However, different definitions of "happiness" in different times and life experiences may bring strong feelings of guilt to children, and this cognitive bias may lead to children obtaining parental sympathy and care in unhealthy ways![6] The theory of educational well-being suggests that people need to cultivate positive attitudes and behaviours. Educational theories of well-being suggest that people need to cultivate positive and healthy guilt, avoid "unhealthy guilt", and give up rationalising the intentional infliction of suffering on others, so as to prevent individuals from imposing suffering on others and triggering negative events.

## **4 Insights and responses**

### **4.1 Shift the perspective of parents and identify the needs of children**

The parent's role is to nurture the child. Nurturing means to ensure the healthy physical development of the child, and nurturing means to provide educational guidance and spiritual attention for the development of the child's personality. According to Noddings, every child is gifted differently and no single standard can be used to require that a child must grow up along a set line.

Parents need to change the perspective of their educational thinking according to the situation, and take on the task of caring for their children's physical and mental health and planning for their children's lives. Parents need to realise that children's development is a continuous process and that they must be provided with an environment that is appropriate to their abilities and personalities, and that respects their children's wishes for development. Parents should abandon the teacher's and ruler's mindset, exercise their own emotional management skills, respect their children's developmental wishes and pay attention to their multidimensional developmental possibilities.

### **4.2 Valuing the role of happiness education and moulding a good mind**

The key to the promotion of happiness education in modern families lies in the fact that the person being cared for is motivated to improve himself or herself and realise his or her self-worth as a result of the positive incentives provided by the caregiver. Noddings divided "happiness" into explicit happiness and invisible happiness, the former is the happiness that can be clearly perceived as needed by people, and the latter is the happiness that other people presume to be needed by the person being cared for.[7]

When children are ready to focus on a particular research activity based on their personal interests, parents, as more experienced and caring persons than they are, should actively provide them with a wealth of relevant options, discuss and dialogue with their children as much as possible without personal preference, and give them positive moral support.

### **4.3 Valuing role models and influencing children's development in their daily lives**

In family education, role modelling is more important than preaching. In early childhood, children unconsciously imitate their parents' behaviour and then internalize it, so it is important for parents to consciously model the behaviour they want their children to develop in their daily lives.

According to Noddings, dialogue is an open, back-and-forth exchange between two parties seeking to solve a problem with a certain purpose [6]. When parents engage in dialogue with negative emotions, imitation by their children also occurs. The only thing that should be demanded in a dialogue is truthfulness. Parents should not pre-

suppose the exact outcome of each dialogue, whether it is negative or not, but a dialogue that is genuine and heartfelt is often touching, or else it becomes a dialogue of the parent's own words, which is meaningless.

#### **4.4 Accelerating the introduction of family education instructors to assist in educational activities**

The implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy in recent years has gradually shifted part of the focus of educating children from school to home, where families can no longer focus solely on their children's paper scores to the neglect of mental health issues, and are increasingly aware of the fact that relying on the school to supervise their children's learning is not enough, and that they must additionally seek out more auxiliary channels to help consolidate the knowledge that their children have learnt. The two sides of the conflict make parents unable to cope with their children's learning. Parents are overwhelmed by the conflict between the two sides, and family conflicts continue to arise.[8] Family conflicts also arise [4]. Under the influence of the two-child policy, urban families in China are faced with the serious problem of the contradiction between childbirth and work; while most rural families lack good family education ability and correct education concepts, and parents are unable to solve the problem of children's healthy growth independently.

The introduction of family education counsellors is an important initiative for China to face the various conflicts in family education that need to be alleviated urgently. After years of development, family education counsellors in the United States already have a relatively complete set of vetting standards and qualifications, and drawing on their practical experience will help to alleviate the pressure of child-rearing on families in China and promote the establishment of a good family education support system.

## **5 Conclusion**

Family is the first school for children. Norddings's theory of caring relationships is the core of the theory of happiness education, which is increasingly valued by modern Chinese families because of its open and inclusive connotations. It seems to put forward only the requirement of "happiness", but in fact, it requires family members to have good interpersonal relationship skills, a calm mental state and stable communication skills.[9] Parents are the initial guides for their children's development. Children need to learn from their parents' experience, but they also need space for their own independent development. When parents implement family education, they should focus on the process of education on the basis of caring theory, enrich the content of happiness education, and enhance their own perception of happiness and creativity.

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