

On Home Education Concept in “The Kite Runner”

Qingjuan Nie

School of Foreign Languages
Qingdao Agricultural University
Qingdao, China
nieqingjuan@163.com

Abstract—The objective of present study was to examine the role home education concept plays in children’s personal transformation and how it can affect their growth in the long run. We developed a comparative study of two conflicting home education concepts presented in Afghanistan American writer Khaled Hosseini’s novel *The Kite Runner* and explored their totally different effects on protagonist Amir and how they contributed to Amir’s different choices and destinies. Our findings indicate self-centered education concept firmly practiced by Amir’s father—Baba posed a great restraint to Amir’s personality development and induced distorted moral values, which consequently made Amir end up in sin. On the contrary, man-oriented home education concept followed by Rahim Khan, both a mentor and a moral guide was conducive to Amir’s personality development and helped Amir accomplish self-redemption eventually. The results show the significance of man-oriented home education concept to one’s personality development and personal transformation.

Keywords—*The Kite Runner*; Khaled Hosseini; Amir; home education concept

I. INTRODUCTION

The Kite Runner is the debut novel written by Afghanistan American novelist Khaled Hosseini. Deeply rooted in vast Afghanistan with turbulent historical and political changes interplayed, this marvelous novel mainly talks about the incredible story of sin and salvation. Once published, the book has received unusual welcome, and stood on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 103 weeks. So far the book has been translated into 61 languages, published in 152 countries and regions, sold 32 million copies worldwide.

The success of *The Kite Runner* has attracted wide concern of scholars at home and abroad. Foreign academic circles mainly focus on cultural studies of the book. For instance, Shafiq Shamel puts emphasis on paradigm of cultural identity in *The Kite Runner*, highlighting the healing power of culture and considering Persian culture as truly an effective means of transcending ethnic and religious conflicts[5]. Jefferess studies the ethical issues embodied in the novel in relation to humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism[1]. More scholars work on comparative study between Hosseini and other ethnic writers based on the postcolonial perspective. For example, Skouket Ahamd Tilwani studies the issue of subaltern reflected in Amitav Ghosh and Khaled Hosseini’s novels[6]. Lee Erwinhu gives an in-depth study of the issue of class and

subaltern deeply hidden in four immigrant writers’ works[3]. In contrast to the fruitful and profound studies of Hosseini and his novels, Chinese scholars show more interest in Hosseini and *The Kite Runner* from indigenous viewpoint. Their multifaceted studies are highly rewarded with numerous articles. The most fruitful study lies in cultural perspective, with emphasis on cultural identity. Yuping Wang as a leading scholar explores the core motif of identity politics embodied in *The Kite Runner*[7]. There are also a large number of scholars who examine sin and salvation in the novel from a moral standpoint. Some other scholars focus on Amir’s personal transformation, who, though, deal with the issue of home education in the course of Amir’s growing up, unfortunately fail to develop an in-depth study.

Publishers Weekly highly praised *The Kite Runner* as “memorable both as a political chronicle and a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our adult lives”[8]. As a matter of fact, a person’s growth cannot go well without appropriate home education, the first and foremost form of education in a person’s educational experience. Therefore, as a novel of personal transformation, the theme of home education is inevitably intertwined with sin and salvation in the process of Amir’s growth. In the book, Hosseini mainly presents two different kinds of home education concepts, one is self-centered education concept with a strong sense of self-assertion firmly practiced by Amir’s father—Baba, the other is man-oriented home education concept followed by Rahim Khan, both a mentor and a moral guide to Amir in the novel. Those two kinds of conflicting home education concepts pose totally different effects on Amir in the course of his growing up and contribute to his different choices and destinies. So to speak, by skillfully blending home education with love, betrayal and salvation, Hosseini intends to point out the importance of man-oriented home education concept through studying the interconnection between the two different kinds of home education concepts and their effects on Amir’s growth comparatively, so as to lay bare the significance of man-oriented education concept to children’s personality development and personal transformation.

II. SELF-ORIENTED HOME EDUCATION CONCEPT

Self-centered home education concept is a sort of self-assertive education concept in which parents tend to measure children against their own criteria so much so that they tend to ignore children’s personality characteristics. Under such influence, the subject of education, namely parents, who are often self-centered and self-asserted, tend to shape and teach

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their children in compliance with their own standards and principles, totally ignoring individual differences, and come to become demanding and authoritarian parents eventually. Whereas the object of education, namely children, as independent individuals with personalities often wander between maintaining personality and adapt to changes in order to cater parents' taste. Such tension can largely pose a great restraint to their personality development, and can even contribute to children's overthrown moral values or deformity. As a result, children are inclined to act immorally. In Hosseini's debut novel *The Kite Runner*, Amir's father—Baba applies such kind of self-centered home education concept to Amir, which not only stiffens father and son relations but also puts Amir into incredible amount of agony and restrains his personality development because such education concept bearing a taint of utility runs conflict with Amir's nature of melancholy, sensitiveness and affection to literature. Worst of all, such education concept fails to instruct Amir properly in moral values and eventually pushes Amir to make the wrong choice and commits serious moral sin.

Amir's father Baba is a typical Pashtun masculine image in traditional Afghanistan society. He had a tall build, was a force of nature, and once wrestled a black bear in Baluchistan with his bare hands. His black glare would "drop the devil to his knees begging for mercy"[2]. When sleeping, the sounds of Baba's snoring penetrated the walls like a growling truck engine. Father is not only strong, but very intelligent. As one of the richest merchants in Kabul, Baba built a wildly successful carpet-exporting business, two pharmacies and a restaurant with Rahim Khan. Besides, Baba is benevolent and generous. He once funded an orphanage. Meanwhile, father is a fervent lover of soccer and sports. He once flew to Tehran just to watch a soccer game. It can be safely concluded that Baba is a successful Pashtun. However, Amir, the son of Baba is quite different from his father both in physical image, inherent temperament and personal interests. Amir looks small, fragile with a nature of cowardice. He is so timid that when he finds a pool of blood from a *chapandaz* falling of his saddle soaking through the land in the yearly *Buzkashi* tournament, he begins to cry. He is vulnerable, introverted, showing no love for football and force except novels and poetry. His favorite is to stay in the room reading books or writing stories. The great difference between Baba and Amir in physical image, inherent temperament and interests makes it possible for self-asserted father to impose his self-centered education concept on Amir. Though Baba is a successful Pashtun upper class, he is not a qualified father and fails to educate Amir in an intelligent way. On the contrary, he always asserts himself to be right and examines Amir from his own position. Baba refuses to admit the difference between Amir and himself. Using his own standards to measure Amir, Baba anticipates Amir to be an equally brave and powerful person as he is, totally ignoring Amir's unique personality. Furthermore, instead of helping Amir get the best out of his personality and interests, Baba stubbornly imposes his own interests on Amir and enrolls in a soccer team for Amir, hoping to cultivate Amir's enthusiasm for soccer so that Amir can become a true man. But when it proves out that Amir is not a hand at soccer and shows no interest in it, Baba changes his mind and attempts to adapt Amir into an enthusiastic audience, but still

in vain. Desperately disappointed, Baba has to give up in the end. Baba's attempt to cultivate Amir's interest in soccer has become a good case in the negative sense in children education. As a matter of fact, Baba's self-centered home education concept to impose his own interests and hobbies on his son can only become an illusion.

Apart from imposing his own interest on Amir, Baba's self-assertion also prevents him from recognizing Amir's unique qualities and shows no interest in Amir's talent in writing at all. He strongly humiliates Amir with his reluctant smile when Amir proudly shows him the story created by him. Greatly ashamed, Amir stands probably for one minute which is the longest minute of his life. To win father's recognition, Amir works hard and finally gets the first place in poem competition, only to be responded with an indifferent "good" from Baba. As can be seen, Amir's love of literature and his writing talent receive no recognition from Baba. His total indifference to Amir's writing talent hurts vulnerable Amir intensely, which not only hinders Amir's personality development but fails to help him build self-confidence. In a word, as the leading role in family education, father barely plays the positive role in guiding Amir in his personal development. To put it another way, father measures Amir against his own interest and considers those different from his contemptible and unacceptable. "But something about Amir troubles me in a way that I can't express.... If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son" [2]. This private conversation with Rahim deeply exposes Baba's complaint, and even contempt to Amir. As a child who has lost mother right at birth, Amir feels more agonizing as he fails to get recognition from Baba. To put it differently, a kind of fatherly love is deprived of Amir, which produces a serious identity anxiety and intense inferiority.

Totally grounded on self-centeredness and self-assertion, Baba's self-centered home education concept fails to make him discover the unique personality Amir possesses and therefore Baba can't properly guide Amir in his personality development. As a result, such education ends up in tension between father and son. Father can't conceal "the disgusted look on his face"[2] while Amir has a mixed feeling of both fear and hunger for love. He wants to follow his heart and pursues his love for literature; meanwhile, he also desires recognition from father. Such a contradictory and conflicting feeling hinders the sound development of Amir's personality and contributes to his moral crisis. In order to possess father, Amir chooses to stand aside and offers no help when he watches his best friend Hassan being raped, regardless of how Hassan has taken great pains to protect him whenever he is in danger. He even mistakenly regards Hassan as "the price I had to pay to win Baba"[2]. Therefore, Amir's misconception of Hassan as the price for fatherly love and his total ignorance of his own moral responsibility and moral conscience essentially can be attributed to his father's wrong concept of home education.

III. MAN-ORIENTED HOME EDUCATION CONCEPT

In his famous work on education *Emile*, Rousseau permeates humanism into education, advocating culturing man of nature, “we should consider children not only as human, but as children and educate children based on their physical and mental characteristics”[4]. The humanism education thought advocated by Rousseau has profound influence on later generations. Humanism education concept puts emphasis on “man-oriented” thought, strengthening subject consciousness of human and improving man’s role as the main body, proposing to get the most out of everyone’s strong points and help him to realize his personal value and social value in accordance with the law of physical and mental development. Rahim Khan in *The Kite Runner* is such a typical representative who advocates man-oriented education concept. Rahim is Baba’s best friend and business partner. He is more a father than father’s friend and business partner. Actually, Amir’s attachment and affection to Rahim has already begun when Amir is in a swaddle with his hand tightly holding Rahim’s little finger while he was in father’s arms. And Amir has more than once wished that Rahim could be his father. Amir’s trust and attachment to Rahim, to a larger extent, is closely associated with Rahim’s humanism education concept characterized by man-orientation, full respect, thorough understanding and consistent support. Different from Baba who holds self-centered education concept and always considers himself as the center, Rahim can always discover the merits of Amir, help him to get the most out of them for further development, and give Amir good instruction patiently. Basically, Rahim serves not only the mentor of home education in Amir’s growing up but also a guide in his moral growth in the future.

As Amir lost mother at birth, Rahim always brings Amir motherly warm feelings with tender eyes and encouraging words. He can understand Amir, appreciate him, find his merits and give affirmation, encouragement and support to Amir. When Baba complains about Amir’s timidity and cowardice, Rahim laughs, “children aren’t coloring books. You don’t get to fill them with your favorite colors”[2]. Such a favorable reply not only gives a forceful counterattack to father’s self-centered education concept, but explicitly suggests his own humanism education concept. To Rahim, Amir is an independent individual, with unique personal temperament, hobbies and interests. Therefore, Rahim doesn’t measure Amir against his own standards and principles. Instead, he fully respects Amir, shows understanding, learns to appreciate, and finds the shining points in Amir. For instance, in a response to father’s complaint about Amir’s inability to protect himself and his own toys, Rahim responds, “he is not violent”(24). Rahim’s smart reply not only protects Amir’s dignity, but also gives Amir Confidence with confirmation and encouragement by discovering Amir’s strong points. Such man-oriented education concept completely respects individual difference and therefore is conducive to his personality development.

Rahim’s instruction and guidance of Amir is also reflected in his positive response to Amir’s story writing. When Amir feels his self-esteem deeply hurt and his passion for writing diminishing due to father’s considerable indifference and even

contempt to his story when he shows it to his father with great excitement, it is Rahim who not only defuses the embarrassing situation, but also protects Amir’s creative enthusiasm and more importantly, shows respect to Amir with such a witty response, “May I have it, Amir jan? I would very much like to read it”[2]. Such a favorable response from Rahim implicitly demonstrates people-oriented education idea that Rahim holds. In the meantime, the great interest Rahim shows towards Amir’s story is a clear evidence of his full affirmation and encouragement to Amir’s writing talent, “I enjoyed your story very much. *Mashallah*, God has granted you a special talent. ... My door is and always will be open to you, Amir jan. I shall hear any story you have to tell”[2]! And it turns out that Rahim’s man-oriented mode of education works. His encouragement and affirmation fill Amir with exhilaration. The word “buoy” fully illustrates the satisfaction and great achievement Amir has. Encouraged by Rahim, Amir grabbed the story and hurried downstairs to get Hassan and read it again. To sum up, following man-oriented education concept, Rahim Khan is able to discover Amir’s creative abilities and gives affirmation and encouragement accordingly, fully respects Amir’s personality characteristics and leads Amir onto the right way, all of which plays a vital role in Amir’s personal transformation and his writing career in particular.

As a good mentor, Rahim not only excels in discovering Amir’s personality characteristics and guides him onto the right way with positive encouragement and affirmation, but also serves as a moral guide in the process of Amir’s moral growth. As is discussed above, Amir fails to have a sound personality development under the influence of his father’s self-centered education concept in his childhood. The collision of two conflicting forces from a strong sense of inferiority due to lack of father’s recognition and desperate hunger for fatherly love pushes Amir onto the path of moral evil, that is, he shows total indifference when his best friend Hassan is being raped until in the end he forces Hassan to leave in the name of theft. As a result, Amir “was going to get away with it”[2] throughout this life and lives with a lifelong moral condemnation until he receives a call from Rahim Khan about twenty years later, “there is a way to be good again[2]. Clearly aware of the moral evil that Amir has committed, Rahim wants to guide Amir onto the way to be “a good man again” before he dies. However, Amir expresses his strong objection when he learns that he has to risk his life back to Kabul to rescue Sohrab, the son of Hassan, “Why me? Why can’t you pay someone here to go? I’ll pay for it if it’s a matter of money”[2]. At Amir’s opposition, Rahim again plays the role of moral guide, “It isn’t about money. Amir! ...And why you? I think we both know why it has to be you, don’t we”[2]? Obviously, with the full knowledge of the sin that Amir has ever committed to Hassan and as a mentor, Rahim simply wants to help Amir to find the way back to be good again, that is, save Hassan’s son---Sohrab so as to achieve self-redemption.

To summarize, the role that Rahim plays in the process of Amir’s growth can never be exaggerated. Not only does he serve as a mentor in Amir’s childhood education but also works as a guide to lead Amir to become a good man with moral values when he grows up. Throughout the whole

process of Amir's growing up, Rahim firmly stands on the side of Amir, giving encouragement, affirmation and acceptance, and eventually helps Amir to grow into a successful writer with established moral conscience who has courage to correct his mistakes, learns to undertake responsibility and does a job he loves.

IV. CONCLUSION

Family is the first school that children attend and family education is one that children receive first, which poses the largest effect on children in process of growing up. Therefore, parents, as the subject of education play an indispensable and even decisive role in children education. Different education concept that parents hold can, to a larger extent, decides the future of children. As a writer with different cultural backgrounds, Khaled Hosseini exquisitely incorporates family education into a story of love, betrayal and redemption. By presenting two quite different concepts of education, namely, self-centered education concept represented by Amir's father whose total ignorance of Amir's unique personality and crude way of education bring about Amir's moral deformity and consequently lead to moral sin, and man-oriented education concept represented by Rahim Khan who follows humanistic idea, shows full respect for individual differences, excels in discovering Amir's advantages and guides him, and corrects mistakes that Amir has made, Hosseini intends to explicitly express his profound understanding of home education concept. The criticism of self-centered home education concept and embrace of man-oriented education idea reflected

from the book profoundly show Hosseini's liberal view of home education, which offers a good moral enlightenment and reference for readers. In this sense, *The Kite Runner* is not only a good novel of personal transformation but also a good example about home education.

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