

LEARNING TO BE HUMAN:
THE IMPLICATIONS OF CONFUCIAN PERCEPTIONS ON ENDS AND MEANS
FOR THE PRACTICE OF MODERN ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

Modern adult education philosophies during the 20th century have many perceptions on ends and means. Efforts to create means to reach personal, business, and social needs, resolving various kinds of problems have become the ends of most formal schooling, including adult education. Consequently, we are losing our mind in understanding what the ultimate end is. Moreover, the traditional wisdom emphasized on quality of true human beings is often overlooked. Confucian perceptions on end and means, from a perennial perspective, invite us to reconsider the ends and means issue of modern adult education. They help us consciously understand how a global society is now ruled by predatory corporations and dominated by a "technocratic" or "instrumental" rationality (Welton, 1995). They assist us to reunify and reconstruct the broken selves and worlds. As such, regression to Confucius' learning to be human is a way to progress toward an effective result for a global civilization and the adult education movement of the third millennium.

Introduction

The practice of adult education in the 20th century was based on different philosophies. This has produced dramatic divergence in ends and means as seen by theorists, whether labeled "liberal" development of the mind, "progressive" development of democratic citizens, "behavioristic" social engineering, "humanistic" faith in personal growth, or "radical" societal reconstruction (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Although modern adult education practice is trying to achieve personal, institutional/organizational, and social goals respectively, efforts to create means to reach personal, business, and social needs, and to resolve various kinds of problems have become the ends of most formal schooling, including adult education. Consequently, we are losing our mind in understanding what the ultimate end is. Moreover, the traditional wisdom emphasized on quality of true human beings is therefore often overlooked.

My completed dissertation attempts, from a perennial wisdom perspective, to explore and answer what the ultimate ends modern adult education should have for effective results in the third millennium. It employs both Confucian philosophy and three western perennialists' perceptions as analytical devices to examine perennial wisdom, principles, and insights from which modern adult education may benefit. As part of my dissertation, this paper reports on Confucian perceptions on ends and means within the contexts of Confucian educational philosophy and practice and comprehend principal implications for the practice of modern adult education in the third millennium.

For an accurate presentation and a penetrating interpretation of Confucius' ideas, I selected original Chinese sources, documentation, and statements as officially recorded in Chinese to help me develop a holistic picture of the research. I also use English language literature as valuable sources. For Confucian works (for instance, Lun Yu*), I have read both original Chinese and modern Chinese versions to compare with various English translations.

* Lun Yu (L.Y.) is a compilation of Confucius' sayings and aphorisms by his disciples of the succeeding generations, which is also called "Analects" by westerners. It is generally accepted as the most direct and reliable source on Confucius and his doctrines. For the purpose of identification, both chapters and section numbers are included. The division of section is based on The Analects of Confucius. (1992). (Bao, Shixing, Trans. into Modern Chinese & Lao, An, Trans. into English).

Confucian Perceptions on Ends and Means

Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.), was an educator (adult educator), philosopher, and politician in the history of China. He has been the national ideal of China and influenced its people's education activities for about 2,500 years. As an Eastern version of perennialism, Confucius' thought "to be 'Ren,' then 'Li,'" was the highest form of being. This means that to have the end of being a human being, then it is necessary to learn the rites, etiquette, or manners to identify ourselves properly. These two terms, 'Ren' and 'Li', explicitly illustrate the Confucian relationship between ends and means.

Regarding the issue of ends and means of learning, Confucius explained: "One who has no lifelong end must suffer from goals at hand" (L. Y., XV, 12). Here, the "lifelong end" means an ultimate end that each human being should endeavor to realize during his or her lifetime, which will lead one to enjoy the true sense of happiness. "Goals at hand" refers to the ephemeral aims or means of other aims that will actually never lead to a feeling of true satisfaction even if realized. Instead of true happiness, they lead one to anxieties and unsatisfying desires of various kinds.

Confucian perceptions on ends and means rest upon his education philosophy. The core of Confucian education philosophy is Ren. Ren is true virtue, or character that human beings potentially hold to differ themselves from other beings. Ren is the exhibition of true human beingness, is the totality of morals and the summation of ethics. Learning/education, to Confucius, is to realize Ren, to ultimately realize the wholeness of the conscious beings and be a true human being. This quality, believed by Confucius, is necessary in the makeup of a harmonious social order.

Confucius considered Ren as the principle of the Tao of Heaven. In Chinese culture, Heaven and Earth denote the great whole of the universe--the transcendent sphere in which all is but a transitional process. What is called Heaven and Earth, in fact, is the Universe with a cosmic force. This force, according to Confucius, is the Tao. The Tao constitutes the formula for the production of all things. It emphasizes that all things in the universe are ever in a state of flux and change. Hence, the great attribute of Heaven and Earth is to produce. Like the myriad of things subsisting in this universe, contended Confucius, human beings, as part of the generating organism, also embodied the Tao of Heaven that manifested Ren.

Believing Ren is the principle of the Tao of Heaven, the principle of the Tao of Human (that realizes the Tao of Heaven), should also rest upon Ren. Therefore, the Tao of Human is to cultivate and use the light of reason and to penetrate the nature of things.

To Confucius, essentially, human beings are moral beings. He saw Heaven and morality as closely related to origin and ends. Heaven granted the divine light to human beings. Heaven commands and human beings have moral obligations. Only together do humanity and Heaven build the universe, of which human being is an integral part. In this combination, it is only humanity that can cause disturbances so that it becomes every human being's duty to preserve permanently the balance of the cosmos. One must do everything to achieve personal culture to better one's family and circle and by doing so take part in the building of a universal order.

Besides moral beings, Confucius strongly deemed that human beings' reactions to their fellows make them also social beings and political beings. Interestingly, the etymology of the word "Ren" in Chinese is derived from the words "two" and "person" or "human being." So the true manifestation of the quality of Ren is in the practice of human relationships. It is expressed only when there is more than one person involved, which is a necessary condition of the existence and exhibition of Ren.

Confucius, thus, placed Ren, the Tao of Human, the knowledge of morality, in the highest position, as an end. Confucius emphasized, without humanity people become empty and

unscrupulous. He stated that the acquisition of knowledge without the acquisition of moral judgement was dangerous. If a person's moral character is undeveloped, or if one allows personal interests to intervene, even though she or he is intelligent enough to understand the principles of Tao, then, one actually has no possession of these principles (L.Y., XV, 32).

In theory, Confucius portrayed a Sage in three dimensions as an ideal end. First, a Sage is the undivided "I" with the Universe, therefore, is an absolute free being who knows the fate of universe. Because the sage has realized the undivided "I" with the universe, she or he realizes Ren, the Tao of human, the nature of true human beings, hence becomes highest human model. Second, a Sage is the unity of "I" with other human beings. She or he not only knows the Tao of universe but also cooperates with it, developing together with it. A sage not only internally reaches the realm that becomes undivided with the universe, but also externally extends the domain that unites with other human beings. She or he is not only self-dependent, but also enlightens others. Third, a Sage is the wholeness of "I" with "self." The sage has reached the plane that unifies the ideal with the real, overcomes the conflicts between reasoning and emotion, heart and mind, and becomes a balanced entity.

Simply, we can see that a sage is one who realizes the true nature of human beingness, reaches the harmonious realm that represents the triune of truth, goodness, and beauty. The Sage is a Confucian ultimate end of being human pursuing perfection through communion with the universe, fellows, and the self by means of knowledge of Ren that brings the true happiness of life.

In summary, a sage, being at the most perfect stage, can fully develop his or her own nature. Being fully able to develop his or her own nature, he or she may fully develop the nature of others. Being fully able to develop the nature of others, he or she can fully develop the nature of all things. Being able to fully develop the nature of all things, he or she may assist the transforming and nourishing powers of the universe. Being capable of assisting the transforming and nourishing powers of the universe, he or she may, with the universe, form a triad.

Because Confucius' ideal was to realize a moralized society, clearly he intended to display Ren, via an image of a Sage, both in the moral and social spheres, linking individual development with social needs, helping harmonize social order, and keeping human beings living peaceful and happy lives. In order to realize such a moralized society, Jun Zi, a model of morality, therefore, becomes a Confucian realistic educational end.

Generally speaking, Jun Zi refers to any person who is able to fully present humanities or morality. The term Jun Zi appeared frequently in *The Book of Odes* before Confucius, which generally meant people with high ranks in society, or people from noble families. Starting from Confucius, Jun Zi referred to the model of morality, synonymous with a person of humanities and outstanding knowledge to practice humanity.

Jun Zi, therefore, no longer meant a person of noble blood or of high social rank, but ideally a person of high character who desired, during a lifelong learning process to exhibits Ren step by step, moving up toward higher realms until realizing the true nature of human beings. In order to reach the realm of Ren, Confucius developed a means that is called Li. Li, an ethical recitation, coexists with Ren. Ren is the concept, while Li is concrete performance, a body of rules governing human conduct that gives Ren a full behavioral expression in real life situations, particularly with adults' life in transitions. .

Being a Confucian realistic educational end, Jun Zi is an exemplary of the educated, a model of morality and humanity characterized by outstanding knowledge, courage, and skills to access and practice humanity. Jun Zi is expected, in everyday life, through the code of conduct of Li, learns and practices to fulfill one's obligations toward oneself, family, other fellows, and society. Therefore, in this world here and now, Jun Zi presents the Confucian Tao of humanity, exhibits

Ren toward the natural world, the social world, other beings, and the inner world of self through solid personal and social actions.

Toward the natural world, Jun Zi respects the law of nature and understands the limitations of human endeavors toward something that is beyond human capability. Toward the social world, Jun Zi has strong social responsibility and considers human affairs as his or her own accountability. He or she worries about human affairs ahead of the general populous; he or she enjoys happiness after others do. Toward other beings, Jun Zi holds "do not impose on others what you do not desire" (L. Y., XV, 24). Confucius stressed on many occasions that Jun Zi should compare his or her situation and feeling with others. Jun Zi accepts others with openness, assimilates yet stays different, harmonizes without being an echo (L. Y., XIII, 23). Jun Zi seeks to enable people to succeed in what is good, but does not help them to what is evil (L. Y., XII, 16). Jun Zi "is conscious of his or her won superiority without being contentious, and comes together with others without forming cliques" (L.Y., XV, 22).

Toward self, Jun Zi ceaselessly self-strengthens. Jun Zi is one who "examine[s] myself three times a day: have I been unfaithful in planning for others? Have I been unreliable in conversation with friends? Am I preaching what I have not practiced myself?" (L.Y., I, 4). In other words, Jun Zi always seeks the cause of any error within himself or herself. Also, Jun Zi betters her or himself when she or he sees a chance and corrects whatever faults she or he has. In addition, "Jun Zi desires to be halting in speech but quick in action" (L.Y., IV, 24). Furthermore, she or he put her or his words into action before allowing her or his words to follow her or his action" (L.Y., II, 13).

Jun Zi is a person of "Zhi" (wisdom). That is precisely why Jun Zi is also synonymous with an educated or knowledgeable person. Confucius said, "It is only when simplicity and refinement are blended harmoniously and complement each other that one will be Jun Zi" (L.Y., VI, 18). Therefore, wisdom is an essential and basic requirement to be Jun Zi. Confucius asserted that Jun Zi must be both Ren and Zhi. Refinement, to Confucius, is wisdom, culture, knowledge, rites, and music, which are that characteristics of Jun Zi. In additional, Jun Zi is a person of multiple skills. Confucius pointed out that "an intellectual person of true learning is not like a utensil [specialist] that is of use only in a limited way" (L.Y., II, 12). As each utensil is designed for a specific purpose, it cannot be used for different purposes.

Jun Zi is also a brave person. This bravery, using the Confucian word, is "Yong" that is characterized by reaching Ren consistently, persistently, and insistently. Jun Zi must be strong and resolute, for his or her burden is heavy and his or her road is long. "Isn't it heavy? Jun Zi shoulders the Tao of Human as his or her own responsibility? Isn't it a long way? Only with death does the road come to an end" (L.Y., VIII, 7). Jun Zi differs from common people because "he or she has Ren and Li in mind." These characteristics, therefore, will manifest in almost every aspect of life no matter what conflicts or situations he or she is in.

In summery, Jun Zi is the end of a Confucian education. Jun Zi is able to cultivate the self and also establish others. Jun Zi as the exemplary of humanity and morality and can moralize for the ideal society, can purify and influence common people. Jun Zi exhibits Ren through lifelong learning with solid personal and social actions, which holds the promise of enabling us to think of all of society as a learning community, which educates people to learn to be human (Tu, 1998).

Implications for the Practice of Modern Adult Education

Modern adult education philosophies during the 20th century have many perceptions on ends and means. Hines (1996) explains that they are gained under the consciousness of feeling, thinking, observing, or contemplating. These four types of consciousness provide us with private, subjective, public, and objective comprehension of realities that each leads human beings to various ends.

Confucian philosophy provides us with a kind of vision of reality that is perceived by all four types of consciousness. This reality is one that begins with Ren in mind and is drawn toward a true human being as an end, which completes the circle. Reaching this end gives authentic power, provides with a base for, ideally Confucian termed sage, to unit with the universe, other beings, and the self, realistically, Jun Zi through self-cultivation and is illustrated by the daily regular activity through actions of love, benevolence, filial piety, loyalty, trust, and propriety. Everyone can learn and practice. Confucius emphasized the choice and endeavor that individuals made to learn to be human. The process of gaining access to knowledge through lifelong learning/education, therefore, becomes a stepping stone to the state of humanity, the development of a balanced character.

To Confucius, a well-balanced individual, well-ordered family, well-governed state, and happy and harmonious world all rested upon the moral cultivation of human beings. Confucius ideally appealed to the more noble instincts of human nature, which, when properly cultivated, could bring forth rich fruits of peace, order and harmony in society. Therefore, being truly human beings becomes the ends. In other words, the end for Confucius lays in what the person is rather than what the person has (Feng, 1952).

Reflecting on Confucius' perceptions on ends and means, we comprehend principal implications for modern adult education practice. First of all, Confucius to be "Ren," then "Li," presented us a model of how end justifies means, which invites us to rethink and refocus on the ends and means issue of modern adult education practice. Confucius' ultimate end of realizing Ren via Li and becoming as truly human beings as we could certainly highlights moral learning of adult education activities. Evidently, both Confucius' Ren in theory and Jun Zi in practice displayed with sustained and explicit exhibitions for modern adult education practitioners to see even clearly that adult education indeed is a field of moral learning and practice and these ends are lifelong and ultimate. To have the ultimate end of becoming a truly human being set up first, then learn and use whatever ways it takes to realize the end. All means serve this end during a lifelong learning process and practice. Confucius strongly believed that everyone can reach the realm of Ren and become Jun Zi, however, without lifelong learning and practice, it is definitely impossible, and with different efforts, people will stay at different levels. This precisely explains that adults are not necessary mature in morality although they like to think of themselves so.

Second, with Ren, the ultimate end, established in mind, Confucius' means "Li" was fully penetrated in the process of all actual subject-matter learning activities and real life practice, which extend adults' understanding of their moral choices, deepen their moral awareness and consciousness, and develop their autonomous moral judgements. Both learning and practice were not specifically designed as a "moral /learning/education" program, but through lifelong learning, human routine/daily life, and independent practice of Confucian "liberal arts," which refer to "rites," "music," "math," "history," "driving," and "archery." Precisely, this reflects Paterson's (1979) statement. Central to a Confucian way of learning "is to engage oneself in a ceaseless, unending process of creative self-transformation, presenting the true nature of being a human being. In this sense Ren and Li--end and means are integrated into one entity, serve one purpose of learning to be human.

Third, the end of Confucian education was designed to lead human beings to learn to become what we could be. Confucian Jun Zi practically exhibits us a real doable model on how to learn to become human, not to learn to earn and be slaves of money and property. In so doing, one becomes a truly human, realizes Ren, the root of human nature, gains what Zukav (1989) states "authentic power," which contrasts with external power that is represented by our economic and political system. It is very sad to see the fact that although external power can be gained or lost, can be bought or stolen, or can be transferred or inherited, yet we are more and more drawn into it and unconsciously manipulated by it that caused violence in varied forms.

Finally, a Confucian sage, an ideal human model set us an example to comprehend fully moral relationships between whole and part, between individual and society, between self and others. Confucius restored the closest ties between the great world system and human behavior.

Humans' acts and behaviors can and should harmonize with the general course of the world. That is morality with cosmic perspective. As a social and political being, Confucius' Jun Zi was perfectly integrated a social sphere with self-improvement in the practice of Ren. Confucius stated that for Jun Zi, while they want to be established themselves, they establish others. While they want to succeed themselves, they help others to succeed. In other words, balancing social learning and social responsibilities together with self-ceaseless learning and practice of Ren is what Jun Zi goes for. Therefore, either social oriented end or individual oriented end will not truly help people to realize their true nature.

Conclusion

Confucian perceptions on end and means truly invite us to reconsider the ends and means issue of modern adult education. Each of the above implications provides possibilities to make a difference of adult education activities for effective results of the third millennium. They deepen our consciousness and help us understand how a global society is now ruled by predatory corporations and dominated by a "technocratic" or "instrumental" rationality. They assist us to reunify and reconstruct the broken selves and worlds. As such, regression to Confucius' learning to be human is a way to progress toward an effective result for a global civilization and the adult education movement of the third millennium.

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