

Confucius' Educational Thought

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my great honour to be invited to visit your country and to give a talk on "Confucius' educational thought".

Confucianism has been the mainstream of Chinese traditional thought, and Confucius is the central figure of this school and the most influential philosopher of the Chinese people. As such, it is fitting to say that his thoughts are the orthodox Chinese thoughts.

Confucius was born in a time when the aristocracy was declining, when feudalism and the caste system became unstable, when political and social chaos prevailed and when there was no moral standard to follow. Living under such conditions, he hoped to purge society and save humanity. He sought and received audiences with various feudal princes, anxiously hoping to be favoured by some wise lord so as to implement his political thoughts, which were based on moralism. Unfortunately, nobody appreciated him. Disappointed, he gave up seeking office and returned to his own country to teach. He indefatigably devoted himself to education and taught people of all ranks without discrimination. He had 3000 disciples in all, of whom 72 were thoroughly versed in the six arts. (See the *Record of the Historian*, "Biography of Confucius"). As a result the Confucian School was formed. It was called the "prominent" school by posterity. (See *Hanfeitzu*, "Prominent School"). It is in education that Confucius made the greatest achievement in his career. We can comprehend from his educational thought his greatness and the reason why he deserves the honorific title "Paragon for All Generations".

Here we will investigate his aim and methods of education to judge the essential points of his educational thought.

I. Confucius' Aim of Education

Confucius' philosophy of life concentrates on benevolence or humanity. To practice benevolence is, to him, the ultimate goal of education. Therefore, he says, "If the gentleman forsakes benevolence, in what way can he make a name for himself? The gentleman never deserts benevolence, not even for as long as it takes to eat a meal. If he hurries and stumbles, one may be sure that it is in benevolence that he does so." (*Analects*, BK 4) He also urges his disciples "not to defer even to their teacher when it comes to the practice of benevolence". (Ibid, BK 15). As for practicing benevolence, one has to be able "not to impose on others what one oneself does not desire". (Ibid, BK 12). One then has to move further ahead and "establish and promote others as one desires to establish and promote oneself". (Ibid, BK 6). If one can always put oneself in another's position, no matter what he does, one is certainly "benevolent". Confucius says again in the *Doctrine of the Mean* that "the cultivation of the Way is to be done through humanity." (Chap 1). And that "the cultivation of the Way is called education" (Chap 1) where "the cultivation of the Way" is education itself. The two passages therefore mean that to practice "benevolence" or "humanity" is the ultimate goal of education.

II. His Educational Method

Confucius' educational method contains four main points.

First, it stresses that people holding responsible positions must set examples of moral uprightness by their own actions so as to influence and reform others. Confucius emphasizes the changing of a person by influence. His education is without explicit didactic instructions. People can be unobtrusively and imperceptibly imbued merely with the good examples they frequently hear about and see. It is recorded in the *Analects*, Book 13, "If a superior is upright, then there will be obedience without orders being given; otherwise, there will not be obedience even though orders are given." Book 7 says, "If you set an example by being upright, who would dare to remain in the wrong?" Book 14 says, "The gentleman is ashamed of his word outstripping his deed." From these words we can see that Confucius considers teaching by personal example very important. Teachers and parents nowadays should pay attention to this educational principle, both in school or at home.

Second, it provides education for all people without discrimination.

Prior to 700 B.C., the state and the school were body, and teachers were officials. Books were collected in high government offices and education controlled by high officials. Only children of the noble families could receive high academic education. Commoners did not have any chance to enjoy it. Confucius provided education for people of all ranks and taught indiscriminately, breaking through the ancient aristocratic education and beginning universal education in China. During his teaching career, he admitted with pleasure anybody who was willing to follow him. His idea of universal education is what we are at present endeavoring to carry out so as to provide everyone with equal opportunity for education.

Third, it teaches according to the student's ability. In Book 15 of the *Analects*, he says, "To fail to speak to a man who is capable of benefiting is to let a man go to waste. To speak to a man who is incapable of benefiting is to let one's words go to waste. A wise man lets neither man nor words go to waste." "And in Book 6, he says, "You can tell those who are above average about the best, but not those who are below average." On both occasions he explains the reason for using such a teaching method. We can find in the *Analects* many instances where Confucius taught according to his students' abilities. For example, the various answers to the meaning of "filial piety" are "never failing to comply" (BK 2), "to show reverence and to provide with food" (Ibid), and "what is difficult to manage being the expression on one's face" (Ibid). Also, the meaning of "benevolence" or "humanity" is "to love", "to master oneself and to return to propriety" (BK 12), "to loath to speak" (Ibid), or "respectfulness, tolerance, trustworthiness, diligence and generosity" (BK 17). We can see that Confucius gave different answers to the same question posed by different disciples. It is probable that the interlocutor was in want of certain virtues and Confucius warned him by pointing it out in his answer.

Fourth, it adopts the approach of self-enlightenment. Confucius says in Book 7 of the *Analects*, "I do not enlighten those who are not eager to learn, nor those who are not anxious to give an explanation themselves. If I have presented one corner of the square and they cannot come back with the other three, I should not go over the points again." He means that when a student is stuck with a problem, the teacher must take the opportunity to enlighten him so that it would dawn upon him suddenly; and when the student has already solved the problem but cannot yet present his solution clearly and smoothly, the teacher must take the opportunity to instruct him so that he can be lucid. In so doing, the teacher's guidance will make a deep impression

of the problem on the student's mind and cause him to understand thoroughly.

In short, we can see that regardless of the aim of education or educational method, Confucius is beyond compare. That is why he is respectfully called the paragon for all generations.

This ends my brief presentation. Your comments are most welcome.

Confucius' Political Thought

Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today, Teh Cheng is invited to visit your country and to deliver a lecture. I feel that I am greatly honored. Now, I am going to talk about Confucius' political thought on this occasion, and any comments are welcome.

Confucianism is the main trend of Chinese traditional thought. Confucius is the central figure of this school and his influence on China is unsurpassed. In any case, the political ideas of Confucius can be said to have become an orthodoxy in China.

Confucius' standpoints taken on politics should thus be discussed from two angles:

I. Historical Background and Sources of Confucius' Political Thought

In order to know the political ideas of Confucius, we must first understand the political and social circumstances with which Confucius was confronted. Confucius' ancestors came from the Kingdom of Sung, originally a fief of the Shang Dynasty. One of his forefathers called Hoo Hu-ho (son of Duke Ming of the Kingdom of Sung) had abdicated for Duke Li, and another forefather of his, named Cheng Kao-hu, had given hands to Dukes Dai, Wu and Shuen. Later on, the ancestral family of Confucius moved to the Kingdom of Lü. Such a honorable lineage of Confucius' ancestral family must have exercised some influence on the shaping of his political thought.

Confucius was born in 551 B.C. and died in 479 B.C. when he was seventy-two years old. This period is what historians designated as the Spring and Autumn Period. And the country where Confucius lived was called Lü.