

A Study of the Educational Thought of Choosing Friends in the Ancient Chinese Literature “Book of Rites – Record on the Subject of Education”

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ABSTRACT: *In the “Record on the Subject of Education”, choosing friends was listed as one of the important educational indicators. It is meaningful in modern education and thus requires further research and discussion. With respect to this, this study used a qualitative research method to analyse the implications from the “Record on the Subject of Education” related to the education of choosing friends. The research results illustrate the analyses of and interpretations of the implications regarding choosing friends. This study expected to make contributions to the field of education by guiding them to pay more attention to the value and practice concerning the education of choosing friends.*

KEYWORD: Ancient Chinese educational thought, “Book of Rites-Record on the Subject of Education”, Education of choosing friends, Educational thought of Confucian school.

INTRODUCTION

The motivation of this study is that there have been increasing cases of the misfortune of students caused by making friends with deviant behaviours. Thus, education workers must guide students in making friends. The “Record on the Subject of Education” (Wang, Ho, Chou, Lin, Sun, & Chen, 2001) was written in an old language, classical Chinese, which is different from the Chinese used nowadays in writing styles and literary forms. One feature of classical Chinese is to make expressions with simple words or with less words. That is, to make expressions with rather simple words in classical Chinese, it is very likely that the following types of words are omitted: (a) subjects, (b) verbs, (c) objects, (d) subject complements, (e) conjunctions, and (f) adjectives. Thus, the content of “Record on the Subject of Education” had been interpreted before studying.

LITERATURE

The purpose of the literature review is to identify the meanings and interpretation of the original text of “Book of Rites–Record on the Subject of Education”. The major sources of literature are from four resources: First, sources are from a Chinese textbook for university (Li, 1999;

Editorial board, 1985). A second source is from the notes of a single historical figure (Zhu, 1996; Li, 1971). Third, additional sources are from the note compilation of historical figures (Sung, 1983). Fourth, there are also sources from a professional book of modern interpretation (Jiang, 2007; Wang, 2009).

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method adopted by this study was a qualitative research method, which is the content analysis method proposed by Wen-Ke Wang in his work titled “Educational Research Methods” (2001). The method was applied to the text of the “Record on the Subject of Education” to identify and cross-reference the meanings of words, terms, sentences, and relationships between sentences. In addition, the method was applied to retrieving words related to the “education of choosing friends” and making interpretations of these words as well as retrieving words indirectly related to the “education of choosing friends” and making interpretations of these words, which were then extended to the interpretations of conceptual applications of the “education of choosing friends”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study summarised and analysed content directly related to choosing friends in the “Record on the Subject of Education” and the results are listed below.

Selecting Friends

To make a small achievement in learning, the capability of choosing helpful friends is essential. One can only be said to make a small achievement in learning when one is able to distinguish helpful friends and unhelpful ones. The original text said “sui li shi fu er bu fan ye”, it means “being away from teachers and friends but still meeting their expectations”. In this sentence, the character “fu” (assistance) is used instead of “you” in peng-you (friend). Though here there is no explanation regarding how to tell what kind of friends this character means, it can be found that some other parts of the text are related to this principle. In ancient times, teachers expected their students to develop moral capabilities. Moreover, friends were those who could encourage each other. This shows that the capability of choosing helpful friends was very important in educational philosophy in ancient times.

Understanding and Defending the Way of Life

In ancient times, the highest goal of education and learning was the examination of understanding the way of life in the ninth year in which teachers assess their students based on indicators and whether they have the willpower to practice. In the original text, there is a sentence, “zhi lei tong da, qiang li er bu fan”. It means “understanding the way of life, being resolute with strong willpower, and not violating teacher’s teachings and principles of righteousness and justice”. The two characters in the sentence, “qiang li”, stand for “being resolute”. Why were the two characters, “qiang li”, meaning strong willpower used? The reason is that “understanding” is related to the aspect of “knowing”, while “qiang li” is related to the aspect of “doing”. In other words, knowing a principle does not mean being able to apply it.

For example, in Taiwan, there was a shocking event of a high-level police officer and a DA taking bribes. Everybody knows that taking bribes is wrong. This is about “knowing”. Of course, this high-level police officer with a doctoral degree definitely knew that he should not take bribes, yet, he did. What he “knew” and what he “did” were not consistent. That is, he did something that he knew was illegal. This event shows how one can be influenced by temptations not to practice known principles. Based on this analysis, it can be seen that, in ancient times, the most important thing in achieving educational goals is to keep behaviours within the range of moral, righteousness, and justice.

Preventing Students from Performing Improper Behaviour

The education in ancient times stressed the philosophy of prevention. The sentence “jin yu wei fa zhi wei yu” in the original text means that “the educational guidance to forbid students to perform a deviant behaviour before they actually do it is called prevention”. The character “JIN” in the sentence is a character with a legal meaning. Teachers should educate their students through guidance before they actually do anything deviant. Some other parts of the text also pointed out that if a teacher does not adopt a preventive teaching method and only dissuades a student from doing something deviant after the student has already done it, the student would resist as a result, and it would be difficult to correct the behaviour. Based on this, it is comprehensible that the “preventive” educational thinking was the most important successful education method in ancient times.

Making Injurious Friends Goes Against the Expectation of Education

The educational philosophy in ancient times focused on avoiding making injurious friends. The

original text mentioned that once a student makes a friend who behaves dishonourably or evilly, the student would disobey the teachers' instructions and teachings, resulting in neglecting his or her studies. Teachers' attitudes towards their students are positive with expectations. However, making friends with deviant behaviours may cause negative influences and result in the violation of integrity and morals. Thus, it can be seen that in ancient times a lot of attention was paid to character education for students, and students making friends with deviant behaviours was considered one of the factors behind the failure of education.

This study interpreted the content related to choosing friends in the "Record on the Subject of Education" and the results are listed below.

Guide Students in Life Education

In this complex society, teachers must teach their students to not be influenced by various seductive illegal factors and enlighten their good nature, so that education can become a force to create good values in society. Thus, teachers must guide their students in life education to distinguish good values and behaviours from evil ones, in hopes of preventing them from making friends with deviant behaviours or from doing illegal acts due to the seduction or influence from these kinds of friends.

Avoid Crises Caused by Making Friends Online

Learning with flexible applications is meaningful in education. Students live in a society with advanced Internet technology where interpersonal relationships are complex. It is essential to teach them to avoid possible crises caused by making friends online.

Make Rational Analyses

Teachers must identify students' needs or problems and offer corresponding guidance patiently and systematically. First, they must methodically ensure that their students can understand their concerns and make rational analyses, and they must explain to their students why it is necessary to avoid making friends with bad companions. This way students would not feel bored or not know which course to follow.

Remind Students

When a teacher teaches students, attention must be paid to their individual differences. Although equality is important in education, equality in this form may result in an inability to achieve educational goals. Thus, teachers should find the way that is the most appropriate and

the most consistent with the educational goals based on their students' individual differences. For example, some students need their teachers to remind them not to make friends with deviant behaviours repeatedly, while others prefer their teachers to tell them this principle only once or twice.

Avoid Regrets

When a teacher teaches the students not to make friends with bad companions, it is important to ensure they understand that the intention is to help them to create a bright future and avoid regrets, which cannot be erased.

Using Real Examples

If teachers can share news reports of events that have actually happened in the real world regarding tragedies caused by making friends with bad companions with their students, their students can attain a deeper understanding of the issue. Thus, teachers should seize any opportunity for education to guide their students using real examples to yield twice the results with half the effort.

Learning from Each Other

Teachers can use the opportunity of group discussions to ask students to share their experiences related to making friends with bad companions and the corresponding consequences. There will definitely be some great stories shared. Additionally, this is a way to help students to learn some experiences and draw some lessons. This is the effect of applying the method of learning from each other.

Establish a Stress-free Climate

Nowadays, in a diversified society, the roles teachers play may also be diversified. Teachers try not to stick to a strict method. Sometimes, teachers can try an easier technique to gradually inform their students of the possible results of making friends with bad companions. When interactions between students and teachers are stress-free, the effects of teaching students can be more obvious.

Use Friendly Language and Warm Manners

When students face their teachers, they may have different responses according to their teachers' language and manner of speaking. Thus, when teaching students, teachers should not use

improper language or manner of speaking, which may lead to psychological resistance. Otherwise, not only the purpose of guidance cannot be served, but also the teacher-student relationship could become more tense. Therefore, teachers should use friendly language and a warm manner of speaking when reminding students not to fall from virtue due to making friends with bad companions. This way, students are more likely to accept the advice, as they feel good about it.

Reduce Students' Antagonistic Feelings

Teachers must have good communicative skills to make explanations. For example, when teachers aim to teach their students about the serious issue of not making friends with bad companions, if they can do it in a humorous way to reduce students' antagonistic feelings, and use various metaphors well, students' degrees of understanding and acceptance can be increased.

Allow Them to Fully Express Themselves

When a teacher interacts with the students and the students are willing to voice their opinions, the teacher should allow them to fully express themselves without interrupting them. It is also important to let students know that the teacher is focused on what they are saying and respects them. This way, from the students' conversations, the teacher can get to know them regarding aspects such as learning, living, and making friends to further explore their outlooks on life and values. Hence, the teacher can observe the students and teach them according to their aptitudes. Further, the teacher would have a better chance to help them set their values right or guide them to determine which friends are friends worth having.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

After analysing the implications related to the education of choosing friends from the article "Book of Rites-Record on the Subject of Education", this study expected that current education workers can use ancient experiences as a reference to teach students the values of healthy choices of friends and how to choose friends, in hopes of reducing social cases of tragedies caused by making friends with the wrong people, as there are increasing cases of this sort.

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