A STUDY OF KONGZI’S METHODS OF EDUCATION THROUGH FOUR BOOKS

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Abstract. Here is our summary study about the methods of education of Kongzi through the use of Confucian scholarly books. As a final consideration, Kongzi’s theory of education came about because of the regulations of the time, social conditions and the influence of class position. This is why some of his methods of education are not suitable in the present time. It is the positive value and power of Chinese culture that have had a great influence on education in the East and in Vietnam in particular.

Keywords: Kongzi, methods of education, Confucian, Four books.

1. Introduction

Kongzi (551-479 BC) was a Chinese teacher, editor, politician and philosopher of the Spring and Autumn Period of Chinese history. Moreover, he was considered to be a great educator due to his the teaching methods which combined mental and moral education. His aim in educating people was to create a civil society for political purposes. He valued self-training, making a good family, ruling the country and maintaining peace. The philosophy of Kongzi emphasized personal and governmental morality, correct social relationships, justice and sincerity. He was respected as a saint by his students and later generations respect him as a ‘Model Teacher for Ten Thousand Ages’.

2. Content

2.1. Biography of Kongzi

Kongzi (551-479 BC), whose name was Kong Qiu, also know as Zhongni, was born in Lu state (near present-day Qufu, Shandong province) in an esteemed family on the decline. His native land was a place where many vestiges of the Zhou dynasty were
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preserved. Kongzi was well-known for his extensive study and great knowledge. At the age of 30, he went to Leyi, the capital city of the Zhou dynasty to learn rites and music. It was seen that he loved culture and education when he was young. Kongzi sided with the Zhou class when he expressed his opinion about restoring Zhou law and order. He systematized previous Confucian ideas to establish a Confucian system. When he was more than 50 years old, Kongzi was an administrator whose policies were good, making people become tender and loving. However, he felt that King Lu was not virtuous and talented and so he resigned after five years. After that he travelled here and there, promoting the restoration of the formal social order of the Zhou dynasty. But, his ideas were different in that he thought that Confucianism heightened virtue and training and he considering that as an instrument and method for ruling and managing society most effectively. Although he went to any countries, he wasn’t recognized as an important functionary. He returned to Lu state and opened a school, with himself working himself as the teacher. He also revised books and promoted the teaching of ancient teachers, spreading his ideas abroad for future generations. This is why he was respected as a ‘Model Teacher for Ten Thousand Ages’. His students put his teachings down in the scholarly book Analects (the Analects of Confucius or Lunyu). – It was said that Kongzi taught three thousand students and more than 70 became well-known. He died when he was 73. Future generations adored him as a sage but he never considered himself to be a saint.

2.2. Kongzi’s methods of education

Being an educator, Kongzi felt that teaching people was most important and practicing virtue was a basic action in life. He thought that personal happiness, family, national order and law all depended upon educating people. To carry out the ideal: “making a good family, ruling the country and maintaining peace,” education and self-training was essential. To educate people according to that ideal, people’s characters had to be looked at. After looking at human character, he saw the methods needed to educate people. According to Kongzi, “Initially, people’s characters are rather the same, but when they learn different customs and habits they become different from one another” [2;614]. Education could reform people. Both Kongzi and other scholars attached much importance to the role of education. With a proper education, all people could become “open-hearted” and Confucian deities. He also categorized people: “Men who know principle after being born are in the top level. Men who know this know this after learning are of second rank. Stupid men who find it hard to learn are in the third category. A stupid man who doesn’t like to learn is the lowest level” [2;605]. On that basis, he could find the most effective way to teach anyone. We can study the methods of education of Kongzi and his followers in the Confucian scholarly books, especially the Analects of Confucius. That was a skillful combination of mental education and moral education.
2.2.1. Methods of mental education

+ **Telling Confucianism without composing, being really interested in the old ages**

Kongzi expressed the principle used by one scholar: “Teach Confucianism without composing; rather, tell old stories.” Kongzi looked to the old ages and old works. He propagated Confucianism without composing or expressing personal opinions that would make Confucianism incorrect. Kongzi was very modest when he said, “I am not a man who can know everything after birth. I am only interested in the old ages and working hard to understand Confucianism” [2;358].

+ **Reviewing old work to know new work**

This was basic method of education of Kongzi. He said, “Reviewing the old work to know new work can make a man a teacher” [2;225]. Students need to look at what was taught and then think of this every day, revising it but then to accept one thoughts as solid knowledge. Then they could learn more new things. An old work is reviewed in order to know a present and future work. Kongzi’s method of ‘reviewing old work to know new work’ which came from the spirit of loving old ages, was also a vital necessity of the society in that period. Kongzi said: “The Zhou dynasty (1046-256 BC) looked to prior dynasties, (the Xia dynasty and the Shang dynasty). How brilliant the culture is! I follow the Zhou dynasty” [2;251]. Kongzi always wished that the ceremony and virtue of the Zhou time returned. That meant that he wanted people to follow the ancient good things considered “beau ideal” by him. All old things from the ancient beginning were clearly expressed and noted in Zhou’s time, then the new beginning things of every doctrine and every Confucian deity were discovered. Finally, they were collected all together. As the result, it was thought that there was an ideal example for ten thousand generations for ever. That was method of education was also the great achievement of Kongzi.

+ **Combining learning and thinking**

The principle of combining learning and independent self-thinking, not only learning constantly and hard, but more importantly to be able to defend what was learned. Learning had to be combined with thinking. Kongzi said: “Learning without thinking is certainly not understanding. Thinking without learning is surely tired” [2;227]. Learning without thinking is to live parrot-like. Thinking widens study and makes it possible to understand what is learned. Kongzi said, “I often eat nothing the whole day and do not sleep all night because I am thinking. But it is useless. This is not as good as learning” [2;583]. Learning and thinking have to go together. Thinking without learning is surely tired and makes people not want to eat or sleep.

According to Kongzi: deeply thinking was thinking, drawing an inference from this object to that one, from the known thing to the unknown one. Learning without thinking depth can not be enlarged or developed. He supposed that: “If its not angry, the mind can not open, if its not being shocked, ideas can not come out. An angle was already shown and three other angles were to be infered. I certainly do not want to say that again”
This is an educational principle that was to encourage students to develop their own creativity. Kongzi would wait until they could not find the answer and then explain. Therefore, students could gain real knowledge and ‘speak one understand three’.

+ Arriving at the truth through suggestion

This was the method usually used by Kongzi in his process of teaching. Getting to know the truth through suggestion meant giving students hints as to what students want to know and making statements which students want to say. In this way making comparisons, asking, guiding, exciting and widening were used to help students to discover the truth. Kongzi thought that this suggesting method was very important because it promoted positive temper and creative dynamism in students. It was Kongzi’s method of “suggesting the matter”, exciting from the simple to the complex which gives students the chance to develop an ability to invent. Studying was forever. Teachers only open the way to show how to learn, encourage the students’ passion for study, but they do not help to the end, which is why students have to pay attention, think and find out what is true. That was also one of Kongzi’s contributions for the education of mankind in general.

+ Ways to teach different kinds of students

Kongzi had different methods to teach different kinds of students. When he taught, he looked at the students’ essential qualities and taught accordingly. In fact, Kongzi divided students into different categories and applied suitable ways of explaining for every kind of student. According to him, intelligent students could be taught philosophy but unintelligent students could not.

At the same time, he also looked at students’ individual characters when explaining things and correcting them. For example, when he taught Zilu: “Hey, student, I will teach you about knowing. You need to learn it, don’t you? If you know, say I know; do you do not know, say I don’t know. That is already known, too” [2;228]. Kongzi taught Zilu like this because Zilu was an upright man and an obstinate man who was often ambitious, so he advised: don’t be afraid of the words ‘I don’t know’.

Or when Zilu asked, “After hearing of a good thing, should I do at once?” Kongzi said: “Your father is alive now. It is impossible to do at once whatever you hear, isn’t it?” Ranyou asked, “After hearing of a good thing, should I do it at once?” Kongzi said: “After you hear of it, do it at once”. Gongxihua said, “You (Zilu’s nickname) asked that after hearing of a good thing, should be do it at once, and you pleaded his father. Qiu (Ranyou’s nickname) asked that after hearing of a good thing, should he do it at once, you told him to to do it at once after hearing of it. Chi (Gongxihua’s nickname) does not know what is what. Can I ask you?” Said Kongzi: “Student Qiu is often dejected, so I have to encourage him; Student You is truculent, and that is why I have to delay” [2;458]. Because Zilu was obstinate but Ranyou was very careful, Kongzi taught them differently.

Or when Kongzi explained Ren (human virtue) to different students, he spoke about different aspects of the Ren according to each student’s shortcomings in order to perfect
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him. For Yanhui, he was careful and not to be caught napping, and Kongzi advised him to go on being like that to be able to reach Ren [2;471]. As expected, Yanhui followed his advice and became a perfect man.

But Zhonggong was a man with hidden intimate feelings, so Kongzi told him: “What you do not want, do not carry out for other people” [2;473]. He advised his students to open their hearts, to not feel anymosity towards anyone, to not think that his heart is as the same as the other’s, and to be altruistic. Being altruistic meant coming near to Ren. The Confucianism which Kongzi followed all his life and taught his students was finally one word: altruism.

Simaniu was an impatient man, so Kongzi explained him about Ren: “A man of human virtue speaks cautiously” [2;474]. Because an impatient man does not often speak thoughtfully, so Kongzi advised: “To do as what is said is very difficult”. That is why a man who wants to become a man of Ren has to speak carefully.

Similarly, when the students asked about “the virtue of filial piety”, Kongzi gave each one a different answer. For Mengyizi, Kongzi taught “You had better not disobey filial piety” [2;218]. Because Mengyizi came from from one of three powerful families (Mengshi, Shushi and Quishi), the power was handed down from father to son, with most of their power in the Lu state. Later, they infringed upon the King, often usurped courtesy and the King’s ceremony. Therefore, when Kongzi said, “You had better not disobey filial piety”, Mengyizi understood at once and asked nothing again.

Mengwubo asked about filial piety, and Kongzi said: “Parents are only afraid of their son’s illness” [2;219]. Mengwubo (Mengyizi’s son) a mandarine’s son, was a depraved playboy, so Kongzi advised: “You should not let your parents worry. That is filial piety.”

Ziyou asked about filial piety and Kongzi said: “Nowadays, people who consider themselves to be children with filial piety all say that they can feed their parents. As for dogs and horses, people feed them easily. Without piety and obedience, upon what can you distinguish?” [2;220]. For Ziyou, quite loved by his parents, Kongzi advised him to be vigilant, knowing that the parents’ pampering and love can make the son commit sins against filial piety. So he taught: “feeding parents with respect can be considered filial piety.”

Zixia asked about filial piety and Kongzi said: “Keeping one’s counternance merry and happy, how difficult it is!...” [2;220]. The reason why Kongzi taught him like this was that Zixia often had an unpleasant counternance and he was afraid that it was not good to respect parents with an unpleasant counternance and it would make his parents unhappy.

Thus, one matter, but for every student Kongzi had a different way of teaching. Being children, everyone considered filial piety to be the most important, and he recognized everyone’s basic shortcomings to perfect them. This is what it means to teach according to each student. Kongzi’s active teaching method was accepted by Mengzi. It
was thought by Kongzi- Mengzi, as well as many in later Confucianism, that teaching was not an immutable principle that can be applied to everyone.

+ Learning and practising go together

Learning and practising go together and Kongzi always stressed this. Learning to know, but not understanding was not considered the last purpose, and moreover students had to apply it in their lives. A great man learned, reviewed and practised what was learned, and then applying in life a great happiness in the heart. For the students, there were three periods: first, getting to know about Confucianism, second, understanding and then enjoying, and last being happy with Confucianism. The purpose of the Confucianists was to help people and country. They always tended towards politics. From Kongzi to his followers, whoever found a way to present moral principles taught students to carry out moral principles to help the nation. The later Confucianists also followed that ambition: (self-training, making a good family, ruling the country and maintaining peace). Kongzi believed in great men: words had to be accompanied by action, and not be just empty words. Zigong asked what a great man is. Said Kongzi, “Do what you said you’d do” [2;226]. Kongzi advised his students to try to see things as others see them. He thought that words and action must go together and if one can not follow through on words, say nothing. As a result, the spoken word could be a model for guiding action. Word and work have to be in unity, so studying had to be wide, understanding, deep, thoughtful and clear, and what was taught had to be carried out. When talking about action, Kongzi divided people into many kinds: the kind of people that took action, the kind of people that did things for personal benefit and the kind of people acted unwillingly. The general idea was to carry out moral principle according to the principle “human virtue” and create a peaceful society. This is what Eastern thinkers mean when they said, “establishing Confucianism goes together with carrying out Confucianism.”

+ Being studious and enjoying study

Kongzi himself was a bright example for being studious and enjoying study. He once said, “In a village with ten families, there is surely a faithful man like Qiu, but no one is interested in studying like Qiu” [2;314]. When Yegong asked Zilu about Kongzi, Zilu did not answer, Kongzi said, “Why don’t you say that is a man studying while being too angry to eat, being always interested in carrying out Confucianism so that he forgets sadness, is unluckily, and upon whom old age is creeping up?” [2;357]. Kongzi thought that things come from yourself and not from others’ requirements. A man studying Confucianism had an inner happiness. The man has to be so enthusiastic that he was happy to learn. The learner had to have the will, establish the will firmly, be not afraid of difficulties and not get tired of a long time. So the learner had to have the will, determination, perseverance and patience to be successful. He said: “For example, when you bank up a hill, it is not finished without a basket of land, then stop doing, that is because of yourself. As you level the ground, however you pour only a basket of land, it is a progress and you go on working” [2;411].
If his students were thirsty for knowledge, would think thoroughly and learn in a complete way, then he would teach them carefully. He emphasized, “Sincerity is of providence, practising to become sincere is a human virtue. If one is naturally sincere, it is easy to know principle, to understand confucianism without thinking, and to constantly remain in a calm mood: that is being a saint. A man who is sincere chooses the right thing, maintains securely, thinks carefully, discusses clearly and works enthusiastically. Thing, no need to learn, but can not know, decide not to stop. Thing, no need to ask, but can not know after asking, decide not to give up. Thing, no need to think of, but can not know after thinking, decide not to cease. Thing, no need to discuss, but can not be clear after discussing, decide not to leave. Thing, no need to do, but do without enthusiasm, decide not to abandon. Other people makes effort for one part to succeed, man makes effort for cent parts, other people makes effort for 10 parts, man makes effort for thousand parts. Indeed, if a man can follow this way, a stupid man will become intelligent and a weak-willed man will become powerful” [2;141].

2.2.2. Methods of moral education

+ Self-training according to the way of self-learning, self-criticism, self-blame, self-correction, careful speech

According to Kongzi “A great man who does not speak mannerly and whose action is not careful is not stately. His study was not firm or lasting. Keep faithfulness in the fore. Do not make friends with people who don’t have the same purpose. When making mistakes, do not mind correcting them” [2;203]. He said: “A great man eats not to be full, lives not to need comfort, works very hard and speaks carefully, finds out the virtual man to perfect himself, and is rather studious” [2;209].

In the Doctrine of the Mean it is written: A great man has to watch himself so as not to make mistakes and not to be tired of himself or life. After correcting himself, there is something unsuccessful left (only known by himself), how can other people see?” [2;178]. Kongzi also said, “Realizing that many people hate you, have to get a look at it again. If you find that too many people love you, you have to get a look at, too” [2;581]. For yourself, you have to look at yourself regularly. However, don’t quickly go over to public opinion, otherwise should not throw off completely the crowd’s opinion. He said, “Impelling yourself with sincerity but still making mistakes, that is a rare thing” [2;282]. Often keeping yourself good, advising yourself not to do against your duty, then few mistakes happen. And, “Making mistakes but not correcting them, that is really a mistake” [2;582]. Making mistakes and then correcting them, that is not a mistake. It is incorrectness that is a mistake.

When teaching students how to correct their own mistakes, Kongzi used many methods. For example, he told his students to forbid Zengcen to be indoors because he had heard the story: “Zengcen harrowed grass in the melon field and destroyed some melon plants because of his carelessness. His father, Zengji, was so angry he hit his son’s
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back with a stick. Zengcen fell down on the ground and lost consciousness for a moment. After coming back home, Zengcen went up to his dad and said, “The last time, I made a mistake and was hit, making your hand hurt, and I really lost the duty of a son.” After that, he went to his room and played the lute and sang so that his dad would think that he was not in pain.” Zengcen saw that his teacher was very angry with him but he thought that he was innocent. He asked his friends to ask the teacher why he was so angry. Kongzi said, “In the old days, King Shun respected Guzou. His father was beside him when being ordered, keeping aloof from him when he lost his temper to kill him; when being beaten with a rod he tried to suffer, but with a stick, he fled. That was why Guzou was not said to be inhuman. Today, Cen respects his dad, trying to suffer from his anger to lose consciousness. Would he want his dad to be prosecuted for killing his son if he died? What can be greater than filial impiety?” Zengcen understood and hurried to apologized to his sage.

Roubei (from Lu state – Kongzi’s student who was learning about funerals) making mistake, asked for visiting him, he alleged illness without meeting. But as soon as the teller went out the door, he took his lute and began singing so that Roubei could hear, understand his teacher with no good will of meeting, then came back home to look at himself again to correct his own mistake. That was a very special teaching method of Kongzi.

Following Kongzi’s idea, Mengzi later said, “There are many methods to teach people. I do not want to teach a man, that also means I have already taught him.” He did not want to teach, he let him think and see his mistake, and that was an effective teaching method.

+ Observing people

A learner had to observe people to look at himself, learning from the examples of old man he can learn himself. Kongzi said, “Knowing a good man, think of the way how to be as good as him, knowing a bad man, look at yourself again to see whether you make mistakes like him or not.” Also, “Of 3 people going together, there is certainly one who is worthy to be your teacher. Find the good thing to follow and the bad thing to perfect yourself. A studious man, being thirsty for knowledge, has a spirit of thirsting for understanding and can find teachers everywhere. That is a man who always finds out the other’s advantage to learn from, and at the same time realizes their shortcomings to correct himself. He does not mind learning from a man who has a lower position or less education. Kongzi himself was a man who “does not mind learning from a man with a lower position or less education.”

+ The teacher himself as a bright example for the students

This was a very outstanding method of education of Kongzi in particular and of Confucianism in general. Setting an example was much more important than any explanation. Kongzi and Confucianists all paid attention to “setting an example for the students.” According to Kongzi, no method was more effective than “setting the example
for the students” and no method was more difficult to carry out than that method as well. All his life, he nurtured his own human virtue, keeping himself always good to be an example for the students. He looked at himself: “Remember silently, learn with great passion, teach students without tiredness, in those 3 things, are any of them my shortcomings?” [2;344]. Kongzi taught Zigong: “First, have to do as what you said, later follow it to do” [2;226]. Following Kongzi’s idea, Mengzi thought that to teach others, the teacher must first perfect himself, keep his heart sincere, be ashamed of himself for the wrong things he did, having decent for the faults. If you were winding, you could not make others straight. So it was said that if a great man corrected himself, then everything would be correct later. It was the characters of Kongzi and Mengzi that were the bright examples for the students. Mengzi also expressed his opinion that: The Kings were great men who had to nurture and exert themselves for the people to follow. He said: “The thing is, a great man has to keep correcting himself to maintain peace” [2;1367].

3. Conclusion

The methods dealt with above are surely not enough but they can somewhat outline the picture of teaching/learning of the Chinese “outstanding teacher” in the ancient century [1]. And in fact, in the process of education of Kongzi and his followers, mental education and moral education were combined punctiliously and were not divorced from each other. The purpose of this method of education was to educate people who had human virtue according to the ideal model of Confucianism with the capacity of “self-training, making a good family, ruling the country and maintaining peace.” However, we still find a rational essence which expresses the kind and humane values in Kongzi’s opinion about the methods of education.

REFERENCES