

Education in the Asia-Pacific Region:
Issues, Concerns and Prospects 26

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Education as Cultivation in Chinese Culture



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Chapter 2

Human Nature and Learning in Ancient China

Hung-Chung Yen

Abstract Many Chinese schools of philosophy have addressed the issue of human nature. Several important traditional perspectives on human nature include the theory of acquired habits from the Confucianists and Mohists, the theory of the original goodness from Mencius, the theory of evil human nature from Xunzi and the Legalists, and the simple and true theory of Taoism. These schools of philosophy addressed human nature in relation to the elements of traditional values in Chinese culture, the view of feelings and emotions in learning, the functions of the teacher, and the roles of the government. In addition to analyzing human nature, the implications of these traditional values on current educational practice in Taiwan are presented. Amidst these complicated and sometimes contradictory traditions, the changeable human nature is affirmed, the autonomy of teachers and learners is recognized, and deliberation on the learning process is recommended. Human nature has played a central role in traditional Chinese philosophy in the past and will continue to be relevant in the future.

Keywords Chinese educational philosophy • Confucianism • Taoism • Goodness and evil of human nature • Theory of acquired habits

2.1 Introduction

Education is a cultural phenomenon. People's existing thinking patterns and social values are always firmly intertwined with their basic attitudes, values, and thinking patterns. When analyzing educational issues from a cultural perspective, therefore, it is necessary to recognize the complexity of cultural content in order to grasp subtle applications in current practice.

One of the cultural components in traditional Chinese culture is people's basic attitudes toward human nature. The nature of education and its relationship with human nature are topics that cannot be excluded from research regarding the cultural

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factors in education. Scholars who study the philosophical tradition in China suggest that reflections on human nature are more significant to Chinese than to Western philosophies (e.g., Fung, 1952–1953; Lao, 2010; Nivison, 1996). Despite the difficulty of defining its concept and evaluating its impact, human nature is an important avenue to interpret Chinese traditional thoughts and culture. The rich and lengthy tradition of discussion about human nature has profoundly influenced politics, society, and culture, and it continues to subtly influence the psychology, practice, and systems of contemporary Chinese education. With this tradition in mind, this study explores the connections between traditional theories of human nature and educational practice in four categories: theory of acquired habits, theory of original goodness, theory of evil human nature, and simple and true theory of Taoism.

2.2 A Brief History of the Debate on Human Nature

人之初，性本善。性相近，習相遠。

When people are born, they are naturally good.

Natures are similar, but learning habits vary widely.

苟不教，性乃遷。教之道，貴以專。……

Without teaching, the nature will become worse.

The right way in teaching is to emphasize on concentration.

玉不琢，不成器。人不學，不知義。

Jade without chiseling would not become a utensil, just as a person without learning cannot know what is right.

為人子，方少時，親師友，習禮儀。……

Taking advantage of youthful years, children ought to befriend teachers and friends, and to practice ceremonial usage.

首孝弟，次見聞。

Children ought to learn about filial piety and fraternal love first, and then about knowledge.

(《三字經》 *Three Character Classic*)

San Zi Jing, or the *Three Character Classic*, has been a popular instructional text for early childhood education since the Ming and Qing dynasties, and it remains highly valued among recitation textbooks designed for children adopted by private education institutes and schoolteachers. Taken from *San Zi Jing*, the verses quoted at the beginning of this paper are familiar to native Chinese speakers and contain a variety of Confucian narratives regarding the relationship between human nature and education. The concepts in the verses above were derived from the educational philosophy of *Lunyu* (also known as the *Analects of Confucius*), *Mengzi* (also known as *Mencius*), and *Xunzi*. Why do they begin with the discussion of human nature when discussing education of children? Why do they include various schools of thought when elaborating on human nature? Why is teaching of knowledge placed after teaching of behavior? These questions are not complicated, but to explain them properly requires an understanding of the way thinking about education accumulated and developed over more than 2,000 years of Chinese history.

Current educational systems, forms, and concepts adopted by ethnic Chinese communities differ significantly from those maintained in traditional Chinese

education. Despite of the passage of time, *San Zi Jing* remains familiar to people who have received traditional recitation training. In addition, the diverse concepts of human nature and education featured in traditional Chinese culture still persist. They are the foundation of many beliefs concerning education and cultivation.

In Chinese schools of thought, human nature has inspired a long history of debate. Among there many reasons attributed to this phenomenon, two stand out as the most significant. The first reason is that in the pre-Qin Dynasty era, when philosophies were developing, no single mythical and religious explanation dominated in the areas of politics, society, ethics, education, human nature, and the sources for good and evil. At the time the societal structure of pre-Qin Dynasty collapsed and was reconstructed, these issues became the foci of philosophical controversy. When it came to arguments about education, such as whether or not people should receive education, and questions about the purpose, content, and methods of education, there were many issues. Plato used the metaphor of the city-state to discuss human nature, whereas many thinkers in the pre-Qin period used analyses of human nature to characterize the varied conceptions of ideal politics. The arguments focused on theories of human nature, which in turn inspired numerous discussions.

The second reason is that Taoism and Buddhism, both popular schools of thought during medieval times (third to ninth century), introduced novel perspectives on life. Religions had to address issues that persisted within the ideological community. The doctrine of realizing a true heart and original nature was advocated by Zen Buddhism and eventually became the prevailing current of thought in China. Consequently, the Confucian restoration that occurred during the Tang and Song dynasties relied on the establishment of a Confucian theory regarding heart and nature. From a broad perspective, before the Tang Dynasty, Confucianism was divided between various conflicting theories regarding human nature, such as the theories of acquired habits, the original goodness of human nature, evil human nature, the three classes of human nature (i.e., upper, middle, and lower), temperament, and the nature of talent. With the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty, the theory of the original goodness of human nature dominated the ideology for a significant period of time, during which Confucianism became divided. Although particular scholars advocated a reform of Neo-Confucianism during the Qing Dynasty, the theory of the original goodness of human nature persisted; however, the emphasis placed on human nature shifted toward knowledge development, practice, and the perspective of human and cultural evolution. Therefore, the question is, from the point of educational theory and practice, whether or not theories of human nature corresponded to the theories of learning or at least reflect the major points and arguments of the learning theories at the time.

Since human beings are cultural animals, human societies have a great variety of methods of passing down the culture and the developing technical skills. In the pre-Qin era, philosophers or thinkers were often called *Zhi* [子] or *Xiansheng* [先生], an honorable form of address for those who advise or instruct people, which can be seen as early evidence of the respect for teachers. Although schools did exist before the Spring and Autumn periods (inscriptions on the Great Yu Tripod [大盂鼎] and the Shi Li Gui [師鬲], two bronze vessels from the Western Zhou period,

document the existence of a royal elementary school where princes learned archery and music), ancient accounts of such schools differ significantly, which causes difficulty in understanding and verifying the actual situations. For example, according to *Mengzi: Teng Wen Gong* [孟子滕文公篇], community schools existed in three consecutive dynasties (i.e., Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties), and they taught appropriate behavior and conduct for interacting with people. In addition, *The Rites of Zhou* [周禮] introduced *Cheng Jun* [成均] as a type of ancient institution where the nobility, or “sons of the country,” practiced rites and music. Furthermore, in *Liji (Book of Rites)* [禮記]: *Xue Ji (Record on Education)* [學記], a Great College [太學] was described as an educational institution focused on the learning of classical texts. Scholars who have provided restored accounts of the institution by referencing previous literature include Yang Kuan (1999) and Yu Qiding and Shi Kewan (2000). As a final example, the educational philosophy embraced by people during the Zhou Dynasty emphasized following the virtuous conduct of one’s ancestors (as indicated in *Book of Poetry: Sacrificial Odes of Zhou* and *Shang Shu: Western Zhou*). In addition, rites and music literacy, crafts and martial arts, humility and self-control, and wise judgment were considered essential qualities that the nobility and wise and well-mannered people should possess. However, Confucius was the first scholar to develop an organized understanding of education operations and theories. He was also the first to connect human nature to learning.

2.3 Theory of Acquired Habits

The *Analects* primarily comprise accounts of Confucius’s teachings for students, and the broad educational insights are not easily summarized into a well-defined educational theory. However, as far as the narratives about human nature were regarded, the content of the *Analects* can be considered as the preliminary form of the theory of acquired habits. The theory of acquired habits suggests that through learning, people can cultivate a second nature; the influence of which is comparable to that of the original nature. As the first educational theory proposed by Chinese scholars, this theory had a most profound influence. For example, both Confucius and Mencius valued this concept highly, and innovative theories, such as the theories of evil human nature and the three classes of human nature, are extensions of this concept which build on the original idea.

2.3.1 Confucius and Theory of Acquired Habits

According to current knowledge, Confucius was the first teacher to be revered. The core values and approaches of the Chinese educational tradition, including “In education there should be no distinction of classes” [有教無類], “inspirational teaching” (Heuristic Method of Education) [啟發教育], “anytime inducing to learn”

(Inducement Teaching Method) [循循善誘], and “educate a person according to his natural ability” [因材施教], were all developed by Confucius (Chin, 2007; Wu, 2006; Yen, 2008). However, Confucius said little about the human nature. He only commented that “Natures are similar, but *xi* or learning habits vary widely” (*xi* refers to patterns of practices or habits that are influenced by both goal-oriented learning and social influences). He stressed that the difference between individuals was due to “nurture” instead of “nature.” The argument can be seen as the prototype of the theory of acquired habits. In addition, Confucius stated, “Only the minds of the highly intelligent and the extremely stupid cannot be influenced.” Therefore, except in extreme cases, human nature is malleable. This viewpoint can be interpreted as another articulation of “natures of people are almost similar.” The statement later became the basis for the theory of the three classes of nature (*Xing San Pin Lun*) [性三品論]. It seems that Confucius disliked analyzing human nature but confirmed the effect of learning. Before the tenth century AD, Confucianism maintained an open and accepting attitude toward explanations of human nature. This open attitude allowed many contradictory concepts to enjoy long-term coexistence. The possibilities opened up by Confucius’s flexible attitude cannot be overlooked.

Following the theory of acquired habits, there was a great emphasis on the importance of motivation and trusting in the effect of active learning. Confucius did not say much on the subject of teachers, and his only known remark was “those who can gain new insights by studying the past can be a teacher.” Nor did he propose the way one should look for a good teacher. He once described himself by saying, “In a group of three people, there is always someone from whom I can learn.” Students also said of Confucius, “From whom does the Master not learn? What use was there for him to have a regular teacher?” According to descriptions of his followers, Confucius could learn practically from anyone and anything. His place of learning was not at the school but in the whole society (we do not know if Confucius ever entered a school or what types of schools existed in the State of Lu at the time he lived). Confucius stated, “When I was 15 years old, I made up my mind to study,” which emphasized his determination to study. He seems to think learning is a rather pleasant and relaxed matter, asking, “Isn’t it pleasant to study and practice timely?” He even said, “In a village of ten families, one would always find a man as honorable and sincere as I am, but he may not be as fond of learning as I am.” Although Confucius was a modest man, he openly expressed the pride in his love of learning. He believed that his strength was not an inborn talent, but rather it is due to his intense desire to learn. He believed that the desire to learn was far more important than inborn traits for one to have accomplishments and great morals. As long as one had sufficient motivation, one could find things to study anywhere. Confucius also said, “When it comes to *ren* [仁], do not defer even to your teacher,” suggesting that the most reliable direction a student could follow was his own heart. In sum, Confucius’ most important teaching was to ask people to be engaged in sincere and active learning. He explained his principle of “inspirational teaching” as follows:

I have never enlightened anyone who has never gone into a passionate furor trying to understand a difficult question or has never felt severe frustration trying to put one’s thoughts into

words. If I point out one angle to somebody and he is unable to return with the other three, I will not point it out a second time.

Confucius based his instruction entirely on the student's sincere thirst for knowledge and how much the student understood and applied what was learned.

Confucius did not like to address the topic of human nature but definitely confirmed the value of affect development and its resonance with the human mind. He described affect development in this way:

As at home, a young man should be filial. As going outside, he should treat others as brothers. He should be trustworthy and behave properly, show love towards people and cultivate the friendship of the good. If all above are accomplished and he still has time and energy, he should devote it to study (*Analects: Xue Er*).

It was clear that affective and ethical education should go before knowledge education. Confucius also attached great importance to such traits as honesty, sincerity, forgiveness, reverence, and humbleness. Those emphases can be found throughout the *Analects*. The most complete manifestation of affective and ethical education would be *ren* (benevolence). Confucius asked, "Is *ren* really that far away from us? Whenever I seek *ren*, it is close at hand," and in addition, he asked, "Is anyone able for one day to devote himself to *ren*? I have never seen the case in which his strength would be insufficient." In Confucius's view, the human heart possessed such an authentic power that only exists in affection but not knowledge, and this quality was cultivated primarily through the personal interaction with family and the community.

2.3.2 *The Mohist Theory of Acquired Habits*

In an era of fundamental cultural reforms, an interpretation of human nature was required. The lack of definition or analysis of human nature by Confucius himself has probably caused uneasiness among his followers. Zi Gong, a principal student of Confucius, stated, "The Master's displays of his cultural accomplishments may be heard, but his discourses on human nature and the way of Heaven cannot be heard." Zi Gong's emphasis on the lack of teachings by Confucius addressing human nature implied that other people, possibly including himself, needed to devote substantial attention to this issue. This theoretical vacuum may have contributed to the rise of Mohism.

Mohism, a major school of thought equal to Confucianism in significance, supports the notion that education should be based on the theory of acquired habits and adopts an even more radical position. Mozi proposed the concept of universal love (*jian ai*) [兼愛], stipulating that people should treat others as they treat themselves and love what other people love in the same way they do. Universality and equality are basic rules of morality, while self-interest and partiality are roots of harm. To practice *jian ai* requires actions that benefit other people, as "It is the works of the man of *ren* to try to promote whatever brings welfare to the world and to eliminate

whatever brings harm” (*Mozi: Jian Ai*). To treat others like treating oneself require extreme rationalism. The moral guide in every things is *yi* [義], paralleling utilitarianism, which can be proved through strictly reasoned arguments. He proposed that the cooperation of political power and education has the potential to promote and implement unified and enduring values for human peace. Mozi’s extreme optimism about civil education and his belief in acquired habits inspired many Confucianists.

If Confucius advocated the importance of personal influence as “gentlemen scholars who can influence others like the grass would bend with the wind” [風行草偃], the strong hope of the Mohist would be to create an ideal political system and social environment to help all the people form great characters. In the school of Mohism, there existed rigid organizations, set standpoints, strict student-master hierarchical structures, and uniform debating styles. The extreme interpretation of the theory of acquired habits, therefore, infused the development of the extreme authoritarianism.

In response to this challenge, Confucianists were required to provide a more specific interpretation of human nature. However, the significant difference in responses was unprecedented in ideological history. The following section introduces three major responses: the theory of feeling and nature, as documented in *Xing Zi Ming Chu* (*Destiny as the Provenance of Human Nature*) [性自命出] from *Guo-Dian Bamboo Slips* and *Liji: Yue Ji*; the theory of the original goodness of human nature proposed by Mencius; and the theory of evil human nature, as documented in *Xunzi: Quan Xue* (or *Encouragement to Learning*).

2.3.3 Theory of Feelings and Nature

Before the time of Mencius, Confucian attention to issues regarding human nature had adopted the idea of *yi* from Mohism. Emphasizing analysis of the development of morality, *yi* indicates that the Tao comes from the interaction between internal feelings and external matters. Theoretically, feelings spring from the destiny of human nature. Since destiny and nature are intangible, feelings are indeed of great significance in reality. When influenced by various external matters, people develop differing feelings such as happiness, anger, grief, and joy. During the process of feeling development, judgments regarding good and evil are formed.

In a recently unearthed text from the Warring States period, *Xing Zi Ming Chu*, the importance of feelings is elaborated. It states that “The Way begins with feelings, which spring from people’s nature, and end with *yi*.” In other words, it is impossible to adopt *yi* without accompanying it with human feelings. This theory differs from the ideas proposed by Mozi, who focused exclusively on *yi* without addressing feelings.

At an educational level, *Xing Zi Ming Chu* indicated that feeling can only be taught by appealing to the interaction, sharing, and echoes among people. Enchanting poems, songs, and rituals help people share emotions. Similarly, models with ideal personality also echo and enlighten others. The goal of education is to cultivate

humanity in people's hearts, and it can only be attached with genuine feeling. Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge that contains connotations of ideal human affection, such as poetry, documents of history, rites, and music, was particularly emphasized. In summary, Mohism emphasized guidelines and principles, whereas Confucianism valued the sentiment and edification of feelings during human interactions.

At the educational and political levels, Confucianism was the only school in the pre-Qin and Han periods that adopted a positive attitude to people's internal emotions. The theory of feelings and nature continued to flourish in later Confucian tradition. Numerous works related to poetry, rites, and music, such as *Yue Ji (Record about Music)* [樂記] and *Maoshi Daxu (Mao's Book of Poetry: General Prologue)* [毛詩大序], presented similar views on education or even civilization of all people. As a result, from a broader perspective, the theory of feelings and nature can be considered a type of general theory regarding the original goodness of human nature.

These theories of feelings and nature exerted a profound influence on the governing of the Han Dynasty, where rites, music, and moral exemplars were the means of educating and influencing people. As a result, social morale was gradually transformed, which led to the establishment of what is today called Confucian society.

2.4 The Theory of the Original Goodness of Human Nature

Mencius, who was born about 160 years later than Confucius, was the first person to propose a theory regarding the original goodness of human nature. Although this theory did not gain dominance in the pre-Qin period, it became the foundation of later metaphysical theories proposed in *Zhongyong (the Doctrine of the Mean)* [中庸] and *Yi-Chuan (易傳)*, possibly because scholars wished to challenge the extremely popular Taoist metaphysics.

Modern Neo-Confucianism often considers the theory of the original goodness of human nature, a moral philosophy that recognizes the subjectivity of morality, which, after objective knowledge is recognized in modern civilization, serves as the final defense of human dignity and the values of Chinese culture. Despite the differing ideological backgrounds and focuses of these selective interpreters, the theory of the original goodness of human nature presented in the works of Mencius emphasizes unique theories of learning and political functions.

2.4.1 Goodness Is Originated from Within

Mencius addressed the original goodness of human nature from multiple perspectives. One of them explains the relationship of goodness with feeling development. For example, in a debate with Mencius, Gaozi focused on the issue of *ren* and *yi* (i.e., benevolence and justice). Gaozi interpreted *ren* as an internal order of feelings

and *yi* as the external order of objective things and society. The separation of *ren* and *yi* was seemingly intended as a compromise between Confucianism and Mohism. Mencius strongly disagreed with this theory and argued the following:

The core of *ren* is to service parents, and the core of *yi* is to follow elder brothers. The core of *zhi* (wisdom) is to know both and not to depart from them. The core of *li* (propriety) is to order them. The core of *yue* (music) is to enjoy them. Enjoyment makes everything grow vitally. How can they be repressed? (*Mencius: Li Lo*)

Ren and *yi* can gradually lead to politeness and intelligence, which are successive and involved comprehensive reasoning and judgment. The development stage from feelings to cognition inherited the feeling of care included in the theory of feelings and nature, and it shifted full attention to cognitive capabilities. In Western education, literary appreciation is often viewed as an advanced skill that comes long after basic decoding, grammar, and vocabulary. Similarly, mathematics as a subject of beauty is reserved for the advanced student. Confucianists contend that the high-level intellectual capability, however, has to be built on the base of honest emotions.

The second approach is the theory of four beginnings, which contends that people possess four mental instincts to do good deeds, and these four instincts are sufficient for developing crucial virtues. For example, someone asked Mencius to comment on the following three theories regarding human nature: “human nature is neither good nor evil,” “human nature can be made to be good or evil,” and “some people are inherently good and some are inherently evil.” Rather than directly refuting the notions, Mencius stated:

Everyone has the sense of sympathy, the sense of shame and disgust, the sense of respect, and the sense of right and wrong. The sense of sympathy is *ren*; the sense of shame and disgust is *yi*; the sense of respect is *li*; the sense of right and wrong is *zhi*. *Ren*, *yi*, *li* and *zhi* are not infused into us from the outside. They are our original endowments. And a different view is simply owing to want of reflection. (*Mencius: Gaozi*)

The virtues of benevolence, justice, politeness, and intelligence originate from internal emotions of empathy, shame, and respect (sometimes known as humility) and from the sense of right and wrong, rather than from external matters. Three other views of human nature above were all centered on the issue of whether or not destiny makes a person to be good or bad. The topic Mencius addressed, however, was that the inner essences or forces in human nature are critical in developing all goodness in the world.

2.4.2 Human Relationships Connect to Intuitive Learning of Goodness

Mencius suggests that *ren lun* (i.e., human relationships) education should be provided to teach people about filial piety, sibling love, and harmony with neighbors. Mencius regarded people’s feelings and conduct toward their family as an intuitive

ability. Consequently, the theory of the original goodness of human nature proposed by Mencius can be explained in the following way:

The ability possessed by men without learning is intuitive ability, and the knowledge possessed by men without thinking is intuitive knowledge. An infant has no lack of knowledge of how to love its parents, and when it gets older, it knows automatically how to respect its older brothers. Loving one's parents is *ren*, respecting one's older brothers is *yi*. These are always true all over the world. (*Mencius: Jin Xin*)

For Mencius, goodness of human nature, such as *ren* (a form of affection) and *yi* (implying order), originates from the feelings of natural family affection. By referencing the Mencian account of Shun, it can be demonstrated that Mencius strongly believed in affective education. Given a conscience and intuitive ability, people possess the basic conditions necessary for developing perfect personalities and capabilities. In the Mencian political blueprint, the king should define and guarantee the industries necessary for people to live and work in peace and contentment and thus people can be cultivated to cooperate and assist other people. Subsequently, education for all can be implemented on this basis.

Current knowledge indicates that Mencius was the first person in Chinese history to propose education for all. His plan was as follows:

Let mulberry trees be planted around the homesteads of five *mu*, and persons of fifty years old may be clothed with silk. Do not lose the breeding time of raised fowls, pigs, dogs and swine, and persons of seventy years old may eat flesh. Do not upset the farming schedule in a farm of one hundred *mu*, and the family of even eight mouths will never be hungry. Pay careful attention to education in schools, basing it on the instruction of filial piety and respect for elders, and the gray-haired people will not carry heavy burdens upon their backs or heads on the road. (*Mencius: Liang Hweiwang*)

In particular, Mencius suggested that common people be provided with sufficient economic freedom to support their elderly family members and live without worrying about food and clothing. Although Mencius had extensive knowledge of the past and present, he did not emphasize knowledge education. Instead, his focus on multiple capabilities was primarily at the level of life practice.

2.4.3 *People Have Natural Desires for Pursuing Goodness*

Nevertheless, the goodness that Mencius referred to was beyond the scope of moral virtue. Mencius often used the stories of Yao and Shun to demonstrate the goodness of human nature. Shun's parents and brothers were morally corrupt, and he had never encountered virtuous or wise people. How did he become a kindhearted and wise person? The method is shown in the following description:

When Shun was living deep in the mountains, dwelling with the trees and rocks, and wandering among deer and boars, he differed little from the rude inhabitants there. But once he heard an impressive talk, or saw a good action, he was like a big river bursting its banks and flowing outward irresistibly. (*Mencius: Jin Xin*)

Mencius hypothesized that Shun was committed to virtue and learned from the merits of everyone. A similar analysis also proposed by Mencius is as follows:

When anyone told *Zi Lu* that he had a fault, he rejoiced. When *Yu* heard words of goodness, he would bow in respect. But the great *Shun* had greater largeness of view. He regarded the goodness of others to be the same as his. He gave up his own way to follow others, and delighting to learn from others to practice what is good. From the time when *Shun* was a farmer, a potter and a fisherman, up until he became an emperor, all he practiced was learned from others. To practice goodness from people is to support them to practice goodness. There is no attribute of a gentleman greater than to support others to practice goodness. (*Mencius: Gongsun Cho*)

Allegedly, Shun once lived with combative and lazy farmers, potters, and fishermen, but within a year, he had managed to transform them into polite and responsible people (*Shang Shu: Canon of Yao*). The story did not explain how Shun achieved such effects, and Mencius reasoned that despite inferior abilities compared with those of the farmers, potters, and fishermen, Shun learned from the advantages of everyone. Consequently, these people felt that they were supported and encouraged and became willing to perform good deeds. Compared with *Zi Lu* and *Yu*, who appreciated people who identified their faults and talked good words to them, all Shun did was to admire people and learn from the strengths and virtues of others. Shun's accepting attitude was more encouraging. In Shun's story, goodness includes all virtues and advantages in various matters, including labor, skill, capability, and moral conduct. Shun's intention regarding all the goodness is the most appropriate example for Mencius to demonstrate that "all goodness is originally within ourselves, and there is no greater delight than to be conscious of it sincerity" (*Mencius: Jin Xin*). Mencius wrote a large number of fictitious stories, in which Shun was often the main character who seeks the goodness with all his heart and mind. From a contemporary point of view, these stories can be considered educational and philosophical novels. They were typical and significant especially in New Confucianism.

2.5 The Theory of Evil Human Nature

Theories that contrast the original goodness of human nature can be divided into two categories. These theories were primarily proposed by Xunzi, a Confucianist who lived during the late Warring States period, and Legalist scholars represented by Han Fei, a student of Xunzi. Based on a distrust of human beings, Legalism as a school of political thought still influenced the actual pedagogy and discipline of modern schools. By contrast, the core of Xunzi's philosophy was located in education and ethics and therefore worthy of thorough discussion.

2.5.1 *The Legalist Theory of Evil Human Nature*

Legalism was based on a distrust of human nature, a concept first proposed by Shen Buhai, a politician in the State of Han who warned the king against the ministers who were deceiving and flattering him to seize royal power. Based on this theory, legalism was developed to supervise the subjects and people. For example, the king should not express personal likes and dislikes or trust a single person; instead, he should listen to various opinions to prevent subjects from colluding to seize power. Nevertheless, Shen Buhai was generally considered the person best able to read the mind of his lord Han Zhaohou.

Shang Yang, a statesman of Qin who enacted numerous reforms, was another well-known legalist. He implemented rigid rewards and punishments to control officials and civilians. Numerous statutes were promulgated as required codes of conduct for the people. Simultaneously, people were ordered to learn the provisions of laws and comply with the instructions. Because hereditary political power possessed by nobility had been substantially reduced and avenues for enjoying personal wealth were restricted, the only way for people who wished to improve their lifestyle and elevate their social status was to fight battles, participate in agricultural production activities, and comply with laws. Consequently, personal development was determined by national goals, and the state of Qin became the first example of totalitarian politics in the history of China.

Subsequently, this theory flourished following further development by Han Fei, a prince of the State of Han. Having grown up during a period of political turmoil, Han Fei fully understood the fierce struggle for power. Additionally, as an expert of theoretical development, he collected numerous violent examples to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of political deception, as well as the severe consequences of readily trusting people. In his famous work *Shui Nan (Difficulties in the Way of Persuasion)* [說難], Han Fei analyzed the intricate and malicious competition between officials when they expressed their opinions to the lord.

According to this theory, although not everyone is evil, the evil ones can be highly skilled at disguising themselves in order to gain the trust of others. Han Fei expanded Shen Buhai's theory to suggest that an intelligent leader should never trust anyone. Even more importantly, a leader should never devote the foundation of ruling to winning the hearts of the people. First of all, the common people can only comprehend immediate benefits and lack long-term vision. Secondly, people's good feelings toward the king do not necessarily translate into obedience and loyalty. Children are a good example. Will a child obey a tender mother or a strict father? Is he more likely to listen to loving parents or to a dispassionate official who possesses punitive authority over him? In view of this interpretation of human nature, and because of these convincing arguments for the distrust in human nature, Han Fei's work achieved an irreplaceable position in Chinese tradition.

Legalists proposed that the foundation of governing should be control. People should be managed using only reward and punishment. As an indispensable symbol of power, punishment played a more significant role. A lord can achieve rule effectively only by exercising his authority to implement reward and punishment

and by formulating and enforcing stringent and comprehensive laws and regulations. Simultaneously, the government should discourage social compensation inconsistent with its political goals and laws. Thus, the goal of a government in educating its people was well defined: Developing people to understand and follow laws which state legal rewards and punishment produces more effective results than transforming people into kind human beings. The combination of an absolute and wise lord with his officials and the submissive common people was far from balanced. Nevertheless, in Han Fei's conception, this society can operate effectively, fully satisfy people's needs, encourage simple lifestyles, and achieve governance with *wu-wei* (nonaction) [無為]. The last two outcomes may be surprising, but they provide significant evidence of the influence that Taoism had on Han Fei (Zhou, 2000).

Han Fei's theory was adopted as the ruling policy in the Qin Dynasty. Except in the Qin Dynasty, traditional China has never pursued such extreme and immoral ruling strategies. The history of the Qin Dynasty reflects how such strategies were a double-edged sword. On one hand, they allowed the country to expand to a size second to none in the world at that time. On the other hand, the country was weakened to a point that it was easily overthrown by a baseless but angry peasant revolt.

Most thinkers did not fully agree with Han Fei's tactics. In both theory and practice, however, the implementation of a simple reward and punishment system can quickly bring about effective control in extreme circumstances. Whether in the army or at school, as soon as hope in human nature is lost, or at times when confidence in the abilities the ruler is diminished, he could implement strict policies to take control. Some leaders are even able to establish detailed and all-encompassing tactics to maintain control over a factory or school. In the case of Taiwan in the recent past, the latter is perhaps more prevalent than the former. Except under the pressure of specific ideological and circumstantial forces, these types of tactics rarely receive widespread approval. However, they are often the managers' or educators' last resort. To avoid resorting to such policies, at least under normal circumstances, one must be completely trained with pedagogy and leadership and cultivated especially with the confidence in oneself as well as in others.

2.5.2 *Definition of Evil Human Nature Proposed by Xunzi*

Although Xunzi is known for proposing the theory of evil human nature, people familiar with the history of Chinese ideology, whether or not they admire Xunzi, understand that this interpretation was seriously flawed. The "evil" that Xunzi indicated simply meant "unpleasant" rather than "evil."

Xunzi proposed that nature (*xing*) [性] was the animalistic instincts that human exhibit before education, including the greed, idleness, and desires which cannot be indulged. The existence of this human nature necessitates postnatal education and cultivation of goodness. Xunzi postulates that humans cannot rid themselves of animalistic instincts. However, by way of learning, they can actually control, utilize,

and transform these instincts to cultivate pleasant personalities and establish rational group life. Xunzi stated:

Human nature is evil; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion. Any person who follows his inborn nature and indulges his natural inclinations will inevitably become involved in wrangling and strife. This is accompanied by violation of social class distinctions and throws the natural order into anarchy, resulting in a cruel tyranny. Therefore, people must be transformed by teachers with the code of conduct and guided by ritual and moral principles. Only after these have been accomplished do courtesy and deference develop with precepts of good form and reason, and then order is achieved.

The potter molds clay to make an earthenware dish, but how could the dish be regarded as part of the potter's inborn nature? . . . The sage's relation to ritual principles is just like that of the potter molding his clay. This being so, how could ritual principles, morality, accumulated effort, and acquired abilities be part of man's original nature?

As a general rule, the fact that men desire to do good is the product of the fact that their nature is evil. (*Xunzi: Xing E*)

Regarding the ultimate conviction, the faith that Xunzi had in humans and human effort was comparable to that of the most optimistic scholars. Therefore, a more accurate statement is that Xunzi proposed a theory of negative human nature to emphasize the immense development potential possessed by humans. Although the theory of evil human nature has been mistaken for a long time, derivative educational theories and concepts are widely accepted. The verses in *San Zi Jing*, "Jade without chiseling would not become a utensil, just as a person without learning cannot know what is right," presented the core concepts of Xunzi's theory.

Recognizing the necessity of education, Xunzi paid particular attention to the means, process, and psychology of education. He proposed *shi fa* (teachers with the code of conduct) [師法] and used rites and justice as the primary method for learning. Additionally, Xunzi summarized pre-Qin Confucian ideas regarding education into theories.

2.5.3 *Xunzi's View of Education as a Process of Refining Human Nature*

According to Xunzi's theory, education is a process of refining, sculpting, correcting, and shaping human nature. *Quan Xue (Encouraging Learning)* [勸學] documents a number of Xunzi's famous sayings, such as "Learning should never cease. Blue comes from the indigo plant but is bluer than the plant itself" and "A stick of wood as straight as a plumb line may be bent into a wheel as circular as drawn with a compass and, even after it has dried, will not straighten out again." With its focus on the processes of achieving a great state, the theory provides an extended operational description of the concept of acquired habits.

Regarding the content and process of learning, Xunzi stated that the main focus should be human and cultural knowledge. Students should memorize cultural classics such as *The Book of Poetry* and *Shang Shu* (necessitating a basic knowledge of Chinese characters) until they can fully understand and accurately interpret political

norms, social rituals, and institutions. Such a requirement became the basis for a classical education and disciplinary studies by later Confucianists. By contrast, internalizing and practicing values requires lifelong dedication and endless effort, which means wise people should be held as the ideal. Therefore, the proper process of education should be unanimous, the concept of which is evidently different from Confucius and Mencius.

Since knowledge is acquired from external environments, Xunzi valued learning theories that addressed accumulation as well as internalization and evolution. For example, he argued that “Pile up earth to be a mountain and wind and rain will rise up from it; pile up water to be a deep lake and dragons will appear; pile up good deeds to create virtue and godlike wisdom will come of itself, there the mind of the sage will be fully accomplished.” Xunzi emphasized possibilities of learning that are not only profound and marvelous but also open to everyone. He said, “The gentleman is by birth no different from any other people; it is just that he is good at making use of tools.” To one who keeps his mind on learning and never gives up, there will be accomplishment in the future. Therefore, people should commit themselves to industriousness and lifelong learning. The rate of tangible accumulation is determined by endowment, but people can ultimately achieve ambitious goals through persistent effort.

2.5.4 Xunzi’s Opinion Regarding Learner Psychology as Training the Mind to Transform Oneself

Xunzi maintained that people’s natural desires must be controlled and emotions sublimated, and the impetus for desire control and emotion sublimation is a mental capacity exclusive to humans. A detailed analysis of this mental capacity is provided in *Zheng Ming (Rectification of Name)* [正名], where Xunzi divided the capacity into four nouns (i.e., *xin* (heart) [心], *lu* (consideration) [慮], *zhi* (intelligence) [知], and *neng* (ability) [能]), each with differing referents. The development of mental capacity was considered the drive that shaped perfect personality and superior judgment, implying that knowledge was not ultimate goal of learning. Therefore, despite the focus on the mind and knowledge, Xunzi did not emphasize curiosity as a learning motivation. The incentives he proposed in *Quan Xue* referred to the personal and mental goodness that can only be achieved through learning. Knowledge itself is an externally beautiful thing, and the process of knowledge acquisition involves more than merely understanding that beauty. Instead, it is a process of training the mind and subsequently relying on the mind to adjust and transform the self. *Quan Xue* said:

When the superior men learn, they use ears to listen and heart to memorize. These people fully commit themselves to learning, and their speech and behavior serve as examples for others. ... The superior men learn to improve themselves, whereas mean men learn to show off and draw attention.

This theory regarding the process of individual education explained the mechanism through which culture shapes personality. Xunzi used the psychological effects that

people experience when participating in rituals and musical ceremonies as examples to demonstrate that noble feelings result from rational analysis as well as truthful perceptions of the values worth honoring and sustaining in cultural traditions.

2.5.5 *Xunzi's Views on Education as Social Compensation Which Produces Respect and Status*

Xunzi argues that learning was more than suppression and pain, although learning requires people to devote effort to overcoming their original selves, keeping desire in control, and correcting personal temperament until habitually doing everything well. After desire for beauty and goodness as well as spiritual sublimation is satisfied, Xunzi proposes that learners will be rewarded with psychological gifts of pleasure and dignity.

In addition, the reputation and material rewards obtained from society outweigh the difficulty of suppressing original desires. Society ought to offer compensation to successful learners because they are the essential managers and instructors for maintaining society and educating the public. In other words, they are the *jun* (leaders) [君] and *shi* (teachers) [師]. Rather than being confined to specific persons or the relationship with specific persons, *jun* and *shi* meant group mechanisms that perform social functions (*Xunzi: Wangzhi*). This theory was predicative of a long tradition of Chinese social models featuring governments led by wise men and societies led by scholars. Xunzi postulated that people should enjoy different levels of prosperity based on their status which can be enhanced by learning. Xunzi said:

Though base-born were I to wish to be noble, or though stupid were I to be wise, or though poor were I to be rich—would this be possible? I say: It can be done only through learning.
(*Xunzi: Ruxiao*)

From this statement, it can be seen that educated people not only become wise but also get higher status and respect.

Unsurprisingly, people in educated groups were divided by hierarchy. Xunzi distinguished among *daru* (great *ru*) [大儒], *jaru* (elegant *ru*) [雅儒], and *suru* (vulgar *ru*) [俗儒] using well-defined criteria (*Ru Xiao*). The concept of a *daru* was modeled after the Duke of Zhou, a great statesman of the early Zhou Dynasty. After the death of King Wu of Zhou (brother to the Duke of Zhou), young King Cheng succeeded to the throne, and the Duke of Zhou assumed the responsibilities of establishing a kingdom and stabilizing society. This is the first example of a surrogate throne or regent in Chinese history. The Duke successfully quelled domestic revolts and formulated standards for rites and music, establishing a sound system that led to long-term stability and peace during the Zhou Dynasty. Finally, he retired, returning all power to King Cheng, who had by then matured and undergone training to be a competent king (*Xunzi: Ruxiao*). In simple terms, a *daru* is responsible for offering guidance to the king, devising systems, developing culture, and identifying future development directions. He can unite the world. *Jaru* can bring peace and stability to the country. *Darus* and *Jarus* deserve eternal respect; however, they have

no desire for power and pose no threat to a virtuous king. *Ru* is the social role that wise and virtuous people should play. For a true *ru*, in spite of being deserved, social compensation of learning is eventually not necessary.

2.5.6 *Xunzi's View of Teachers as Judges of Culture and Guides of Students*

Xunzi proposed that rather than originating from human nature, the knowledge and norms that people learn are derived from the development and accumulation of culture. Evidently, knowledge and norms cannot be judged by individuals, at least not until they are revered as wise men. Instead, knowledge and norms must be judged by authorities, that is, teachers who are capable of realizing cultural values. Xunzi indicated:

Ritual is the means by which to rectify yourself; the teacher is the means by which the ritual to be rectified.... If your emotions find peace in ritual and your understanding is like that of your teacher, then you have become a sage. (*Xunzi: Xiu Shen, or Improving yourself*)

Learning must honor and follow tradition, and good teachers are living examples of tradition. Compared with all the forms of knowledge, content, rites, and music combined, the benefits of good teachers are more immediate and immense. Only good teachers are capable of endowing knowledge with life and facilitating the extensive application of knowledge. Therefore, the optimal approach for learning is to follow the guidance of ideal teachers. Moreover, Xunzi thinks that good teachers were irreplaceable. This view was consistent with his theory regarding human nature.

Xunzi's theory of human nature had at least three major contributions to Chinese traditional education. The first contribution was to reach a balance with Mencius' theory of human nature by including the knowledge learning aspect as well as the culture and tradition aspect in education. The second one was to attempt to analyze the mind and the psychological process of internalization during learning. The third one was to develop extensively the socialization of education and the functions of social structures. As a result, the process that followed was the compliance to the power of knowledge, the respect of teachers, and the standardization of educational contents, processes, and methods, as well as the differentiation of academic achievements. The definite need for education and the requirement of professionalism, therefore, increased as a whole. This line of thought was almost completely opposite of the Legalist theory which insolently viewed human nature as evil and education as a political tool.

2.6 Simple and True Theory of Taoism

The core concerns of all the traditional Chinese theories of human nature discussed so far addressed affection, good, evil, law, and the mind. There were, however, other theories of human nature not based on these elements, the main two being Buddhism

and Taoism. While the influence of Taoist theories of education cannot be overlooked, the case of Buddhism is more complicated. On one hand, Buddhist sects and teachings varied widely, and the teachings popular in China differed greatly from the early forms of Buddhism that emerged in India. On the other hand, Buddhism's origins were deeply rooted in the complicated Indian cultural belief of transmigration. Moreover, Buddhist thinking in general did not have much of an influence on education.

Taoism hardly addressed the issue of human nature. Represented by Zhuangzi and Laozi, Taoism pays attention to the possibility of moral cultivation and self-perfection but disbelieved knowledge. Moreover, Laozi and Zhuangzi held a hesitant attitude toward emotion and feelings. Laozi mentioned the teaching of overcoming selfishness and desires, whereas he never addressed education about emotion. Zhuangzi explained the view of "man without passions and desires" by saying, "What I mean by a man without passions and desires is someone who does not, due to his emotions, do inward harm to his body; he who follows the natural law and does not seek material gain" (*Zhuangzi: De Chong Fu*) [德充符]. According to this view, feelings of enjoyment, fear, sorrow, happiness, good, and bad should be expressed in accordance with natural law and not be motivated by gain or harm. This type of emotion conforms to reason and moral integrity, but feelings in and of themselves cannot improve the internal character.

Taoist judgment was rather reserved, if not suspicious, of good and evil. According to Laozi, "When everyone knows what is good, it becomes bad." In general, societal values of good and evil often take one side and overlook the bigger picture. Laozi confirmed that real goodness is a type of selfless attitude. He said, "The highest goodness is just like water. Water benefits everything without contention, and sits low where nobody wants to be. Therefore it is close to *Tao*." The word "goodness" here was about action or inclination but not referring to human nature or social values. Zhuangzi sometimes vigorously declared, "Act of good should not be close to gain fame or recognition, just as act of evil should not be close to meet punishment" (*Zhuangzi: Yang Sheng Zhu*) [養生主]. It seems that the fame of good is as dangerous as the shame of punishment. At times, Zhuangzi also stated, "Unbeknownst to me, the teacher had washed away my anger and vexation with his instructions in goodness" (*Zhuangzi: De Chong Fu*). Zhuangzi believed that a teacher could cleanse a student's heart and soul just with his good character. It appears that Zhuangzi did not deny the existence of goodness; however, he did not see it as an object of definite substance. As a whole, Taoism did not endorse any specific type of virtue, believing that doing so would have adverse effects. Authentic goodness is supposed to be amorphous and flowing, complying with the internal forces of moral integrity, which rests in fulfilling goals and surpassing expectations in life.

Taoism not only paid little attention to the subjects of human nature, goodness, evil, and affection, it also said little on the tangible form of education. Zhuangzi's ideal of education is such that "When (the teacher) stands, he does not instruct (students). When he sits, he does not lecture (to them). Nevertheless, all students who go to him empty leave full. Is there such a thing as wordless instruction? Is there

fulfillment of the mind without the form of learning?" (*Zhuangzi: De Chong Fu*). This is the combined effect of the theory of absolute imperceptible influences and the practice of internalization and self-detachment from the inner noises. Because the path of learning *Tao* was without formats or rules, it was difficult for everyone to achieve the goal. *Zhuangzi* contained many examples of him rejecting some people who came to seek his teaching of *Tao*.

Individuals who achieved success on the path of learning *Tao* had the following characteristics:

The ideal character is honest and simple. In order to achieve this kind of character, one must let go of knowledge and ability to return to a pure and natural state. The ability to return to a pure and natural state does not rest in one's outer appearance. In works of *Zhuangzi* many variations of moral character were described. More often than not, individuals of good character cannot be distinguished from outer appearance.

The mind can surpass physical and material confinement. Even when facing problems or dangers, one must still maintain a humble quiescence, and only then can one return to a pure and natural state. One can learn to cultivate virtue, whereas reaching humble quiescence and transcending the figure and intelligence of a person is the first step. Achieving abundance and fullness in life is possible, but one cannot do so by depending on intelligence and skill. The only way to achieve this state is by cultivating inner virtue. If one can maintain a humble quiescence, then one can reach the state of *Tao* regardless the size of the problems he faces.

The Taoist emphasis on simplicity is rooted in Chinese culture and has become a perpetual core value. Even in a world characterized by utilitarian values, people who work quietly and seek no external attention still exist. There are still teachers who discourage talented students from becoming prominent figures to avoid affecting the students' growth. This attitude is related to the educational philosophies advocated by Confucius, Laozi, and *Zhuangzi*.

2.6.1 Art and Tao

Zhuangzi described several cultivated people of insignificant social status or technical professions to illustrate that people of any background can find *Tao*. As an example, he offered "Dismembering an ox by butcher *Tin*" [庖丁解牛] to demonstrate that learning a technical skill can also be a process of cultivating the spirit. Skill and character can be cultivated together and reach the state of perfection at the same time. The process could instruct a king under huge political pressure in ways to nourish his life as well as his mind.

The Taoist theory of personal and virtue cultivation has been extensively practiced in Chinese societies and even became a common philosophy and tradition of the East. In ancient China, arts such as painting, calligraphy, chess, and music, as well as varied crafts and martial arts, all shared the Taoist tradition to some extent. As time progressed, however, they have different fates. Artistic practices such as painting, calligraphy, chess, and music instrument playing, after being embraced by the intellectuals throughout the medieval time, have gained a higher recognition and

noble status in society. This tradition has continued to the present, as evidenced by the popularity of private tutoring and talent classes, which can be found in Chinese societies everywhere. The role of these artistic practices in cultivating ones' character and temperament has been well accepted as a cultural convention. The goal of the artistic practices in Chinese tradition, therefore, was not to achieve outward purposes such as creative production or award-winning talent but to inwardly realize the fulfillment in life and the possibility of opening up the heart and soul.

On the other hand, the practice of crafts and martial arts, although not without seeing its mastery achievement in the past and technological professionals at the present time, has never been held in as high as regard as the artistic practices. It is not clear yet what have contributed to this outcome. Was it due to the fact that Taoism, which intentionally de-emphasized the design of institutional structure and social hierarchy, rarely came to confront the institutional structures based on Confucian principles? Or was it due to the fact that Taoism was only an imagery principle in crafts and martial arts, which in reality were only practical systems centered on the transfer of knowledge between teacher and student, and did not offer them sufficient focuses on the cultivation of spirit and character nor help the technical practices ascend to the level of Tao?

Stories of skill development abound in contemporary East Asia, particularly in Japan. This trend eventually spread throughout Chinese-speaking world. For example, Taiwanese society praises Wu Pao Chun, a skilled baker. Western culinary competitions typically emphasize innovation, taste, individuality, and tension between competitors. In addition to these elements, the popular Taiwanese story of Wu Pao Chun emphasizes his modest personality, dedicated efforts, simple motivations (i.e., his motivation results from the desire to improve his mother's living standard), willingness to share, as well as the selflessness he demonstrates by training young bakers following his rise to fame (He, 2010; Wang, 2008; Wu & Liu, 2010). Thus, Wu Pao Chun is generally revered as an ideal personality model. Movies based on his story and similar themes are typically well received. This is a contemporary version of the artisan story written by Zhuangzi.

In Taiwan, technical and vocational education is provided only at universities of technology and technical colleges, whose reputations are generally lower than those of general universities, although the professional competence of their graduates are recognized by industry. Professionals in academia have endeavored to improve the social image of professional technicians; however, as yet, no effective solution has been identified. Part of the solution may be discovered in familiar Taoist stories.

2.7 Analyzing the Education in Taiwan by Theories of Human Nature

Numerous contrasting theories regarding human nature have existed in Chinese intellectual history, whereas the notion that human nature can be shaped remains dominant. Confucian, Mohist, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophers maintained that

human capability and competences can be enhanced and that people have the potential for virtue. Under this premise, either people or governments often devote substantial attention to education and optimistically anticipate the improvement of people and of world. It is an important foundation of the development of universal education in East Asian countries.

The theories of human nature provide an effective means for clarifying the basic characteristics of Chinese education and identifying the problems of contemporary education. According to the theories based on the human potential for virtue, education involves the development of personality in addition to skill or specialty training. Traditional Chinese culture was characterized by a reliance on wise men who were essentially educated men with a noble character and outstanding ability and who were expected to assume various social responsibilities. In contemporary Chinese society, academic achievement is widely used as the basis for identifying and selecting talent as well as allocating opportunities and power in the public and private sectors. This phenomenon can be partially attributed to general demands of societies in the process of modernization accompanied by rapid transformation and reorganization, but the effects of institutional legacy and traditional beliefs of education are still at work. Some practices apparently followed Legalists' view, using rigorous laws with rewards and punishment to shape people's ideology. Such usage of coercion which exhibited a complete distrust in human nature was actually a commonplace in educational environments under modern totalitarian governments.

The effects of culture accumulate, and instead of becoming obsolete, past viewpoints coexist and complement the overall culture. Additionally, the cultural implications underlying common educational phenomena are sophisticated and inspiring. For example, the content of *San Zi Jing* and the educational phenomena observed in contemporary society can only be fully understood by referencing multiple cultural viewpoints.

The following paragraphs explore students' learner autonomy in Taiwan from the perspective of human nature. Students' lack of learner autonomy is a frequent criticism presented in discussions regarding Chinese education. In addition to inflexible examination methods and limited teaching materials, the tasks assigned to students often prevent them from setting personal learning goals. These restrictions are typical of elementary, secondary, and university-level education. In most curricula, students experience identical or similar demands and training, and extracurricular activities, competitions, and games are usually limited to fixed models. Certain education reformers have attributed these phenomena to the pressure of numerous entrance examinations, whereas other people have accused teachers of being idle and irresponsible. Although the recent decline in the birthrate has caused some schools to experience stress from low enrollment, diverse educational practices have not arisen as a result. Instead, teachers who urge students to pass entrance tests are still considered successful and popular. Therefore, the lack of learner autonomy cannot be sufficiently explained by the school entrance system or teacher idleness.

Recently, special education and particularly education for gifted students have rapidly expanded in Taiwan. In the design of gifted and talented curricula, the programs provide students with greater freedom in the choice of subjects learning and

personal development. By contrast, students experiencing difficulties adapting to school, and thus receiving low scores, are only provided with remedial education. This difference indicates that the amount of freedom students receive is fundamentally associated with educators' trust in learners' learning abilities.

Traditional theories of human nature provide further insights regarding trust in learners. In general, the greater the trust in human nature, the greater the possibilities are offered for autonomous learning. The theory of acquired habits (which includes the theory that human nature is inherently evil, as proposed by Xunzi) was the dominant educational philosophy from the time of Confucius and Mozi to the rise of Neo-Confucianism and even following the demise of Neo-Confucianism. These theories can be divided into two schools of thought: the theory of feeling and nature, which is a Confucian theory that asserts that education should be based on human nature and feelings, and the philosophy advocated by Mohists and Xunzi, that is, education should be based on external norms and restrictions. Confucius valued the aspiration, judgment, and autonomy exhibited by learners and typically refrained from providing students with definite answers. The focus of his teaching was to inspire learning motivation.

The openness observed in the development of Confucian thoughts is closely related to Confucius' attitudes to education. Scholars who support the theory of feeling and nature have argued that emotional resonance should be employed as the primary educational approach. Specifically, poetry, rites, and music should be emphasized, and favorable external environments should be established. These scholars optimistically expect students to gradually develop capabilities and the virtues of benevolence, justice, politeness, and intelligence. Additionally, these scholars consider learners' internal motivation to be crucial and the roles played by teachers to be supplementary. By contrast, Mohists and Xunzi, who held pessimistic views of human nature, emphasized that people must be shaped by education and placed almost absolute authority to teachers. Mohist disciples, who supported ideals such as universal love, formed action groups that honored rigorous rules, close relationships, and absolute obedience. Xunzi believed that teachers were indispensable in the learning process and that successful students must first imitate excellent teachers and adopt particular learning methods. The learning model proposed by Xunzi has noticeable similarities with the school education system currently implemented in Taiwan.

Universal education and autonomous learning are both important beliefs of Mencius. However, the educational philosophy underlying the Mencian theory of the original goodness of human nature seems the most irrelevant to contemporary Chinese education. Mencian philosophy was not appreciated or supported until the following millennium when Neo-Confucianists in the Song Dynasty adopted and developed his theory into various schools of thought. Specifically, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi advocated a learning method that emphasized a willingness to learn from other people's advantages and perform good deeds. Subsequently, these scholars developed an educational philosophy that featured inclusiveness and erudition, as well as the joy and curiosity that people experience in relation to

knowledge and virtue. By contrast, the school headed by Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Shouren advocated the cultivation of virtue, including a conscience and intuitive abilities. For example, Lu Jiuyuan stated, "Illiteracy does not prevent me from being a righteous human being." Accordingly, internal values and judgments were the sole basis of learning guidance.

Substantial internal confidence enables people to challenge authorities and depart from norms as well as restrictions caused by the accumulation of knowledge. Among the students of Wang Shouren, awakening in a flash of insight and demonstrating no reliance on scholarly knowledge were no rare. This simple and bold learning style encouraged people of the lower classes to participate in free lectures provided by scholars. However, as this school of scholars began promoting the idea that "wise and virtuous men are everywhere on the streets," malpractice resulting from a disparity between words and deeds became prevalent. With the demise of the Ming Dynasty, the theory of the original goodness of human nature gradually became obsolete in practice. Nevertheless, the spirit underlying the popular trend of attending academic lectures during the Ming Dynasty has never disappeared. For example, Taiwan's religious communities and privately owned academies host lectures and lessons that are open to the public, and artistic education is flourishing beyond conventional school systems. These learning programs address learners' interest, autonomy, and practice and are essentially the successors of the cultural tradition prevalent during the Ming Dynasty. However, such cultural awareness is lacking in current school education.

Studies regarding theories of human nature have declined since the Qing Dynasty, whereas rigor and specialties were valued in scholarships, and the arduous accumulation of objective knowledge became the primary goal. Additionally, reliable evidence was required for analyses of discourses, and no hasty judgments should be made. Influenced by these academic practices, hard work and perseverance were emphasized in education, and the accumulation of existing knowledge was valued in scholarships. However, the most detrimental outcome was that the people cultivated in these systems lacked the ability to think independently, the courage to judge comprehensively, and the joy and curiosity for knowledge. These problems resemble the issues observed in contemporary school education.

Fundamental solutions for improving contemporary education can be identified after the following questions are answered: What theories of human nature and knowledge are current educational systems and approaches based on? What is the potential of affective education? Is the fundamental student attitude toward knowledge education based on curiosity, tools, internal literacy, or the process of intellectual and mental training? How much confidence should we have in students' ability to conduct autonomous learning? Why must students recognize the authority that teachers have in knowledge acquisition and personality cultivation? Though traditional theories of human nature cannot direct the ways of education today, they surely help to reflect where we came from and ask us to make sure what we believe now.

Conclusion

The Chinese emphasis on education originated from the tradition of imperial examinations and of the traditional faith in personality development. This faith is shared by seemingly contradictory theories of human nature. In contemporary Chinese education, the subjects taught at schools are associated with knowledge accumulation and basic operation methods, and students are supposed to learn to internalize the external knowledge during the process. So far, the education sector has no definite understanding of how personality should be developed from affect or how to use affect to achieve knowledge acquisition and ability cultivation. These deficiencies can be attributed to the educational philosophy developed after the Qing Dynasty, following the decline of the theory of the original goodness of human nature. However, the philosophies practiced in contemporary education activities resemble the educational philosophy proposed by Xunzi, which is characterized by a refusal to believe that internally inspired human qualities can guide learning and even insufficient emphasis on students' life goals. Moreover, the misconception that learning involves only the internalization of external elements has resulted in fixed educational models and a lack of learner autonomy.

Moreover, because knowledge only exists in the objective and external world, learners usually comprehend and absorb knowledge passively. Consequently, the affective development cannot be integrated with values and judgments because these two elements are just based on knowledge and facts. Hardworking and kind students who lack curiosity, the ability to think independently, and the courage to make moral judgments are commonly observed. These issues are closely related to the problematic educational philosophies discussed previously.

East Asian culture is generally perceived to be profoundly influenced by Confucianism, particularly the notions of Confucius and Mencius. However, the educational philosophies practiced in this region today differ as much from the ideas advocated by these two wise men as they do from Western philosophies. This difference occurred as culture developed through various stages. Understanding the theories of human nature helps in finding its application and mechanisms in cultural practices, as well as opening up possibilities for insights and implication in education.

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