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## WISDOM EDUCATION IN SOCIAL CONTEXT – DISCUSSING THE SOCIAL ROOTS OF THE CHINESE WISDOM

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### ABSTRACT

In the history of human progress, China's traditional culture has left us a splendid civilization and numerous wise and preeminent individuals who have made a great impact on the development of human history. In this paper, I provide a novel interpretation of China's traditional culture from the perspective of eight moral principals of "wisdom, honesty, loyalty, filial piety, rites, righteousness, purity and shame". It is my aim that this educational study will help educational researchers develop a correct way of thinking to approach the essence of Chinese traditional culture.

**Keywords:** Wisdom education; Chinese traditional culture; wisdom, honesty, loyalty, filial piety, rites, righteousness, purity and shame.

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese traditional culture is equipped with a long established, glorious and splendid history. It assembles the wisdom that Chinese ethnicity has accumulated for almost thousands of years. The descendants of Chinese are always proud of their own culture and are determined to promote their own culture. Their striving efforts are beneficial to the nation, citizens, the world and each individual.

Youths and young adults are in the process of developing their worldview, life view, and a sense of worth. Such development demands a correct way of thinking to guide them to understand and approach the essence of Chinese traditional culture. A pure and upright heart is the key. When the heart is upright, the energy is upright. When the energy is upright, conducts are upright, and the way we do things is upright. As long as each one of us contributes the upright energy to the world, each one of us will believe in honesty, practice good manners, respect elders, nurture a sense of justice and become aware of purity and shame. Then the moral climate of our world will certainly be positive. When the hearts of people are purified, the society will be purified. When the society is purified, the world will certainly transform

to be a beautiful, harmonious and tranquil land.

China's traditional culture has lasted for a long period of time. In the history of human progress, it has left us a splendid civilization and numerous wise and preeminent individuals who have made a great impact on the development of human history. A few individuals' capabilities cannot determine the promotion and development of Chinese traditional culture. Isn't learning contemporary culture an obstruction of discovering our wisdom? Chinese traditional culture represents the historical accretion of the wisdom of Chinese ethnicity. It also serves as the fruit of wisdom and valuable treasure of the whole humankind. The inheritance and development of Chinese traditional culture should be established on the basis of what the contemporary society demands. We shall wisely succeed and develop, rather than standing still or completely reverting to the old style. It is hard to imagine having students of the twenty-first century learn Chinese traditional culture in old style schools (私塾). The ultimate purpose of inheriting ancient traditional culture is to develop contemporary social culture. When merely focusing on the inheritance of the Chinese traditional culture and ignoring its development, we have no way out.

In this paper, I provide a novel interpretation of China's traditional culture from the perspective of eight moral

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principals of “wisdom, honesty, loyalty, filial piety, rites, righteousness, purity and shame”. In other words,

**Wisdom (智):** to discover self-wisdom, master self-wisdom and apply self-wisdom

**Trust (信):** to practice wise trust.

**Loyalty (忠):** to apply wisdom to serve the nation and its citizens.

**Filial piety (孝):** to apply wisdom to give thanks to our elders.

**Rites (礼):** to apply wisdom to self-discipline words, deeds and human relations.

**Righteousness (义):** to apply wisdom to cultivate a sense of justice.

**Purity (廉):** to apply wisdom to treat the lose and gain of interests.

**Shame (耻):** to apply wisdom to establish a positive energy in the world.

#### **WISDOM -TO DISCOVER SELF-WISDOM, MASTER SELF-WISDOM, AND APPLY SELF-WISDOM**

Wisdom is defined as discovering self-wisdom, mastering self-wisdom, and applying self-wisdom. “Self-discovery” denotes the “discovery of one’s wisdom”; “self-initiation” denotes the “mastery of one’s wisdom”; and “self-renewal” denotes the “application of one’s wisdom into practice”. These are necessary conducts.

Each individual possesses her/his own wisdom. Everyone’s self-wisdom is the same. The wisdom of Lao-Tzu, Confucius, Zhuang-Tzu are the same. Because they discovered, mastered and applied their own wisdom, they were able to naturally apply wisdom in their own living space, and discovered and created a glorious culture for the humankind. In a long process of research, we have discovered the secrecy the successful individuals share (Tomlin, 1968). The reason why people in the fields of politics, economy, science, and arts become successful is because they first of all discovered and mastered their own wisdom (Baumeister & Tieney, 2011). Those who did not discover their own wisdom always set their eyes on knowledge created by others. They eat the food that others have tasted; and repeat what others have done. Although it is convenient, these people never truly launch their own wisdom. A wise person will never eat the food others have tasted. They try things that others have not done (first people to eat crab). If you want to become an expert in a specific field, you need to, first of all, obtain wisdom, and then explore

the laws of that field. Wisdom is within your own hands. Each individual unlocks their own wisdom. Wisdom cannot be learned. It can only be enlightened. A person who can tell one hundred stories about wisdom or philosophy is not a wise person. Can we call *The Encyclopedia* or *The Imperial Collection of Four wise people*? They can only be counted as the sediment of our predecessors’ wise products (knowledge).

The true value to succeed and develop traditional courses lies in making the past serve the present. The *Analects* is the *Bible* of the Eastern world. It is one of the powerful discourses of liveliness in China, even in the world. The *Analects* has no revelation to the wisdom of humankind (Lau, 1998). Yet, how Confucius discovers, masters and applies human wisdom is revelational. For instance, Zhaopu (赵普), the founding Prime Minister of Song dynasty, is said to be an individual who discovered, mastered and applied wisdom. Thus, with half *Analects*, without *Analects*, one can assist the king to successfully manage the kingdom. From the perspective of wisdom intelligence (Ma, 2016), the following points are worthy of discussion: first, the *Analects* is not wisdom, but we can discover the wisdom of Confucius through the *Analects*. Second, it is not that each day we edify our heart-and-body through the sage’s wisdom; rather, we discover, master and apply our own wisdom each day as the sages do. Third, to develop and survive with peace and contentment, we must do what the wise individuals in history do: to discover, master and apply their own wisdom. Fourth, our task is not to discover wisdom in the *Analects*; instead, the *Analects* is a channel for us to discover Confucius’ state of wisdom. The ultimate purpose is to act like Confucius: to rely on our own wisdom to create and leave treasures of wisdom for humankind.

By reading discourses of wise people’s texts such as the *Analects*, the *Tao Te Ching*, *Mencius*, or *Tan Ching*, we shall inspire children and youths to think and reflect in the following way: we are all ordinary people. How come they can write such profound and long-lasting texts? The function of the wise people’s texts dwells upon this. In my opinion, if we merely want to use these texts to educate others, it is not necessary. If each child and youth, first of all, discovers, masters, and applies their own wisdom, then learns, reflects and publishes their ideas, the preeminent texts such as the *Analects*, *Tao Te Ching*, *Mencius* and *Tan Jing* of the twenty-first century

will inevitably be produced in their hands. A person cannot spend their life with a walking stick because each one of us has two legs. At this time, do we truly acquire the meaning of reading classics?

To establish Confucius Institutes in the world is to use the sage's fame to promote the Chinese language and China's extensive cultural essence. This is a good idea. To widely promote Chinese traditional culture in the world contributes greatly to the culture of humankind.

In this time when technology is greatly advanced, the past can only become history. Only through innovation, there will be a way out. Foundation knowledge, such as the *Chinese Four Treasures of the Study*, we must know. Yet, it is not realistic to ask each individual to use brush or calligraphy as a channel to record words and to communicate. In terms of the genuine essence of Chinese traditional culture, we need to renew and bring it to a great height of development. They represent the wise culture that the Chinese predecessors own. They are the materials that will be used to teach the students. They also indicate the significant duties of educational practitioners. Each one of us shall be aware of it.

#### **TRUST - TO PRACTICE WISE TRUST**

Why do we need to believe in and practice wise trust? To maintain the stability and harmonious relationship of a social group, trust certainly plays a vital role (Schilke, Reimann, & Cook, 2015). It is like the currency we exchange with each other. If a large amount of false currency is blended in, there will be a huge chaos caused in the social economy. Similarly, what would an untrustworthy person look like during the social intercourse? The result can be seen easily. Thus, for a truly successful individual, the trust shall be her/his root of standing in the world. And the fulfilment of this ideal begins with discovering wisdom, mastering wisdom and applying wisdom.

From the perspective of wisdom intelligence, no matter how wonderful the clouds in the sky are, our feet are still set on the ground. If we become untrustworthy toward others, others will become untrustworthy toward us. No matter how the talk is exaggerated, decorative and touching, the final goal is trust. Trust and honesty are the branches; a sincere heart is a root. We cannot afford to lose the foundation of trust to lie in pursuing one's own interests. Wise trust follows right after our discovery of wisdom, mastery of wisdom and application of wisdom.

Trust is a like a mirror. It demonstrates the degree of your credibility in the public (Lam & Leung, 2006). Have

you ever heard the story, "The wolf is coming"? The real base for us to stand in the world is trust, not a giant in speech. We must keep our promise. When you keep your promise, you are doing it for your own sake because no one can survive in society alone. For example, when encountering illness or natural disaster, or even in the future, it is impossible for a person to climb to the grave by themselves. Can a person who is selfish, lying, cheating, stealing, and untrustworthy even think about these things? A person who is not trustful has no way to survive among other individuals. To some individuals, believing in and practising trust requires courage. Yet we need to be aware that the majority of people among us believe in and practice trust. For these people, trust is natural. Laws have no effect on those who obey them.

Children sometimes do not practice trust. Isn't it a shadow that a society leaves in their hearts when it does not practice trust? It may have something to do with society, school and family (Xu, Evans, Li, Li, Heyman, & Lee, 2013). Most importantly, it is to help children to become wise ones. Trust is first of all one's own immediate concern, then it is a concern of the family, society and humankind. Take a formal sports game for example. If the rules of the game can be easily altered, the referee will punish the athletes according to their own likes and dislikes. What is the meaning of the game? Trust is a society's unwritten rules. Each one of us is complaining now. No one is happy about the repulsive phenomenon that is filled in society such as fraud or fake goods. When you realize that the goods you paid for a high price turned out to be fake, each one of us shall right away think how we have done in terms of the trust. The issue of trust is a social issue. It seems simple; however, it is complex. The entire society shall pay attention to and advocate for issues related to trust.

The issue of untrustworthiness has become a tumour for society as a whole. It has been threatening each individual, family, society and precious human relations (Frankel, 2006). Remember, a sincere heart and credibility are the common rules that two friendly parties shall obey. Can wisdom be seen everywhere? If a letter of warranty stops people from lying or cheating, then the greatest industry in the world is paper manufacturing. Can the solution be this simple? The issue of trust is a social issue.

When we discover our wisdom and master our wisdom, we can apply our wisdom in our lives. At that time, not only the problem of trust will be solved, our whole life

will have a dramatic change. How come we keep our words when we were children and we change when we get older? The truth is, we shall first discover and obtain self-wisdom. Honesty and credibility shape our images. If a nation would like to stand on the world stage, it shall start right now and from ourselves.

#### **LOYALTY- TO USE WISDOM TO SERVE THE NATION AND ITS CITIZEN**

The concept of loyalty (忠) belongs to the paradigm of social moral principles (Duquette, 2010). Loyalty is the discovery of human nature. To love one's nation is to love oneself. Even the meanest and low person is still a citizen. Each person has her/his own root: the root of parents, the root of society, and the root of the nation. No matter how low the family background and social economic status are, a person is still a citizen of a nation. To wisely repay the nation and its citizen begins from ourselves, from small things and from our pure hearts. It is not enough to "love nations" in one's mind. We have to act.

As we mentioned before, loyalty (忠) refers to someone wisely repaying his/her debts to the nation and its citizens. How can a person fulfil her/his dream of contributing and repaying the nation and citizens when her/his wisdom is absent? How can a compass without a needle point to the direction? Of course, certain people around us are doing such a thing). Being loyal and not being loyal cannot be distinguished from the status and power one possesses. No matter who we are, as long as we love our nations and are willing to add bricks to the architectures the nations are constructing, we are demonstrating loyal conduct. Can a person who does not discover her/his wisdom, master her/his wisdom and apply her/his wisdom contribute to the nation-building? Having mere ideas is not enough.

After the discovery, mastery and application of wisdom, we shall commit it in our own work, appropriately deal with the relationship among us, and do what we are supposed to do. These are the proper interpretations of being loyal. In other words, we use wisdom to repay our nation and its citizens (Chao, 1990). We first discover our wisdom, then master it and finally apply it.

Wise parents often teach their children to become individuals who respect others, always think from others' perspectives, and act as good team members (Jen, Chou, Lin, & Tsai, 2012). If a child discovers her/his own wisdom and can master and apply it to their daily

life, are parents still to be concerned about the complexity of society and the cruelty of social competition and their threatening to the child's survival? When the larger river has water, the small river is full; when the larger river has no water, the small river is dry. Similarly, while loving our own nation, we are loving ourselves. We sacrifice first, receive later. Yet to receive has nothing to do with trying all sorts of tricks and shortcuts, taking advantage of others and benefiting ourselves; instead, the society grants us. Nature is our best model. It selflessly provides all the supplies humankind's demand. When a sincere and loving heart is given to the society, the world will become more harmonious because of our giving.

#### **FILIAL PIETY – APPLYING WISDOM TO GIVE THANKS TO OUR ELDERS**

It is meaningless when merely discuss filial piety. Filial piety in the feudal context differs from filial piety in this article. The concept of filial piety requires new content and demands new meaning to serving the new age. The greatest way of filial piety is to use wisdom to love and care for our elders. A wise person knows the best approach to love and care for the elders. For example, the issue of retirement. How many people have made good arrangements for their elders?

In terms of how to solve problems, a person who has discovered, mastered and applied wisdom differs greatly from the one who has not discovered, mastered and applied wisdom. The same thing can be said differently. When one person says it, it is pleasant to the elders' ears. When the same thing is said by another person, it annoys the elders. The reason is rooted in wisdom. We shall respect and care for our elders from the bottom of our hearts because it is them who gave us lives, nurtured our lives and offered all sorts of conditions that made our lives possible (Zhang, Sayundranayagam, & Hummert, 2004). From the perspective of the life cycle, to nurture offspring is firstly to maintain the continuation and prosperity of human species; secondly, when one loses her/his ability to care for oneself, there will be family and relatives who can look after them. We shall keep this in mind no matter who we are. Who can be exempt from old ages? Of course, in terms of how to view things and how to solve problems, younger generation and older generation should have an equal relationship. It is not right to blindly obey the elders. We shall let the flame of loving heartburn forever.

The nature of filial piety is loving people, loving all

people (Liang, Basnyat, & Stohry, 2012). People who have no loving hearts can hardly practice filial piety. Thus, from now on, on the premises of discovery, mastery and application of wisdom, we shall ignite the flame of our loving hearts, and contribute our efforts to the wonderful human relations.

#### **rites - APPLYING WISDOM TO SELF-DISCIPLINE WORDS, DEEDS AND HUMAN RELATIONS**

Rites are summarized by our ancestors after thousands of years of practice (Riches, 1988). They are the enlightenment toward heaven, earth, human and the *Tao*. They serve as the establishment of social moral principles and are used to regulate the world order. They are not innate; rather, they originate from wise people's discovery and mastery of the wisdom and eventually the application in the field of human relations. Thus, people who do not understand rites are ones who do not understand heaven, earth, human and the *Tao*. In other words, they are what we call those who live in a state of foolishness. Rites represent the form of social order. It shall become the habits of each individual. Rites play a significant role in maintaining the stability of the social order and the development of the nation's social system.

The emphasis of social interaction is rooted in sincerity (Scott, 2007). Without sincerity, there is no interaction. Sometimes we wonder: why when we treat others with sincerity and honesty, we do not always get the same thing in return? The degree during the process of interaction is vital. The relationship cannot be too close nor too distant. Any relationship established on mere interests will eventually fall. Is the sun sincere to humankind? What does it demand from us? The glow of the sun is equally shining upon the earth. No exceeding desires, no absurd needs, to accept what comes, to agree with the *Tao* is how wise people handle things.

We plant trees, we do not hope for the fruits. When the flowers bloom, she will smile among them. It is the heart that connects the hearts.

#### **RIGHTEOUSNESS - APPLING RIGHTEOUSNESS TO CULTIVATE A SENSE OF JUSTICE**

Righteousness belongs to the paradigm of social moral standards (Hoar, 1900). Law, on the other hand, represents rules of conducts that are constituted and acknowledged by a nation. They are interrelated, yet different. Social moral standards represent the major aspect of maintaining the harmonious social order; on the other hand, the law serves as the fundamental

safeguard to maintain the harmonious social order. Thus, focusing on the promotion of each nation's traditional merits and strengthening on educating social moral standards will automatically help each social individual obey and uphold social moral standards, cultivate themselves a sense of justice, and motivate them to strive their efforts to establish positive energy for society as a whole.

An upright person is the child of pride in heaven and on earth. The character of selflessness indicates an upright heart. An upright heart yields conduct of integrity. When we observe, experience and practice the laws of heaven, we realize that nature has no self, but is just. Justice is a feeling, a virtue and a realm derived from human hearts. It occurs at all times. When we have no idea what virtue is, we have the highest virtue of sublime.

#### **PURITY - APPLYING WISDOM TO THE LOSS AND GAIN OF INTERESTS**

To pursue interests represents the most innate motivation of humankind (McGarity & Wagner, 2010). Agony is often rooted in people with a narrow mind and a small heart. Agony comes from the loss and gain of interests. How do we treat the loss and gain of interests? "Interests" have nothing to do with loss and gain; yet, the word "interests" is deeply rooted in a person's small heart. Thus, agony and annoyance inevitably grow from their closed minds and their value system towards the loss and gain of interests. Politicians and business people do not have the same concern. The most fundamental difference is that while a business person pursues maximization of wealth and profits, a politician is more concerned about controlling and changing the heart-and-body of the people in society.

In terms of interests, the biggest one is life. The second one is wealth, then it is fame. The frog wanted to speak. What it attempted to protect was its fame. What a pity when it opened its mouth and lost its life. For short-sighted people, most of the time, the interests or benefits they see does not matter. Isn't it caused by the vanity and selfishness that human nature inherently owns? All human defects are out of a selfish heart. The reason why a selfish heart exists is that we do not discover, master and apply self-wisdom. When facing interests, the phenomenon of having weak willpower is not common. When people can truly discover, master and apply self-wisdom, they are not going to give more values to things that do not belong to themselves.

#### **SHAME- APPLYING WISDOM TO ESTABLISH**

### POSITIVE ENERGY IN THE WORLD

After discovering, mastering and applying self-wisdom, people will naturally know the existence of righteous and noble spirits among heaven and earth. Born among heaven and earth, humans naturally realize positive energy, follow positive energy and obtain positive energy. Positive energy will naturally produce. The eight words of “wisdom, trust, loyalty, filial piety, rites, righteousness, purity, shame” are our ancestors’ work of enlightenment toward heaven, earth, humankind and the *Tao*. They apply them as society’s moral standards. They are not human-made affairs that are imagined or pretended. Thus, in our daily social lives, we shall take initiative to discover and master self-wisdom, and then apply self-wisdom. We shall deal with everything in the world according to these moral standards. In my point of view, this method is more or less a quick solution; a solution that is in line with heaven and earth (the great way of nature).

The cause of inharmonious relationship between humankind and nature is always embedded in humankind. Because humankind possesses so-called “intelligence”, they generate true “foolishness”. What goes through people’s minds when merely focusing on the small interests and ignoring the consequences such as polluting our living space by chemical materials and harmful air? Without a doubt, these people never think about others’ lives (Jolley, 2011). What they have in mind are “my” interests or “my” benefits. The common space that we live in and share is others’ concern, and has nothing to do with “me”. Is this the reality? When she/he leaves this world, how is her/his offspring going to survive? Conscience comes from positive energy. Only when discover, master and apply self-wisdom can individuals truly understand what positive energy is; then, conscience will naturally come.

When we are children, we are pure. Why children do not keep their words anymore when growing up? The answer we have is as follows: children’s problems reflect social problems; they also belong to family and schools’ educational problems (Asendorpf & Nunner-Winkler, 1992). Everything begins with hearts. Each person shall look for her/his own precious treasure of hearts; each person shall cast her/his own wonderful and good disposition; each person shall create and build harmonious atmospheres to let the things harm society, family and individuals, and obstruct the laws of human development disappear from our living space.

### CONCLUSIONS

What we have discussed so far can be summarized to the issues of discovery, mastery, and application of wisdom. If each one of us become wise people such as Confucius or Lao-tzu, do we still need others to instruct us on a daily basis, eloquently talk on the subjects of wisdom, truth, loyalty, rites, righteousness, purity, and shame?

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