

The Historical Changes and Contemporary Implications of Chinese and Western Educational Philosophy from the Perspective of Cultural Identity

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Abstract: In the context of globalization and cultural diversity, educational philosophy, as a key core carrier of cultural inheritance and value construction, has always been deeply integrated and constrained by the internal logical context of cultural identity in its historical evolution and contemporary transformation process. This article takes cultural identity as the starting point, systematically sorts out the historical context of Chinese and Western educational philosophy, analyzes the differences and integration trajectories of the two in cultural genes, value orientations, and practical paths, and reveals their implications for contemporary education in cultural inheritance, value integration, and model innovation. Research has shown that Chinese educational philosophy has undergone paradigm shifts from Confucian ethics, Western fusion, to modern reconstruction, while Western educational philosophy has shown a spiral upward trend of rationalism, empiricism, and criticism; The two complement each other in the tension of cultural identity, providing historical insights and theoretical support for the construction of a Chinese characteristic educational philosophy system.

Keywords: Cultural identity, Chinese and Western educational philosophy, historical changes, contemporary inspiration.

1. Introduction

Educational philosophy focuses on exploring the essence and value of education, and is closely related to the construction of cultural identity. Cultural identity, as an individual's sense of belonging to their cultural group, not only shapes the value orientation of educational philosophy, but also is inherited and strengthened in educational practice. From a historical perspective, Chinese and Western educational philosophy have developed in their respective cultural soils, forming distinct systems: Chinese educational philosophy is influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, emphasizing moral cultivation, social harmony, and individual inner transcendence; Western educational philosophy is influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, Christian culture, and modern science, emphasizing rational thinking, knowledge transmission, and individual external development. In the process of globalization, the exchange and collision between the two have intensified. This not only brings development opportunities - Western scientific spirit and innovative concepts provide reference for China's education reform, but also the humanistic care and harmonious thinking of traditional Chinese educational philosophy have attracted attention from the Western academic community; It also triggers reflection on cultural identity: how to maintain the uniqueness of local culture while absorbing foreign cultures, and achieve innovative development of educational philosophy in a multicultural context [1]. Based on this, this article explores the historical evolution and contemporary enlightenment of Chinese and Western educational philosophy from the perspective of cultural identity. By tracing its development trajectory, analyzing the cultural connotations and value orientations of different historical periods, revealing the similarities and differences in cultural identity, and exploring the integration and innovation of the two in contemporary educational practice, this study provides theoretical support and practical

guidance for constructing a Chinese characteristic educational philosophy system.

2. The Distinction of Taoist Instruments and Rational Enlightenment: Tracing the Cultural Genes of Chinese and Western Educational Philosophy

2.1. The Ethical Cultural Foundation of Chinese Educational Philosophy

Traditional Chinese educational philosophy is centered around Confucianism, forming a thinking paradigm of "unity of Dao and Qi" [2]. The concept of the integration of politics and education in the Book of Rites and the Book of Learning, which emphasizes the importance of education as the foundation of the nation and the people, and Wang Yangming's practical philosophy of the integration of knowledge and action, both view education as a dual pathway for cultivating moral character and constructing social order. The Confucian concept of the Tao of Heaven, which emphasizes the connection between heaven and man, and the theory of human nature, which emphasizes the cultivation of one's nature through goodness (the dialectical relationship between Mencius' theory of good nature and Xunzi's theory of evil nature), have established the fundamental purpose of education to cultivate oneself and ensure the well-being of others, highlighting the ethical standard. In the Confucian system, 'Dao' is an abstract moral principle and spiritual pursuit, serving as the ultimate goal of education; 'Qi' is a specific knowledge and skill that serves as a means to achieve the 'Dao'. The proposition of Confucius in the Analects that 'a gentleman should not possess weapons' does not negate knowledge learning, but advocates transcending utilitarianism and approaching the realm of 'Dao'; The "Six Arts" (ritual, music, archery, archery, calligraphy, and

mathematics) balance moral etiquette with practical skills, aiming to cultivate gentlemen with both morality and talent. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Huang Zongxi and Gu Yanwu proposed the idea of "applying knowledge to the world", criticizing the emptiness of Neo Confucianism and advocating for academic relevance to reality, but still guided by Confucian ethics and did not deviate from the framework of local cultural identity.

2.2. The Rationalist Tradition of Western Educational Philosophy

Western educational philosophy originated from the ancient Greek concept of "the love of wisdom": Socrates' "midwifery" stimulated rational reflection through dialogue, Plato's "theory of ideas" aimed to understand ideas as educational goals, Aristotle's "free education" advocated the development of reason to achieve comprehensive human development, and jointly constructed a rational core educational tradition. Although medieval scholastic philosophy was influenced by religion, its dialectical methodology injected vitality into rationalism; During the Renaissance, humanistic education emphasized individual value and human liberation; Since modern times, Kant proposed that "human beings are the purpose" and advocated for education to respect human dignity and cultivate moral autonomy; Dewey's pragmatism of "learning by doing" emphasizes gaining experience through practice and cultivating problem-solving abilities, both of which continue the pursuit of knowledge certainty and individual autonomy, forming an interwoven thread of instrumental rationality and value rationality, enriching the rational tradition of Western educational philosophy.

3. Traditional Fission and Paradigm Shift: The Historical Evolution of Chinese Educational Philosophy

3.1. Classical Period: The Maturity of Ethical Education Philosophy (Pre Qin to Ming and Qing Dynasties)

In the pre Qin period, Confucian educational philosophy established its core position in the Hundred Schools of Thought. Confucius proposed the idea of "education without discrimination" to break the monopoly of education, with "benevolence" and "propriety" as the core of education, and guiding students to cultivate themselves through "learning and practicing at the right time"; Mencius advocated the expansion of good nature in education through the theory of "good nature", while Xunzi emphasized the "transformation of nature into falsehood" through the theory of "evil nature", jointly consolidating the foundation of ethical education. The "Three Guidelines and Eight Articles" of the "University" construct a complete path, clarify the goals of "upholding virtue, being friendly to the people, and striving for excellence", and achieve the connection between personal cultivation and social governance from "investigating things to acquiring knowledge" to "governing the country and pacifying the world". During the Han and Tang dynasties, the dominant position of Confucianism was strengthened: Emperor Wu of Han "dismissed all schools of thought and exclusively respected Confucianism" and designated Confucian classics as official textbooks, while the Imperial Academy promoted the dissemination of classics; The

imperial examination system of the Sui and Tang dynasties combined Confucian education with officialdom, strengthening cultural identity. The Neo Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties deepened educational philosophy, and Zhu Xi advocated "investigating things and exploring principles" by studying the "Four Books" and "Five Classics" to explore heavenly principles; Lu Jiuyuan proposed the concept of "mind is reason" and emphasized inner reflection, enriching the connotation of Confucian ethical education from both internal and external dimensions.

3.2. Modern Transformation: Cultural Adjustment under the Impact of Western Learning (late 19th century to mid-20th Century)

At the end of the 19th century, the spread of Western learning to the east promoted the transformation of educational philosophy. Yan Fu translated Spencer's "On Education" and introduced scientific educational ideas, proposing the idea of "boosting people's strength, enlightening people's intelligence, and promoting new people's morality" in the hope of improving national quality through education; Liang Qichao advocated "New Citizen Education" in "New Citizen Theory", advocating the cultivation of new citizens with national consciousness and independent personality, breaking through the traditional Confucian educational framework. In 1919, Dewey came to China to give lectures, and his pragmatic educational ideas attracted attention. Tao Xingzhi proposed the theory of "life education" based on the national conditions, advocating that "life is education" and "teaching and practice are integrated", achieving the localization of Western theories [3]. At the same time, Marxist educational thought was introduced, and Yang Xianjiang's "New Education Outline" explained the essence of education from a Marxist perspective, laying a theoretical foundation for the philosophy of education in New China and reflecting the adjustment and reconstruction of cultural identity under the impact of Western learning.

4. Diversified Evolution and Intrinsic Tension: The Historical Context of Western Educational Philosophy

4.1. From Ancient Times to The Middle Ages: The Interweaving of Reason and Faith

The ancient Greek educational philosophy centered around rationality, and the democratic system of Greek city states required citizens to participate in public affairs, with rational thinking ability becoming a core competency. This demand strengthened the emphasis on rationality in education. Socrates' "midwifery" inspires rational reflection through questioning, Plato advocates education to cultivate a "philosopher king" in the framework of idealism to achieve soul sublimation, Aristotle's "free education" emphasizes the development of reason to pursue a noble life, and both regard reason as the fundamental direction of education. During the Roman period, Cicero's "eloquence education" integrated rationality and practicality, requiring citizens to possess both knowledge, morality, and public speaking abilities, continuing the rational tradition of ancient Greece [4]. Although theology was the core of medieval Christian educational philosophy, the curriculum system of the "Seven Arts" (grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, etc.) retained ancient

Greek knowledge and rational thinking. Dialectics deepened rational cognition through logical reasoning, while grammar and rhetoric assisted in clear expression and effective argumentation, providing rational tools for interpreting religious doctrines and continuing the cognitive tradition of ancient Greece; Augustine's "original sin theory" and "redemption theory" endow educational religion with ethical significance, believing that education needs to guide people to believe in God in order to obtain redemption, forming an educational pattern intertwined with reason and faith.

4.2. Modern Times: The Game between Scientism and Humanism

During the Enlightenment period, Comenius advocated for the popularization of scientific knowledge through his "pan intellectual education", while Rousseau advocated for "natural education" that catered to children's nature and broke free from religious constraints on education. Comenius' ideas provided theoretical support for the establishment and popularization of modern public schools, while Rousseau's respect for children's nature inspired the modern concept of "child centeredness". In the 19th century, essentialism (Bagre) emphasized the transmission of cultural common elements to meet social needs, while perennialism (Hechins) focused on the study of classics to cultivate rationality. The debate between the two revolved around a "knowledge-based" approach, reflecting the tension between the demand for practical technical talents and the inheritance of cultural classics in post industrial society. In the 20th century, existentialism (Sartre) focused on individual freedom and personalized education, advocating respecting students' uniqueness to construct self-worth; Analytical philosophy (Wittgenstein) requires educational language to be clear and precise, avoiding vague expressions that may lead to cognitive biases. These pluralistic theories expand educational philosophy from different dimensions, not only continuing the rational tradition, but also promoting education to focus on individual needs and practices, deeply reflecting the continuous game between scientism and humanism.

5. Differences and Integration: A Comparative Study of Cultural Identity in Chinese and Western Educational Philosophy

5.1. Value Orientation: Ethics Based Vs Rationality Based

Chinese educational philosophy is guided by the Confucian concept of "unity of heaven and man", with moral perfection and social harmony as its fundamental goals, and emphasizes the unity of individual responsibility and ethical norms. Confucius' philosophy of "self-restraint and restoration of propriety as benevolence" and Mencius' philosophy of "benevolent governance" both position education as the core path of "self-cultivation, family harmony, governance, and peace of the world", focusing on cultivating individuals' patriotism and moral qualities; In terms of teacher-student relationships, emphasis is placed on "respecting teachers and valuing the Way", and the curriculum system is based on the interpretation of Confucian classics as the core carrier, in order to inherit traditional cultural values. Western educational philosophy is based on the "subject object

dichotomy" thinking paradigm, pursuing the objectivity of knowledge and the independence of individuals, with the core orientation of cultivating "rational people". Socrates' "midwifery technique" aims to stimulate individual rational reflection, Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" further highlights the core position of reason, and modern Western education places more emphasis on cultivating critical thinking and innovative abilities [5]; The teacher-student relationship advocates "equal dialogue", and the curriculum focuses on scientific exploration, conveying scientific spirit and independent thinking ability.

5.2. Practical Path: Overall Construction vs. Analytical Criticism

Chinese educational philosophy is centered around holistic thinking, with Confucianism's "unity of knowledge and action" (Wang Yangming's "knowledge is the beginning of action, action is the completion of knowledge") emphasizing the unity of cognition and practice, and teaching methods leaning towards heuristic (Confucius' "not angry, not inspired") and experiential (traditional academy lectures and debates). Western educational philosophy excels in analytical thinking, constructing rigorous methodologies through Socratic logical questioning and Dewey's "five step teaching method" (creating situations, identifying problems, proposing hypotheses, and verifying hypotheses). Since modern times, the two have merged: China has introduced Western experimental teaching and inquiry based learning, while the West has borrowed from the American "Social Emotional Learning" (SEL) program to absorb Confucian emotional education concepts and cultivate empathy and a sense of responsibility.

5.3. Cultural Identity Mechanism: Inheritance Type Vs Construction Type

China conveys cultural identity through classic interpretations (such as the Analects and the Great Learning) and the imperial examination system (which uses Confucian classics as examination content). The system is stable, and the core Confucian values (respect for teachers and the Way, benevolence and integrity) have always been integrated into education. The West relies on rational criticism to reconstruct cultural identity: Ancient Greece broke through the constraints of primitive religion to explore the essence of the world, the Enlightenment criticized authoritarianism and advocated freedom and equality, and postmodernism reflected on traditional rationalism. Its educational philosophy innovates through continuous criticism, from elite education to universal education, from knowledge transmission to ability cultivation, constantly adapting to the needs of social development.

6. Contemporary Inspiration: Seeking Innovation in Educational Philosophy within the Tension of Cultural Identity

6.1. Adhere to the Roots of Local Culture and Build the Subjectivity of Educational Philosophy

Faced with the pressure of cultural homogenization under globalization, it is necessary to deeply explore the modern value of traditional Chinese educational philosophy.

Confucianism emphasizes individualized education based on students' characteristics, which is in line with contemporary personalized education concepts and can guide teachers to adopt differentiated teaching to stimulate students' potential; The integration of knowledge and practice emphasizes the unity of knowledge and practice, which can guide students to transform theory into practical abilities through experiments and social practice. When introducing Western educational theories, it is necessary to avoid "appropriation". When introducing theories such as constructivism and multiple intelligences, it is necessary to combine them with China's social reality and cultural psychological adjustment - relying on the collectivist cultural tradition to emphasize cooperative learning, adapting to the practical application of local education, and ensuring the core position of cultural identity.

6.2. Promote Multicultural Dialogue and Foster Inclusive Development of Educational Philosophy

The difference between Chinese and Western educational philosophy reflects the diversity of cultural identity, and the complementarity between the two is significant. Contemporary education needs to establish a dialogue platform: on the one hand, it should absorb elements of Western rationalism and science education, cultivate students' scientific spirit and innovation ability through experimental teaching and inquiry based learning; On the other hand, spreading the ethical wisdom and holistic thinking of Chinese educational philosophy to the world, such as the idea of "harmony in diversity" contained in the concept of "a community with a shared future for mankind", provides inspiration for global education governance. Through two-way interaction, we will build a system with both local characteristics and international perspectives. For example, the curriculum will integrate the essence of China and the West to provide cross-cultural courses. The evaluation system will learn from the western multiple evaluations and combine them with China's education goals to help students develop in an all-round way.

6.3. Responding to the Issues of The Times and Achieving a Practical Shift in Educational Philosophy

In the era of technology, issues such as the loss of digital indigenous values and the impact of AI on the essence of education have become prominent, and educational philosophy needs to return to a practical approach. China can learn from Western critical education to reflect on technological alienation, while promoting the tradition of "practical application", constructing a collaborative framework of "technology culture education", using technology reasonably and combining cultural inheritance to cultivate students' correct values; The West can absorb the concept of "unity of heaven and man" and integrate it into environmental and humanistic education to address ecological crises and spiritual dilemmas [6].

Regardless of the East or the West, educational philosophy needs to focus on the fundamental question of "what kind of person to cultivate", provide value navigation based on the needs of the times and cultural background, and cultivate talents who possess both cultural confidence and social responsibility, and adapt to the development of the times.

7. Conclusion

The historical evolution of Chinese and Western educational philosophy is essentially the process of constructing and reconstructing their respective cultural identities. Chinese educational philosophy is nurtured in an ethical culture, from the traditional Confucian pursuit of "self-cultivation and safety of others", to the local transformation of pragmatism through Tao Xingzhi's "life education" under the impact of modern Western learning, and to the advocacy of "cultural confidence" in contemporary times. Through traditional inheritance, integration of Western learning, and modern reconstruction, it has always followed the logic of "upholding righteousness and innovation", adhering to the cultural core of ethical standards while adjusting educational connotations with the times.

Western educational philosophy revolves around rationalism, from the rational enlightenment of Socrates' "midwifery" in ancient Greece, to the breakthrough of religious constraints in scientific education during the Enlightenment period, and then to the reflection of traditional rationality in postmodernism. Through continuous criticism, it achieves a diverse paradigm shift and presents the characteristic of "breaking and coexisting", constantly enriching the practical dimensions of rationalism in deconstruction.

In the tension of cultural identity, both adhere to the roots of local culture - China anchors ethical inheritance, while the West focuses on rational development; Through communication and mutual learning, China has absorbed Western scientific education methods, while the West has drawn on Eastern ethical wisdom to achieve theoretical proliferation. Contemporary education reform needs to face this difference squarely, drawing nourishment from Confucianism's "teaching according to students' aptitude" and "integrating knowledge and action", and consolidating the ethical foundation and cultural confidence of education; We must also rationally draw on the spirit of Western science and critical thinking, and avoid being closed and conservative.

Only in this way can we construct an educational philosophy system that combines cultural identity and adaptability to the times in globalization, providing support for cultivating talents with both local sentiment and global perspective. Future research can focus on cultural identity practices in specific fields such as curriculum design and teacher training, promoting the transformation of theory into educational practice.

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