

The Enlightenments of Educational Ideas of Ancient Academy on Modern Higher Education

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Abstract

The ancient academy in China demonstrated some unique educational values, such as the school-running idea of independence and autonomy and the governance by famous experts, the instruction idea of being free and open and focusing on academy and morality cultivation, and the management concept of mind-oriented administration and student autonomy. At present time, Chinese universities have encountered some difficulties in the process of talents cultivation, such as the administrativization, the incomplete implement of people-oriented concept and the inadequate attention on morality education. As a result, the educational ideas of ancient academy enlighten modern higher education mainly in the following aspects: the university should keep its relative independence, put the student-centered administration into practice, construct academic research atmosphere and promote academic communication, value morality cultivation and foster human spirit, and then the essence of these educational ideas will promote the reform and the development of higher education and improve the quality of talents cultivation in China.

Keywords: Ancient academy, Educational ideas, Higher education, Enlightenments

1. Introduction

Educational idea is the judgment and views arising from the process of thinking and finding the answer to the questions as follows: What is Education? How to educate people? What is the value of education? How to better realize the value of education? With the rapid development of knowledge economy, the various needs of talents and the change of the context of quality education, universities, as the main position of talents cultivation, should build and practice the educational idea, which values talents with all-around development. However, some universities have problems in talents cultivation, such as inadequate consideration of demands of teachers and students, lack of a wide range of democracy, inappropriate implementation of people-centered concept, and weighing knowledge and skill over morality education, having a strong impact on the quality of talents cultivation. Ancient academy, as one type of higher education institutions in Ancient China, has made outstanding contributions in the implementation of education and the dissemination of academy and culture. It views humanistic education as the basic concept and learning rules as the implementation carrier, and the core of its educational idea contains the educational aims full of human caring, contending academic atmosphere, and independent management model. Its value has been recognized by scholars both at home and abroad. Professor Li Hongqi, from New York University, admits, "Ancient academy is one of the most important institutions in Chinese culture, and it is also one kind of significant systems in the history of human education." (Li Hongqi, 1997) Gu Mingyuan thinks, "Ancient Academy in China has been existing for more than one thousand years, and it made the academic research prosperous and cultivated many talents. As a result, it plays a significant role in the history of Chinese education, and it is a notable phenomenon in the history of the world's education." (Gu Mingyuan, 2004) The educational ideas of ancient academy such as the philosophy of running academy, the instruction and management model, are worthy of reflection and reference for modern higher education. This paper aims to arouse reflection on talents cultivation, promote the implementation of people-centered concept, and improve the quality of higher education by learning from the educational idea of ancient academy in China and extracting its essence.

2. Review

Due to its special effects on ideas and culture in China, and its great influence on the spirit of college, ancient academy has been researched into by many scholars. Some of the researchers gathered historical information of ancient academy, and some made deep analysis and comprehensive research in interdisciplinary fields, which referred studies on academies in different regions, case studies of different academies, different academic schools and the relationship between ancient academy and education. Based on the different perspectives of educational ideas of ancient academy, the research results of the scholars can be concluded as follows: the main educational ideas of ancient academy includes “Academic Freedom”, “Open Door Policy”, “Human Spirit”, “Emphasis on morality Education”, and “Administration Autonomy”. The ancient academy in China has enjoyed its relative independence, and it has some particular rights of autonomy in establishment, school-running idea and internal management. As one of the educational ideas of ancient academy, “the doctrine of self-cultivation” indicates the distinguished value of educators, promotes intrinsic values of self-improvement and morality cultivation, approves the independent spirit and human subjectivity, and reflects the spirit of “pure pursuit for academic research”. The methods and ways of individual morality cultivation in ancient academy have enlightenments on the education of socialist core value system, the internalization of socialist core value system as individual morality and codes of conduct, and the cultivation of students to become qualified constructors and reliable generations of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The educational ideas of ancient academy, which emphasizes on academic innovation and academic freedom, values moral education and promotes personality development, and pays attention to the harmonious teacher-student relationship, has reference value for modern universities in China in the construction of study atmosphere, the administration of teachers and students and the selection of teaching contents. Ancient academy takes the human spirit, the independent spirit, and the compatibility and critical spirit as its essence and core, and its human spirit, which regards moral cultivation as the core, has enlightenments to the idea construction of modern universities in China.

3. Main ideas of ancient academy

3.1 *The school -running idea of independence and autonomy and the governance by famous experts*

The establishment of ancient academy was not realized on the official imperial edicts of the government, but was established according to the needs of different academic schools to disseminate academy. (Zhu Hanming, 2010) In most of the historical period, in order to spread academic ideas and conducted research into the academic ideas, scholars could establish or rebuild the academy according to their own demands. Ancient academy usually kept its relative independence and autonomy in highly centralized feudal society of ancient China in light of its educational resources and economic foundation, and embodied its independence in the selection of teaching contents, the method of instruction and the model of internal management. At first, ancient academy set courses autonomously, and its selection of teaching content was closely related to the educational thoughts of academic schools and presidents. For example, Zhu Xi, as the representative of Neo-Confucianism academy, emphasized on reading, and so he collected lots of books during the period of taking charge of the White Deer Cave Academy and selected *The Four Books* (“*The Analects of Confucius*”, “*The Works of Mencius*”, “*The Great Learning*”, and “*The Doctrine of Mean*”) as the main courses. Lu Jiuyuan emphasized the importance of virtue education in the academy he took charge and paid attention to the education in behavior and practice. Secondly, ancient academy had got financial independence to some extent. There are two reasons for the normal operation of the finance in ancient academy: firstly, the main financial source of ancient academy is academy-owned land, which can bring steady funds to ancient academy by leasing land and collecting land rent. Moreover, the annual expenditure of ancient academy is restricted. Besides, ancient academy has the right to recruit students independently and recruits students who have some knowledge foundation and academic interest, regardless of their status, age, origin, or pursuit. There is no limitation on the student identity and the number of students to be recruited. Finally, ancient academy has the rights to develop study rules and academy charters. All these above-mentioned items expressed the character of independence and autonomy of the ancient academy.

Neither the president nor the administrator has got official position in the government, and the president is always selected and hired through strict procedures. “People think, the founder of ancient academy is definitely a sage, and the president is absolutely a famous scholar, because the academic activities could not be carried out if the president is not a famous scholar, and thus the ancient academy would have no attraction to students and then become fading and close the door finally.”(Mao Lirui, 1979) Therefore, the superior administrator of the ancient academy is selected primarily according to his moral realm and academic level, namely, the president should be good both at academy and morality and he should thus be the model for others, and he should be righteous in morality, high-levelled in

academy and high-profile in reputation. Just because the ancient academy has got this kind of "academic masters", such as Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan, ancient academy has its unique academic fascination and permanent academic spirit.

3.2 The instruction idea of being free and open and focusing on academy and morality cultivation

Ancient academy carried out the Open Door Policy in reality, although it could not escape from the influence of the imperial examination system completely in the process of its establishment and development. In ancient academy, scholars can give lectures freely and students can choose schools and teachers independently according to their aspirations and interest. The spirit of liberalism developed prosperously in the Northern Song Dynasty because the first emperor made some specific policies and special rules, such as the national policy of weighing intellectual achievements over physical training and the clear rule of excusing scholars' death penalty. Academic freedom is the soul of academic spirit, which enabled the students to form the cultural personality with independence and freedom under such a free atmosphere. Teachers and students have the freedom to discuss academic views, exchange ideas and comments on current affairs. This very kind of atmosphere in ancient academy leaves a beneficial effect to the upcoming offspring generations, which was still kept even in Dong Lin Academy in the Ming Dynasty when thoughts of absolutism were quite persuasive. (Wang Yipeng & Chen Taizhong, 2010) The most distinctive feature of the atmosphere of academic freedom is reflected by "academic communication by giving lectures", which offers a platform for different schools and scholars with different ideas to debate and discuss with each other, sets an example in free lecturing and promotes the academic democracy and prosperity.

The saying "a good scholar will make an official career" was popular in ancient China, but the educational aims of ancient academy, which valued the cultivation of students' research ability and personality and played an unique educational function, were different from that of official schools, which paid much attention to cultivate participants for imperial examination. High-level academies are just higher education institutions and the places to cultivate senior talents and study profound knowledge in the ancient times. The founders or the presidents, who spread theories and opinions by giving lectures in ancient academy and formed different kinds of academic schools, emphasized the education of ideal personality and paid attention to students' morality cultivation. For example, Zhu Xi, the famous educator in the history of academy education, advocated attaching equal importance to morality cultivation and academic research and cultivating students' good virtues and noble character, and he said, "After privately observing the educational aims of the sages in the past, I found that the main educational purpose is to understand rule and reason, cultivate morality and be considerate to others, but not to read or remember words and sentences, nor to pursue reputation or interest." (Mao Lirui & Shen Guanqun, 1987) In addition, Yan Yuan, the educator in the late Ming and early Qing periods, advocated cultivating talents with morality and ability, ambition and wisdom or professional skills when he gave lectures and educated students in Zhang Nan Academy. In a word, ancient academy combines virtue with knowledge in the process of cultivating talents. The emphasis on morality cultivation of ancient academy is reflected vividly in the "Study Rule". At that time, every academy had its own educational aim, which was reflected in the "Study Rule". Usually, they included principles of instruction, regulation of academy and living, programs and standards of study and procedures and methods of learning. "Announce in White Deer Cave Academy", made by Zhu Xi, was one of the most famous and influential study rules, and it fully embodied the instruction idea of emphasizing on academic research and morality cultivation by stating five purposes of moral education, procedures of study and principles of morality cultivation, behavior and manners.

3.3 The management concept of mind-oriented administration and student autonomy

In spite of the fact that the administration of ancient academy is implemented under the constraint of various regulations and rules, instead of overemphasizing the control of management system to students, it focuses on the mind of students, grasps their psychological needs, it devotes to raising the enterprising spirit of the students, enhances their inner motivation, inspires potential and promotes independent development. Some sentences in study rules are "remarks should be faithful and sincere, behavior should be honest and rigorous, desire and anger should be punished and suppressed, and faults should be overcome and changed into kindness", which include a series of requirements in speech, manner, attitude, mental activity and virtue, ranging from behavior to mind. Moreover, the requirement on doing things, which is "the purposes of doing things are justice and morality, instead of interests and merits", is the typical character of mind-oriented administration. Wen Ruicheng, the lecturer in the Southern Mountain Jixian Academy for nine years, has ever written a couplet to encourage the students, which says, "Those who can be immortal are virtues, publications and contributions to the country, everybody can be a sage, and a sage into a saint, a saint into the god". He told people to treat others in the way of putting oneself in other's position and seek for calmness in heart, required students to read books after morning ceremony, meditation and putting heart in peace, and said, "The motives for learning are not only passing the imperial examination or getting official position,

but also acting the principles of human behavior.”(Li Bihong, 2007) From the above, we can see that ancient academy implements the mind-oriented administration by putting emphasis on persuading and guiding the students.

Besides, the students participate in administration and even teaching activities independently and autonomously. The positions in ancient academy are arranged as follows: the president is in charge of instruction and organization and mainly responsible for giving lectures and answering questions on study from the students; the deputy lecturer, the deputy president and other assistants, who are served by senior and talented students whose duties are mainly involved in discipline monitoring, reception, sacrifice, books arrangement and daily schedule. Occasionally, students also participate in editing academy history records, inspecting gardens and lands and even collecting land rent. The democratic way of management contributed much to the students' spirit of independence and autonomy and the management efficiency of ancient academy.

4. The enlightenments of educational ideas of ancient academy

Although the development of ancient academy has certain era limitations due to the influence of politics, economy and culture, it is a dazzling pearl in the history of Chinese education and it still enlightens modern higher education with a serious of educational ideas.

4.1 The necessity to keep relative independence for universities

Modern universities have a close relationship with society, politics and economy since its beginning. The university is key to the creativity of a nation, the harmony of internal order of education and the whole educational quality and level. However, it is an organism of spirit life, and the process of its spiritual growth is slow and gradual, which is different from the quick process of raising chickens. As a result, the university would lose vitality and become just a plant if it is constrained by too many orders. Due to the concrete national conditions, the power system in Chinese university consists of three parts, which are the leadership of CPC committee, the administrative power of administrators and the academic power of faculty members (Chen Denghai, 2011), which should support each other and which could not be separated from each other or be overemphasized separately. However, the administrative power is far beyond the academic power in Chinese universities, in which the administrative trend is serious at the present time and the official rank standard consciousness exists everywhere. At the same time, the government and the society employ various ways to interfere in higher education, such as the setting of courses, the arrangement and the implementation of instruction. In consequence, the university loses its academic freedom and the spirit of university indeed.

As a result, the university should deal with the conflicts between the government, the market and itself and try to weaken the administrative trend. Rid-of-administration is not equivalent to non-administration, but it means reforming the management model dominated by administrative power into that by academic power, flattening administration organization structure and simplifying management system. The core of rid-of-administration is to reconstruct the structure model with the management of internal democracy and external independence. In order to achieve rid-of-administration and keep the uniqueness and the spirit of independence and autonomy of universities, both the university and the government should stick to such principles: identifying their own responsibilities and rights, the government's ensuring no intervention with the internal affairs of the university.

4.2 The concept of student-centered administration

The management of students in Chinese universities has long been on the stage of "supervision" and has not achieved the level of "serving the students". As a result, the university should learn from the experience of ancient academy in students' management which combines the autonomy of students with the guidance of teachers, and then it can implement the management of students as follows: firstly, the university should put the concept of "student-centered" administration into practice, ensure students' rights of participation in school life, consult students for opinions on the decisions closely related to themselves, promote the education and the administration with humanity and personification and transform the teacher-centered and the leader-centered administration to the student-centered administration which makes students the priority, considers the students to be important, gives students the dominating position and takes pride in the students. Secondly, student services and lots of activities should be designed according to the needs of students, a good environment should be constructed for the growth and the cultivation of students so as to promote students' ability in society, career, emotion, morality and spirit, and directly serve the task of talents cultivation. In addition, the university can recruit the capable students into college management, realize the independence and the autonomy of students' management by playing the full role of student union, and set up "the counseling office of student service", through which students can give advice and suggestions on administration, and so the university can know students' needs in time and make some improvement to ensure the

target and effectiveness of the management of students.

4.3 The construction of academic research atmosphere and the promotion of academic communication

The spirit of academic freedom was very popular in ancient academy, where scholars gave lectures freely and paid attention to academic communication, and different schools expressed their own opinions and were inclusive to different ideas. All these kinds of academic activities promoted the formation of free academic atmosphere, which was unique in the educational history of ancient China. The spirit of academic freedom in ancient academy has had important enlightenments on higher education in China even to this day.

As far as the instruction in universities is concerned, there are such problems as follows: firstly, because of the standardization and the quantification of the evaluation on teachers in Chinese universities, teachers struggle to cope with the heavy teaching task and thus ignore the selection of teaching contents and methods, researches on teaching theories, summaries of teaching rules and the improvement of teaching methods. As a result, the quality of instruction can not be improved to some extent. In addition, the phenomenon of academic fraud is serious because some teachers and students pursue the utility and would not concentrate on academic researches. In order to solve these problems, the university should advocate the spirit of free lecturing in ancient academy again, get rid of the administration model with mechanization and industrialization utterly, construct a free and relaxing academic atmosphere based on improving the teaching level and the academic research level and encourage the collaboration in academic researches of different schools. Moreover, the university should learn from the activity of "academic communication by giving lectures", develop teaching activities based on student-oriented concept, give full play to students' initiatives in the process of instruction, cultivate the ability of free and self-taught learning and the capability of creating atmosphere of academic freedom, carry out qualified lectures and encourage teachers and students to participate in academic meetings in order to exchange ideas, arouse inspiration, broaden their insights and promote academic communication.

4.4 The emphasis on morality cultivation and the cultivation of human spirit

Chinese universities attach importance to the morality cultivation of students and offer some courses and activities related to morality as well, but compared to the educational aim of cultivating professional and technical talents, morality cultivation is just insignificant in universities. Furthermore, because of the influence of market-oriented economy and its function of serving the development of national economy, the university shows a tendency to seek quick profit, put emphasis on satisfying market demand on professional talents and neglect students' needs, and thus lose human spirit gradually. At present, students also have the tendency to pursue the utility and lack human cultivation, which is incompatible with the rapid development of society. In consequence, universities should learn from the concept of valuing both academy and morality cultivation in ancient academy, emphasize moral education and the cultivation of human spirit, strengthen the education of humanistic care, promote the self-improvement of personality and improve the students' comprehensive quality. Specifically, students should know more humanistic knowledge at first, because abundant humanistic knowledge is the basic element to one's knowledge structure, the necessary condition to be "an all-round development person" and the premise and foundation of human spirit. Secondly, universities should guide students to take part in humanistic practice by taking advantages of "the Second Classroom", raise students' interest in reading classics by constructing that kind of atmosphere and cultivate creative talents with full development by carrying out general education, forming core curriculum and strengthening humanities education.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the ancient academies in China play an important role in the continuation and development of traditional culture; even though they were closed or transformed and failed to develop into modern universities finally like those medieval universities, their valuable educational ideas and spirit have been disseminated till today. As a result, we should make reflection on its lessons while sighing its ending and then let them enlighten modern universities in the following aspects: how to keep calm in the process of social change, how to stick to its spirit homeland under the impact of market and how to stand still in global higher education.

In today's era of globalized knowledge economy, the reform and development of higher education should be improved as follows: developing the spirit of ancient academy, inheriting the helpful education ideas, practicing the education concepts which meet education rules and trends based on situations of universities and the society and cultivating more talents with high quality and all-round development.

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