

A Study on the Educational Thought of Liang Qichao and its Inspirations for Moral Education in Higher Education

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Keywords: Liang Qichao, Educational Thought, Integration of Eastern and Western Ideas, Higher Education

Abstract: Liang Qichao was the first in the history of Chinese moral development to propose the concepts of "public morality" and "private morality." The core of his educational thought is to cultivate a new type of citizen who can adapt to society. For university students, morality is the fundamental requirement and baseline for personal development. Liang Qichao's integrated Eastern and Western educational thought still holds significant reference value. This study explores the background and main content of Liang Qichao's educational thought to derive insights for moral education in higher education.

1. Introduction

Liang Qichao's educational thought inherits traditional Chinese ethics while incorporating foreign moral ideas, playing a crucial role in awakening national moral consciousness. Concentrated in "Liang Qichao's Family Letters" and "Moral Education Mirror," Liang Qichao's educational thoughts are primarily expressed in the latter, divided into six sections: discrimination, determination, self-awareness, self-preservation, self-restraint, and appropriateness, elaborating on his views on moral education.

2. Formation Background of Liang Qichao's Integrated Eastern and Western Educational Thought

2.1. Inheritance of Chinese Traditional Culture

2.1.1. Influence of the "Village Governance" Traditional Upbringing Environment

Growing up under the traditional "village governance system," Liang Qichao was deeply influenced by traditional morality. Liang Qichao, born into a prosperous farming family in Teakeng Village, Xinhui County, Guangdong Province, was surrounded by the typical representation of the "village governance" system. His grandfather and father played significant roles in the local governance, emphasizing mutual assistance and the importance of villagers' conscious actions.

2.1.2. Influence of Confucian Classics

Liang Qichao's early education, particularly from his grandfather and father, played a profound role. His grandfather, well-versed in Confucian classics, had knowledge in history, practiced calligraphy, and was known for his virtuous character. Liang Qichao's father, a typical local scholar, emphasized the importance of self-cultivation and adhering to ethical principles. This family environment cultivated Liang Qichao's traditional Confucian upbringing, instilling qualities such as benevolence, diligence, and wisdom.

Such a family environment not only instilled the traditional Confucian values of education in Liang Qichao's young mind but also laid the foundation for his future success in virtues such as

benevolence, wisdom, and diligence. Descriptions of Liang Qichao's childhood in the "Comprehensive Biography of Liang Qichao" reveal not only his talents but also his valuable qualities: benevolence, diligence, and wisdom, all of which were influenced by the upbringing of his parents^[1].

In conclusion, Liang Qichao's grandparents and parents cultivated in him the Confucian cultural tradition of moral education focused on self-cultivation and benefiting others during his childhood. They instilled the virtues of benevolence, diligence, and wisdom, laying a solid foundation for his future moral studies.

2.2. Borrowing and Integrating Foreign Moral Ideas

Between 1889 and 1903, Liang Qichao went into exile in Japan, and from 1918 to 1920, he traveled to Europe, exposing himself to Western thoughts and concepts. This exposure led to a transformation in his traditional thinking.

During his exile in Japan, Liang Qichao's knowledge came mainly from his mentor Kang Youwei, Japanese books translated into Chinese, and Chinese works. His final and most influential journey was to North America in 1920, where he gained a profound understanding of American politics, economics, culture, and societal norms. This experience reshaped his views on democracy and individual rights. In 1918, he went to Europe for a two-year study, comparing Western educational thoughts and reflecting on educational issues, contributing to a new understanding.

Drawing inspiration from Darwin's theory of evolution, Liang Qichao emphasized the importance of competition in social progress. He believed that fostering competition could promote societal advancement, which, in turn, would contribute to the progress of the nation. "Public morality" is a crucial component of Liang Qichao's educational thought.

3. Main Content of Liang Qichao's Educational Thought

Before discussing moral education, it is essential to define ethics. According to the "Modern Chinese Dictionary," ethics is one of the ideologies, serving as guidelines and norms for people's collective life and behavior. Liang Qichao's educational goals include fostering a sense of self-esteem, perseverance, enterprising spirit, a sense of moral responsibility, self-preservation, self-restraint, and social integration.

3.1. Educational Goals

Liang Qichao believed that ethics originated from specific social relationships. To regulate human relations in society, institutions, ethics, and morality are necessary. Ethics is a way to regulate people's lives in a society. National moral qualities should include self-esteem, perseverance, an enterprising spirit, a sense of moral responsibility, self-preservation, self-restraint, and social integration.

3.2. Educational Content

3.2.1. Advocating Public Morality

Liang Qichao criticized the traditional emphasis on "private morality" and proposed a shift toward "public morality." Traditional moral education tended to focus on individual self-discipline, neglecting participation in societal activities^[2]. To save the nation, Liang Qichao argued that public morality is a fundamental requirement for citizens and a basic demand for the nation and society. Educating in public morality can awaken patriotism, dedication to truth, and a sense of collectivism, maintaining the interests of the majority.

3.2.2. Cultivating Individual Qualities

While emphasizing public morality, Liang Qichao did not completely negate private morality. He considered private morality as a means of self-cultivation and interpersonal interaction^[3]. He believed that to correct private morality, individuals must first eliminate dependency, establish self-esteem, purify desires, and maintain strict self-discipline. Good private morality includes personal qualities, conduct, and moral sentiments, representing the fundamental moral requirements of an individual^[4].

4. The Importance of Moral Education in Higher Education

4.1. The Significance of Moral Education for College Students

The 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China introduced the fundamental educational task of "Cultivating Virtue and Nurturing People," while the 19th National Congress emphasized the need to implement this fundamental task. "Cultivating Virtue" focuses on building a moral foundation, while "Nurturing People" involves fostering talent. In contemporary China, the Marxist perspective extracts profound meaning from these commonly used terms in the Chinese language, using "Cultivating Virtue and Nurturing People" as a fundamental identifier for education and its development. In 2018, nation emphasized the cultivation of "socialist builders and successors with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor." This marked the transformation of the educational policy from the "Four Educations" (morality, intelligence, physical fitness, and aesthetics) to the "Five Educations" (morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor), aligning with the requirements of the era for accelerating the modernization of education, building a strong educational nation, and providing satisfactory education for the people. College students represent the future and hope of the nation, and universities bear the crucial mission of cultivating individuals with comprehensive capabilities for the rejuvenation of the nation. It is essential to deeply understand and grasp the connotations and principles of the "Five Educations" and focus on nurturing morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor to cultivate new talents capable of undertaking the great responsibility of national rejuvenation.

4.2. Basic Requirements for Moral Education of College Students

Morality is the fundamental requirement and bottom line for an individual's success. For college students, "morality" encompasses the great virtue for the rejuvenation of the nation, the public virtue of serving society and the people, and the personal virtue of self-discipline and self-cultivation. College students should first possess the virtue for the rejuvenation of the nation, standing high in patriotism and love for the country and nation. Patriotism, a profound and enduring emotion, serves as the source of virtue. In the contemporary era, college students must prioritize the virtue of patriotism, contributing their youth and strength to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Additionally, college students should exhibit the social public virtue of serving society and the people. As a highly knowledgeable and high-quality group, they should lead in adhering to social ethics, setting an example with their good moral conduct. Moreover, as the future workers and builders of various industries, they should embrace the philosophy of "putting the people at the center," dedicating their youth to serving society and the people. Lastly, college students should possess the personal virtue of self-discipline. Good personal virtues include intellectual qualities, moral cultivation, and ethical sentiments, constituting the basic requirements for an individual's character. There have eight-character exhortation to college students, "Diligence, Morality, Discernment, and Practicality," emphasizes the need for young students to strengthen moral cultivation and focus on ethical practices. Only by continually cultivating self-discipline and self-cultivation can college students become the pillars of the nation.

5. Insights from Liang Qichao's Moral Education Thought for Higher Education

5.1. Drawing from Liang Qichao's Thoughts on Public and Private Virtues to Cultivate a Collective Ideology among College Students

Liang Qichao proposed the concept of public and private virtues to save the nation from crisis and inspire patriotic consciousness. He emphasized that China lagged behind the West primarily due to the lack of public virtues, simultaneously considering private virtues as of paramount importance. "Regarding private virtues, Liang Qichao posited that they are demands between one individual and another, belonging to the innermost aspects of a person. Concerning public virtues, he asserted that they are normative requirements between an individual and a certain public group" ^[5]. For college

students, virtues encompass the great virtue for the rejuvenation of the nation, the public virtue of serving society and the people, and the personal virtue of self-discipline and self-cultivation. Drawing from Liang Qichao's thoughts on public and private virtues is positively significant for improving norms in the public interactions of college students, enhancing their sense of responsibility in cultivating virtues, and fostering a collective spirit of idealism among college students.

5.2. Drawing from Liang Qichao's Thoughts on Perseverance Education to Cultivate Unyielding Perseverance in College Students

Unyielding perseverance is crucial for an individual's growth and success. Liang Qichao stated, "In the forest of success and failure throughout the ages, if one does not have a determined path, how can one achieve success or avoid failure? It is said: success belongs to those with perseverance, while failure awaits those who lack it." Even if a person has lofty aspirations from an early age, without the perseverance to support the realization of their goals, they are destined to fail. Therefore, cultivating unyielding perseverance in college students is an essential aspect of moral education in higher education. According to Liang Qichao's thoughts on perseverance education, the cultivation of perseverance in college students can be divided into three stages: firstly, instill expectations in the hearts of college students, as those with expectations possess the power to advance and scientifically plan for the future; secondly, encourage courage, enabling college students to boldly pursue their aspirations; and finally, based on their actual situations, guide college students in setting realistic goals, progressing from smaller objectives to higher ones. These three stages are essential for nurturing perseverance.

5.3. Drawing from Liang Qichao's Enterprising Thoughts to Cultivate the Enterprising Spirit in Youth

Based on evolutionary thinking, Liang Qichao proposed that the new personality of the nation should possess an enterprising spirit, facilitating the transition from a conservative orientation to an enterprising one. He outlined four dimensions to cultivate the enterprising spirit in the nation: firstly, citizens need to be full of hope and anticipation for the future to muster the courage to be enterprising; secondly, citizens should maintain enthusiasm and a positive optimistic mindset; thirdly, citizens should possess basic knowledge and skills, with sufficient wisdom to handle challenges; and finally, citizens should have an undaunted and powerful psychology, understanding that the pursuit of ideals inevitably involves difficulties and having the courage to face challenges. We can draw from these four dimensions to cultivate the enterprising spirit in college students: create a campus culture environment that promotes a positive and enterprising mindset, focus on the intellectual development of students while imparting knowledge and skills, and ensure that students, enriched with knowledge, have a strong inner spirit to continuously propel them forward in the complex and ever-changing society.

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