

Implication From the Ancient Chinese Educational Work on Teacher Quality Evaluation

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Xue Ji, as the ancient Chinese educational work, contains a wealth of thoughts about the evaluation on teachers' quality: The evaluation on teachers' cognitive quality includes the knowledge view of "respecting Tao" and "knowing Tao", the learning view of "respecting learning" and "knowing how to learn", and includes the education view of "respecting education" and "knowing education"; the evaluation on teachers' character quality includes whether teachers can integrate "moral cultivation", "Tao cultivation", and "faith cultivation" in their mind; the evaluation on teachers' behavior quality includes whether teachers can exert "Yan Li" and "figurative abilities". Exploring the thoughts about the evaluation on teachers' quality in *Xue Ji* can enlighten today's teachers' evaluation. We should expand and deepen the requirements of evaluation on teachers' cognitive quality. We should add the faith evaluation to teachers' moral quality evaluation, and add "Yan Li" and figurative ability into the evaluation on teachers' behavior quality.

Keywords: *Xue Ji*, the evaluation on teachers' quality, teachers' cognitive quality, teachers' character quality, teachers' behavior quality

Introduction

Improving the evaluation on teachers' quality is one of the important ways to promote the professional development of teachers, and the research on related topics in the academic community is gradually deepening. However, it cannot be denied that since the early 20th century, western discourse has always dominated the discourse system of education in China (Hou & Wang, 2022). The study of teacher quality evaluation is inevitably influenced by the western discourse system. In fact, the ancient classic educational work *Xue Ji* in China contains a wealth of idea of evaluating teacher quality. It is the earliest and relatively self-contained educational monograph in China (Guo, 2017). It provides refined and profound insights into education, teaching, and teachers, and also permeates the thinking of ancient sages on the evaluation of teacher quality. Conducting research on the evaluation of teacher quality in *Xue Ji* can provide inspiration for current teacher evaluation, and improve the quality of the teaching staff. After studying *Xue Ji*, it was found that the structure of teacher quality evaluation includes the following three key aspects. In terms of cognitive dimensions, teachers should possess a view of knowledge, learning, and education; in terms of character dimension, teachers should be able to integrate "moral

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cultivation”, “Tao cultivation”, and “faith cultivation” inwardly; in terms of behavioral dimensions, teachers should be able to exert “Yan Li” and “figurative abilities”.

Integrating a View of Knowledge, Learning, and Education: Teachers’ Quality in “Knowledge”

The Knowledge View of “Respecting Tao” and “Knowing Tao”

Xue Ji emphasizes “respecting the Tao” (Le, 2011, p. 10), which in a narrow sense means respecting knowledge. In *Xue Ji*, when the Tai Xue (An Imperial College) begins, everyone wears leather hats and formal attire, then prepares delicious food, and pays tribute to the ancestors, in order to demonstrate etiquette and express respect. People respect knowledge as much as they respect life, because only when knowledge is respected can the education be widely carried out. On the contrary, nowadays, we have known the importance of knowledge, but have not done a good job of respecting knowledge.

In addition to “respecting the Tao”, *Xue Ji* also emphasizes “knowing Tao” (Le, 2011, p. 4). Simply put, it means understanding knowledge, especially the commonality and uniqueness of knowledge. The commonality of knowledge is that thinking leads to good learning. Therefore, teachers must constantly think in order to grow into qualified teachers. On the other hand, the uniqueness of knowledge. Knowledge itself has no individuality, but those who learn have individual uniqueness. For individual students, if they are still unable to internalize knowledge after thinking, it means that this part of knowledge is too difficult for their current cognition and can be abandoned temporarily, which is mentioned in *Xue Ji* as “teach him but he does not understand, abandon the knowledge temporarily” (Le, 2011, p. 32).

The Learning View of “Respecting Learning” and “Knowing How to Learn”

The learning concept in *Xue Ji* (Le, 2011) emphasizes not only the learning of students, but also the learning of teachers. On one hand, teachers should respect learning. In *Xue Ji*, “when entering school, one must beat drums”, just like beating a drum to enhance energy before a war (Le, 2011, p. 10). This is because ancient people knew the importance of learning: Learning can make people more deeply understand the truth; learning can also help people face their own shortcomings and make up for their weaknesses; in addition, for teachers, learning can also improve their educational and teaching abilities, and their continuous learning can also serve as a model for students.

On the other hand, teachers also need to “know how to learn” and recognize the characteristics of good learners, in order to be a better teacher. Firstly, good learners are good thinkers. In *Xue Ji*, ancient scholars often excelled in thinking (Le, 2011). They can classify and categorize things through analysis and comparison, in order to understand the principles of all things. Secondly, good learners are good at asking questions. They start with simple problems, and then tackle complex and delicate problems, just like the saying in *Xue Ji*: “First conquer the easy, then the difficult” (Le, 2011, p. 30). Finally, good learners are also skilled at answering questions. They will not answer too deeply when facing simple questions, nor will they answer too simply when facing big questions; when they answer questions, they identify people. For those with high intelligence, they will conduct in-depth discussions; they will also give the questioner sufficient “blank space” to allow them to think fully. Hence, for teachers, we need to help students become good learners.

The Educational View of “Respecting Teaching” and “Knowing How to Teach”

Teachers need to respect education. Education not only enables individuals to become talented, but also promotes the prosperity and development of the country. Firstly, education has great significance for individuals.

As *Xue Ji* once said, “If the jade is not carved, it will not become an exquisite work; if people don’t learn, they won’t become talented” (Le, 2011, p. 4). So even if one is very intelligent, he must undergo education in order to become a true person. Secondly, education has a significant impact on the prosperity and development of a country. If the rulers of a country want to transform the quality of backward citizens and form a good social atmosphere, they must start to establish education. Currently, the country and the world also need to vigorously develop education for cultivating high-quality talents. Therefore, teachers must have great respect for education.

Teachers also need to be familiar with the basic principles of education. The Four Laws of Education—“Yu”, “Shi”, “Xun”, and “Mo”—are clearly defined in *Xue Ji* (Le, 2011, p. 16). Firstly, “Yu” means preparing as early as possible just like the saying “forbidden before it is discovered”. It emphasizes the foresight of education, and teachers need to detect and prohibit students’ bad behavior before it occurs. Secondly, the meaning of “Shi” is to seize the critical period. It emphasizes the immediate application of education that matches students’ cognitive and ability maturity, just as “if time passes and students learn later, they will work hard but find it difficult to achieve” in *Xue Ji* (Le, 2011, p. 18). Thirdly, “Xun” means following the laws of science. It refers to the fact that education should comply with the development laws of students and not exceed their current level very much. Observing China’s education nowadays, it is common for children to learn primary school content in kindergarten and learn secondary school knowledge in primary school. Fourthly, “Mo” means observing. In *Xue Ji*, it is said that “observing each other and improving oneself is called Mo” (Le, 2011, p. 16). These four are the fundamental principles of education that teachers must understand and be proficient in.

Integrating “Moral Cultivation”, “Tao Cultivation”, and “Faith Cultivation”: Teachers’ Quality in “Character”

Having the right view of knowledge, learning, and education is a prerequisite for becoming a good teacher, but possessing excellent character quality is the core literacy of being a good teacher. According to *Xue Ji*, whether a teacher improves a good character quality, it depends on whether they pursue “moral cultivation”, “Tao cultivation”, and “faith cultivation” (Le, 2011).

“Having Great Morality But Not Pursuing Achievement”: Teachers’ Moral Cultivation

Xue Ji emphasizes that if a person possesses the highest level of morality, he does not need to showcase himself through pursuing a good position or achieving self-success (Le, 2011). Therefore, as a teacher, the most important thing is to possess great morality and silently dedicate oneself, cultivating students to be good and never prioritizing position, power, and material wealth.

Traditional Confucianism believes that the core of a teacher’s moral cultivation should be the ideal personality of “benevolence and intelligence” (Zheng & Jiang, 2022). How to cultivate morality? Firstly, we should be aware of honesty and shame. It is the basic moral sense of being a person and the foundation of moral cultivation. Secondly, moral cultivation requires long-term experience in worldly affairs, finally reaching the highest level. That is Shendu: When living alone and unsupervised, one can also consciously abide by various moral standards (Jin, 2016).

“The Path on Tao Cultivation Never Leads to an End”: Teachers’ Tao Cultivation

Simply put, the Tao means the truth. Chinese ancient concept “Wu Lun” can closest explain the meaning of Tao: Family members should love each other. Monarchs and ministers should be loyal to each other. Men and women are different. Younger men should respect the older. Friends should trust each other (Huang, 2014).

Teachers should deeply think and understand the Tao, and then continue to explore the truth of the world with a pure heart, not a utilitarian heart.

Tao cultivation is the constant pursuit of the truth of the world. How to cultivate Tao? It needs to be carried out in a cycle of learning and practice. We should learn through practicing, and practice while learning (Peng, 2013). If we find things right, keep going; if not, correct it. The most important, we should also know that seeking truth is a lifelong process, and do not give up halfway.

“Having a Firm Belief Without External Supervision”: Teachers’ Faith Cultivation

On one hand, *Xue Ji* states that teachers should be a trustworthy person (Le, 2011). A trustworthy person is someone who firmly believes in things from the bottom of the heart, rather than acting under external supervision and constraints. This emphasizes that teachers should possess the quality of being trustworthy. On the other hand, teachers should have a dream in their hearts. He can always adhere to this dream without distracting the attention and take effective actions to achieve his life ideals. Just as Confucius. For him, no matter what difficulties he encountered, he always harbored the faith of “God bestowed virtue on me” and “taking responsibility for saving the world” (Ding, 2017, p. 40). In short, the most important thing is that as a teacher, one should have educational beliefs and be trustworthy, so that their career will be successful and their ideals will eventually be realized.

Confucianism places great importance on faith, as the saying goes: “Confucianism does not value gold and jade, but values loyalty and faith” (Li, 2015, p. 11). Faith is not only the key to maintaining interpersonal relationships, but also the fundamental foundation for countries to establish. As a teacher, one should first examine whether his “trustworthiness” is lacking, and focus on cultivating faith. Then, he can impart faith to students, so that students can also become trustworthy, too.

Exerting “Yan Li” and “Figurative Abilities”: Teachers’ Quality in “Behavior”

Exercising the Educational Ability, “Yan Li”

What is “Yan Li” (Le, 2011)? It is the ability of teachers to establish authority. Judging whether a teacher has authority does not rely solely on the teacher’s perspective, but rather on student’s perspective. “Yan Li” is not a unilateral pressure from teachers, but rather is reflected on the students’ respect and love to teachers. Specifically, students like a teacher very much and are close to him. Meanwhile, students are willing to listen to the teacher and show much respect to him. In this case, it can be determined that the teacher has the “Yan Li”.

How to have the ability of “Yan Li”? Firstly, maintain a moderate distance from students. In *Xue Ji*, teachers will use thorns to make teaching whips, which are placed above the classroom to warn students and establish the authority of the teacher (Le, 2011). Nowadays, it will not be so barbaric. The sense of distance between teachers and students can be generated from the formulation of rules. When students make mistakes, they need to be punished. Secondly, the establishment of teacher authority is inseparable from the teacher’s true love for students. Teachers should be kind to students’ sincerity, and have a caring heart for their students.

Exercising the Teaching Ability, “Figurative Ability”

The most emphasized aspect in *Xue Ji* is the teaching ability of teachers. The core of improving teaching ability is to use figurative ability to make it easier for students to understand knowledge and life philosophy in the world. At the same time, teachers are also required to excel in educating people with concise and thought-provoking principles. It is something that every teacher must master.

Xue Ji also provides detailed answers on how to improve figurative ability. Firstly, teachers should not force students with teachers' own will, but guide them to voluntarily learn something. Secondly, teachers should focus on discovering and promoting students' strengths, rather than criticizing them and inhibiting their development. Finally, teachers need to inspire and induce students to think independently, and generate their own opinions and conclusions, rather than directly expressing the answers to students. In short, teachers should encourage students to learn voluntarily, develop confidence, and think independently to generate opinions and conclusions. If teachers have done these things, they can be considered to have the figurative abilities.

The Enlightenment of *Xue Ji* for the Evaluation on Teachers' Quality

The above chapters discussed teachers' cognitive quality, character quality, and behavior quality in *Xue Ji*. It has certain enlightening significance for the current evaluation on teachers' quality.

Expanding and Deepening the Requirements of Evaluation on Teachers' Cognitive Quality

Xue Ji points out that teachers should have the right view of knowledge, learning, and education, which attaches importance to the evaluation of teachers' cognitive quality.

On one hand, it is necessary to first evaluate the breadth of teachers' cognition, including their level and ability to recognize external objects and themselves inherently. Understanding external objects should involve understanding as much as possible of all things in the world. Cognition of oneself includes understanding the meaning of one's existence, whether one is psychologically healthy or not, and the characteristics of one's thinking, and so on. Those are about the breadth of teachers' cognition.

On the other hand, the depth of teachers' cognition should also be evaluated, including whether the cognition is scientific and profound. Teachers should increase their recognition of erroneous information by collecting popular science information and so on, in order to enhance scientific cognitive abilities through various means. Teachers should also rise research awareness and take actions to gradually explore truth, and form a deeper understanding of the world. And it goes beyond education and teaching, but extends to life.

Adding the Faith Evaluation to Teachers' Moral Quality Evaluation

The evaluation on teachers' faith should be included in the content of moral quality evaluation. Why should we evaluate teachers' faith? From the perspective of cognitive behavioral theory, cognitive errors are the root cause of behavioral errors. Faith errors are the root cause of cognitive errors. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate teachers' faith, including their own development faith and educational faith. However, teachers' faith is not quantifiable and difficult to express, making their evaluation difficult. But if we adhere to the principle of motivation and stimulate teachers to think about their faith, there will be changes in their emotions, cognition, beliefs, and behaviors, which is the true value of teachers' faith evaluation.

Adding "Yan Li" and Figurative Ability Into the Evaluation on Teachers' Behavior Quality

Inspired by *Xue Ji*, the evaluation on teachers' behavior quality should also include the evaluation on "Yan Li" and figurative ability.

First is about "Yan Li", the authority establishing ability. "Yan Li" is quite rarely mentioned in teachers' behavior evaluation. There are two key standards of "Yan Li" evolution. The first standard is about whether teachers can provide strict and moderate education to help students overcome their own shortcomings and correct bad behaviors. The second standard is about whether teachers genuinely love every student. Specifically, that

means whether teachers can enhance students' confidence through appreciation, and establish students' self-esteem through trust, and enable every student to grow healthy and enjoy the joy of success.

Secondly, about the figurative ability evaluation. The evaluation should also focus on whether the teacher has been able to educate students with concise and thought-provoking reasoning, rather than forcing students to accept the teacher's commands. There are three standards: being able to accurately identify students' problems; being able to evoke students' emotional experiences with vivid and passionate language; being able to enlighten and brighten up students with clever ideas and witty phrases.

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