



The Enlightenment of Hsuntze's Educational View on the Construction of Rural Mental Civilization

Qinwei Sun

Sun Qinwei, male, Han nationality, was born in Lanling County, Shandong Province in 1995. Studying for a master's degree in College of Economics and Management, Zhejiang Ocean University.

E-mail: 947745787@qq.com

Abstract: Hsuntze established his educational view based on his materialist view of nature. Firstly, Hsuntze put forward the theory of original evil of human nature. He thought that only the acquired education can make people distinguish between good and evil, and thus extended the view of "transforming human nature into counterfeiting", which laid the foundation for the necessity of education. Secondly, Hsuntze established his own epistemology to clarify the existence of the subject consciousness, namely "heart", comprehensively discussed the importance of "heart" in the process of cognition and put forward the cognitive method of "Empty One But Static", which constructed the possibility of education.

Keywords: Hsuntze; Educational View; Theory of Human Nature; Epistemology

During the Warring States period, with frequent wars and drastic social changes, China's politics, military affairs, science and technology, culture and agriculture were developing rapidly, and the ideological confrontation among various schools was becoming more and more intense. Living in such an environment, Hsuntze fully absorbed the thoughts of various schools of thought when he served as the president of academy school for three times. Compared with the traditional Confucianism, it is more practical and feasible. In view of Hsuntze's view of education, we deeply explore its profound theoretical value, hoping to draw positive thoughts that have guiding significance for the construction of rural spiritual civilization.

1. Hsuntze's Theory of Human Nature

At the beginning of Hsuntze's Evil Nature of Human Being, he put forward his own viewpoint: human nature is evil, human kindness is formed by education¹. He believes that human nature tends to be "evil" and that people's good behaviors are formed through nurture. These words contain two core viewpoints of Hsuntze's theory of human nature, namely "evil human nature" and "human kindness is formed by education". If we want to understand the theory of evil nature, we need to analyze these two points one by one.

As the last Confucian master in the late Warring States period, Hsuntze's theory was criticized by the Confucianists of the past dynasties, most of which came from his view of "evil human nature". Zhu Xi, a great master of Neo Confucianism in the Southern Song Dynasty, once commented on Hsuntze: Hsuntze is extremely biased, and only one sentence of human nature is vicious, which cannot reflect the comprehensiveness of human nature. However, we can see from the full text of Hsuntze's Evil Nature of Human Being that its description and basis of evil nature are all centered on human desire, not involving other aspects of human nature. Hsuntze believed that human beings were born with various desires. If they were not subject to the constraints of etiquette and moral education, human nature would gradually develop to evil. Therefore, we can understand "human nature evil" as "human nature tends to be evil".

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Hsuntze put forward this point of view to strengthen his thought of etiquette and law. Hsuntze first set up the premise of “evil nature”, so as to further discuss the importance of etiquette and law. But Hsuntze didn’t totally deny the natural desire of human beings. As Hsuntze said: “nature is a natural thing; emotion is the essence of nature; desire is the induction of emotion. It’s inevitable for human nature to think that one’s wish is attainable and pursue it³. He thinks that desire is human nature and the natural need of human emotion. If we make good use of the acquired moral education, we can correctly guide desire and make it play a positive role. This leads to Hsuntze’s view of “human kindness is formed by education”.

“Human being’s kindness is required by education”, that is, people’s kindness is acquired by after they were born. Hsuntze thought that the nature of gentleman and villain is the same⁴. That is to say, the nature of gentleman and villain is the same. But why is there such a big gap between the acquired temperament and character? Only education acquired can distinguish good from evil. Hsuntze thus extended his view of “promoting human nature through education”: the evil nature of modern people must learn from the law and then be corrected, and then be treated with propriety and righteousness. In Hsuntze’s view, only by relying on the teacher’s instruction and the restriction of etiquette and law can we change the nature of human beings and make them become gentlemen. “Promoting human nature through education” affirms the innate natural attributes of human beings, and then illustrates the importance of morality and propriety by emphasizing the role of acquired environment and education in human growth. Hsuntze boldly put forward from the moral aspect that “sages were just ordinary people through the accumulation of learning and cultivation”. This can make ordinary people always take “sage” as the moral standard, and constantly move towards the goal of “becoming sage” through learning.

2. Learning Methods in Hsuntze’s Educational View

2.1. Emphasis on “Empty One But Static”

Hsuntze affirmed that people have the ability to know the world, but because of the complexity of the object of knowledge and the limitation of individual cognitive ability, people’s understanding of things often appears certain deviation. Hsuntze called this kind of deviation “limitation”. In Hsuntze’s *Removing Limitation*, he answered the method of breaking “limitation”, that is, “How do people know? Said: heart. How can the heart know? Said: “Empty One But Static.” “Empty” means that the existing knowledge will not hinder the acquisition of new knowledge and maintain a state of open acceptance; “one” refers to the calm analysis and transfer of thinking in the process of cognition; “Static” refers to maintaining the tranquility of thinking, and not allowing thinking to be interfered by other things. Hsuntze thought that in the process of cognition, people should use the methods of “empty”, “one” and “static” to gradually reach the state of “great clarity”, so that they can have an insight into the essence of things and ensure that the subject can form an accurate understanding of things.

Hsuntze’s “Empty One But Static” provides a way for us to explore the truth and the essence of things. We should be soberly aware of the limitations of people’s cognitive ability in many situations. If we want to comprehensively grasp the widespread truth, we need to maintain an open-minded attitude, be single-minded, eliminate the interference of irrelevant things, and achieve peace of mind. For a long time, we can “sit in a room but observe the world and know and talk about distant things in this life.”. We should understand the real situation of all things by looking at all things, know the laws by referring to the actual examples of social stability and chaos, manage the world in an orderly way and choose to manage all things, accurately judge the universal fundamental truth and grasp the laws of the universe in our mind. ⁴

2.2. Emphasis on the Unity of Knowledge and Action

Marx’s dialectical materialism reveals that practice is the basis of cognition, that is, practice is the driving force for the development of cognition, practice is the only standard for testing the truth of cognition, and practice is the ultimate goal of cognition. Hsuntze also put forward a similar point of view. It attaches great importance to the role of “action”, emphasizes that “knowing is not like doing”, and thinks that it is not enough for people to only acquire knowledge, but also needs to test the correctness of “knowing” with “action”. He regards “action” as the purpose of “knowledge” and

takes “action” as the foothold and end point of cognition. However, Hsuntze did not ignore the role of “knowledge” but emphasized the unity of knowledge and action. He believes that “knowledge” and “action” are inseparable organic whole, “knowledge” can guide better “action” and “action” can obtain more “knowledge”. Generally speaking, Xunzi’s view of unity of knowledge and action inherited the view of knowledge and action of simple dialectical materialism in ancient China, influenced the social and political thoughts of Chinese later generations for more than 2000 years, and became the pursuit idea of Chinese scholar bureaucrats.

3. The Enlightenment of Hsuntze’s Educational View on the Construction of Rural Moral Civilization

Hsuntze attached great importance to the role of education. It can be found that he placed “Encouraging Learning” at the beginning of “Hsuntze” and repeatedly discussed the importance of education in the following sections. The theory of evil nature is an important starting point of Hsuntze’s educational thought. Starting from “the evil of human nature”, he expounds that education is the most important method to change people’s nature from many angles. We aim at the theory of “evil nature”, extract its essence, remove its dross, dig deep into its profound theoretical value, and hope to learn from it the positive thinking guiding our country’s revitalization and construction.

3.1. Promoting Rural Education

The educational ideas contained in it can provide ideological guidance for the development of rural education. Many problems in modern rural education are caused by complex historical and social reasons. For example, the education of left-behind children in rural areas, the backward education concept of rural parents, the lack of rural education teachers and other issues will not be discussed one by one here. Taking the education of left-behind children as an example, the “theory of evil nature” has a rich and comprehensive description of people’s desire. Teachers may analyze the psychological characteristics of left-behind children, treat the needs of students rationally, and adopt appropriate educational methods to solve the psychological and learning problems of left behind children. In addition, Hsuntze also explained in Hsuntze ‘s Encouraging Learning that learning is a process of perseverance, “If you do not walk step by step, you can’t reach thousand miles; If the small streams don’t combine with each other, there’ll be no rivers”⁵. The same is true for teachers’ education of students. They need to be patient enough and look at the growth of students from the perspective of development.

3.2. Strengthening Moral Construction

The theory of evil nature provides valuable experience for the construction of Rural Ideological and moral education in China. According to the sixth population census, the urbanization rate in China is 49.68%, which means that most people still living in rural areas. It is particularly important to strengthen the ideological and moral construction in rural areas for the realization of Rural Revitalization and even a well-off society in an all-round way. However, rural areas have been in a relatively closed state of natural economy for a long time, and there are many remnants of feudal and ignorant ideas. In addition, in recent years, the development of urbanization has led to the loss of a considerable number of rural elites, which has led to the decline of Rural Ideological and moral construction to a certain extent. Hsuntze ‘s theory of human nature can provide a theoretical guidance for the transformation of human nature. The “ promoting human nature through education “ reveals the development law of Ideological and moral construction, that is, a process of continuous accumulation and progress. We can take the sages as an example, restrain ourselves with higher moral standards, regulate ourselves, and finally realize the “accumulated sage”. At the same time, we should keep in mind the core socialist values, and integrate the realistic value of Xunzi’s theory of human nature, renew the concept in the field of rural thought, and eliminate the thought of small farmers, the feudal remnants and the old customs.

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