

University Education Model of “Dual Academy” in the New Period

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Abstract: This article indicates the essential differences between Eastern and Western education to uncover the root causes of current educational challenges, purports to restore our national cultural confidence, and investigate a higher education system that meets the needs of the new era. It advocates for utilizing Chinese academies as the foundation for a Chinese-style education system and introduces a fresh new “Dual Academy” model that merges Western educational frameworks with Chinese academy traditions, allowing them to complement each other. This approach aims to reshape the knowledge structures of both students and educators, contribute innovative ideas to enhance the academic and discourse systems of foreign languages infused with Chinese characteristics, and develop talent cultivation strategies that align with contemporary demands.

Keywords: new period; university education; new-style academy of classical learning; education model of “Dual Academy”

1. Introduction

University education, as a core component of higher education, carries the mission of cultivating and delivering talented individuals who can serve as the backbone of the nation. Within the context of Chinese culture, the concept of “university” holds profound significance. The opening of the Confucian classic *The Great Learning* clearly states: “The way of the great learning (higher education) lies in manifesting virtue, in serving the people, and in reaching the ultimate good” [1] (The original Chinese is “大学之道在明明德，在亲民，在至于至善”). This indicates that “higher education” signifies “the study of noble individuals,” aiming to cultivate talents who embody the character of virtuous gentlemen and sages. The enduring civilization of the Chinese nation, which has persisted for thousands of years and has continually rejuvenated itself despite various challenges, as well as its consistent status as a significant power in the eastern world, is fundamentally rooted in its unique, valuable, extensive, and deep cultural heritage. This cultural heritage is complemented by an education system and methods of moral cultivation that have been inherited for millennia, deeply rooted in the essence of Chinese culture.

Represented by Confucianism, the splendid Chinese traditional culture is a study of the sages and manifests the ultimate care for the physical and mental growth of humanity. Chinese culture posits a strong emphasis on harmony, prioritizes mutual understanding and promotes the idea of universal love and compassion for all people. Through timely embedding the teachings of the sages into the growth and maturation stages of university students, we can effectively prevent the physical and mental struggles, confusion, and anxiety often

experienced by individuals in today's industrial and commercial conditions. This strategy serves to guide the direction and illuminate the path for young people as they move forward.

2. The Necessity and Imperative of Establishing New-Style Academies

2.1. Differences Between Chinese Education and Western Education

Chinese education is primarily focused on traditional Eastern philosophies, particularly those exemplified by Confucianism and Daoism. It highlights the importance of learning from wise figures and classical texts, with the goal of nurturing individuals who embody the virtues and principles of these sages. The emphasis is on developing moral character and adherence to the teachings of these esteemed traditions. It focuses on cultivating individuals, with a central emphasis on physical and mental growth and the awakening of life, while paying attention to individualized instruction. It encompasses both the transmission of academic lineage and moral lineage (According to the perspective of Professor Pan Lin, the president of the Eastern Institute of Life Studies, the inheritance of human knowledge can be divided into two types: academic lineage and moral lineage). The relationship between teachers and students plays a crucial role in passing on and preserving human qualities such as personality, values, integrity, and character. It emphasizes the idea of “learning to improve one's inner quality of life”, focusing more on aspects like mental development, character building, and the concept of education as a lifelong journey (Also as “Self-oriented learning”: A type of knowledge aimed at awakening one's inner virtues and conscience as the ultimate goal).

Whereas western education is centered around natural sciences and social sciences, focusing on cultivating talents in technology and science. It emphasizes teaching, measuring success by the knowledge and skills mastered by students, with a unified approach to teaching content and standards. It prioritizes the transmission of knowledge and skills, aiming to the target of “learning for the approval of others” (Also as “Other-oriented learning”: A type of knowledge aimed at enhancing one's social position and obtaining external benefits), and is more characterized by exam-oriented education, degree education, and stage-based education.

In summary, Chinese education and Western education differ fundamentally in terms of contents, goals, and methods. Currently, the existing education system in China is constructed and operated following the suit of the Western education model, which has forced our indigenous educational system to yield to Western influences. In today's situation, under the guidance of our national policies such as “enhancing cultural soft power”, “revitalizing excellent traditional Chinese culture”, and “cultural return” [2], there is an increasing awareness among the Chinese people of the importance of inheriting the tradition of Confucian academy education. There is an acknowledgment of the importance of utilizing the valuable experiences from various outstanding Eastern educational traditions and cultures. It suggests that these experiences should be combined with the distinctive features of the modern era in order to create a new education system that reflects Chinese characteristics.

Different educational approaches can only return to the essence of education and reflect its value when they are compatible with the civilizations in which they coexist. Acknowledging the differences between Chinese and Western education systems and emphasizing the importance of both is an essential path to addressing various contemporary educational issues and shortcomings. In the context of a cultural resurgence in our country, it is essential to find ways for Chinese education to complement modern educational practices. This requires actively investigating the revival of traditional academy education to ensure that the foundations of the Chinese education system can genuinely establish themselves and thrive.

2.2. New-Style Academies That Carry the Chinese Education System

Modern comprehensive universities are the result of centuries of exploration in the West, which establishes effective pathways for the dissemination and research of modern natural sciences and social sciences. While the current Western education system is effective in developing skills and talents in various fields, it struggles to foster individuals who exemplify the ideals of “self-cultivation, family harmony, effective governance, and global peace” (The original Chinese is “修身, 齐家, 治国, 平天下”). In this regard, modern universities are seen as inadequate in nurturing such moral and ethical leaders. Therefore, we need to develop a comprehensive

organizational structure tailored for the dissemination and inheritance of Eastern civilization, which can be referred to as “new-style academies”.

Academies are recognized as traditional institutions of culture and education in China, which are a natural result of scholars’ efforts in accumulating knowledge, conducting research, creating new ideas, and sharing information. This stresses the role of academies in the cultural and educational development of Chinese society [3]. The reason contemporary academies are termed “new” is that they differ from the existing Western collegiate education system designed for natural sciences and social sciences. Their more significant mission is to inherit and develop Chinese culture, ensuring the continuity of a nearly fragmented cultural heritage. These new-style academies must align with the needs of the contemporary period and the strategic development requirements of the nation, thus distinguishing themselves from traditional Chinese academies. Contemporary academies are one of the most effective roadways for Eastern culture to emerge from its challenges.

The core of Chinese studies lies in the cultivation of the mind and character, along with its practical application. Academies serve as places for the study of classics and teachings, thus new-style academies must adhere to the teaching of new classics of Chinese studies. The implication of “newness” in new Chinese studies is reflected in the interpretation of classical texts using modern scientific language, the transmission of these classics through a way of life, and the embodiment (practice) of these classics with a scientific attitude. In the current era, it is crucial to analyze classical Chinese texts with the use of modern scientific language. This method reflects a creative transformation and innovative progress of outstanding traditional culture, making it more relevant and understandable in contemporary contexts. To allow traditional humanistic thought to play a vital role in providing wisdom support for people’s lives and offering cultural assistance for their well-being, we must learn, inherit, research, and explore the wisdom of the sages according to the inherent principles of Chinese culture. The principles related to mental cultivation and the passing down of moral traditions, which are distinctive to Chinese civilization, should be central to the ethos of new-style academies. These teachings are viewed as the foundational essence that surely guide and enrich the educational approach of these institutions.

It should be firmly believed that Chinese-style education is supposed to be the premise of the proper operation of new-style academies, which emphasizes the inheritance of moral traditions and the restoration of the dignity of the teaching profession. Thus, upholding the study of Chinese classics and the practice of cultivating the mind, using China’s own disciplinary system, academic framework, and discourse system are initiative in order to project a Chinese voice to the world. These academies should play an active role in cultural dissemination, social education, and the cultivation of our national character, thereby enhancing the influence of Chinese culture.

3. The Relationship between Chinese Academy Education and Western College Education

3.1. The Limitations of Western College Education

The current talent cultivation model in domestic universities is a product of the gradual influence of Western education. The focus of education is on training students to become social individuals, while neglecting their intrinsic needs. Universities are organized into departments based on disciplines, and teaching is structured around specific majors. Faculty members are tasked with both teaching and research responsibilities, while the dynamics of students’ thought and daily management are left to personnel responsible for student affairs. Talent cultivation programs are primarily oriented towards employment, which essentially reflects a “disciplinary-based” vocational education model.

This disciplinary system is a cultural framework built on concepts, terminology, and logic, inheriting empirical knowledge formed through human experience. It relies on logical reasoning and is characteristic of the traditional learning found in modern natural sciences and social sciences, including mathematics, physics, literature, history, philosophy and so on. The hallmark of this approach is that the interaction between teachers and students principally focuses on the transmission of knowledge, with bare spiritual exchange or guidance. Once a teacher completes a lecture, the teaching task is considered fulfilled; students acquire knowledge and skills, earn credits through examinations, and both parties believe they have fulfilled their respective

responsibilities and obligations. However, this educational approach has significant drawbacks, particularly in overlooking the cultivation of students' character and the importance of life education.

We must acknowledge that current university students read too few classics, especially those of Chinese culture. Classical texts stem from the teachings of wise men and embody their wisdom. These classics are regarded as the spiritual foundation or core of the nation, reflecting its cultural and intellectual heritage. The inheritance of the spirit of the sages is not merely about the transmission of knowledge (knowledge inheritance), but more fundamentally, it is about the inheritance of spirit, the heart, and life (moral lineage inheritance). Moral lineage inheritance is based on a deep mutual understanding between teachers and students, representing the transmission of life and wisdom. The foundation of moral lineage lies in respecting teachers and valuing the way of education profession; students show respect and trust towards their teachers. Teachers, being highly knowledgeable, guide students by example through both words and actions. Over time, students are influenced by the character and behavior of their teachers, leading to a fusion of their lives and a spiritual unity. Therefore, moral lineage is the inheritance of character, thought, vision, realm, and wisdom between teachers and students. Studying and embracing classical texts involve understanding and adopting the virtues and life wisdom of the sages. Engaging with these classics is compared to immersing oneself in the experiential realm of these wise figures, suggesting a deep connection to their insights and way of life. University students should not only learn professional knowledge but also study the classics of Chinese culture, learn from the teachings of the sages, and understand the ways of virtuous living espoused by the men of virtues. Such an inheritance is difficult to achieve solely through Western college education.

3.2. Chinese Academy Education and Western College Education Should Complement Each Other

The importance of new-style academies is to develop a cohort of well-rounded individuals who are distinguished by both moral character and talent, embodying the qualities of both “Wen” (cultural refinement) and “Xian” (moral excellence). This group is expected to have lofty ideals, a broad knowledge base, specialized skills, and a commitment to service, thereby representing the modern “intelligentsia” of society.

For the purpose of deeply embedding the teachings of the sages into the thoughts and lives of students, as well as fostering the ongoing and healthy growth of these teachings, the establishment of academies is the sole effective approach. This emphasizes the importance of dedicated institutions in preserving and promoting traditional wisdom. In Chinese culture, the term “文献” has a fundamentally different meaning compared to its modern usage and should not be translated merely as “literature”. It consists of two concepts: “Wen” (文) and “Xian” (献). “Wen” refers to cultural classics preserved in written form, while “Xian” signifies the integration of the teachings of sages into one's body and mind, as well as the oral transmission and practical teaching of sage wisdom to the people. Currently, the situation in the country is characterized by a prevalence of “Wen” without “Xian,” and this condition urgently needs to be changed. The role of these academies is to assume the social responsibility of inheriting the teachings of the sages and transforming societal customs, thereby ensuring the continuity of the moral traditions. This will foster a society where “Wen” and “Xian” are both prominent, where civic virtues are enriched, and where civilization flourishes, ultimately facilitating the arrival of a flourishing time for the Chinese nation.

Focusing solely on the experiential wisdom of natural sciences and social sciences while neglecting the exploration of the essential nature of life through a priori wisdom education can lead to psychological issues such as a sense of emptiness among many university students. The practical knowledge derived from natural sciences and social sciences, along with the foundational knowledge provided by life wisdom, are equally vital for modern university students. It likens these two types of wisdom to the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart, indicating that both are essential for a well-rounded education and for navigating the complexities of contemporary life. The differences between Eastern and Western cultures determine that Chinese-style (academy) education and Western (modern) education cannot replace each other, but should instead respect and complement one another. Confucius said, “My Way is unified” [4], Mencius stated, “Those who possess the Way have much assistance; those who lose the Way have little assistance” [5], and Laozi emphasized “the Way follows nature” [6]. The ancient sages consistently highlighted the core position of the “Way (also referred to as

Dao)” in Chinese culture. Therefore, the cultural heritage of China should be anchored in the preservation of moral traditions, which serve as its essence. It asserts that Chinese-style education, particularly in academies, must continuously incorporate an awareness of these moral traditions into its structure and practices, ensuring that ethical values remain central to the educational experience.

For Chinese education to break free from various issues and return to the essence of cultivating virtue and nurturing talent, it is essential to improve the current education system, accurately grasp the characteristics of different civilizations, clarify the differences between “Chinese education” and “Western education,” and actively explore the revival of academy education. This approach positions academy education as a beneficial complement to modern (Western) education, facilitating the transformation of character education and lifelong education. This allows the Western education system to fulfill its mission in natural sciences and social sciences, while the Eastern education system accomplishes its mission in nurturing man’s inner existence. Both can complement each other and thrive together. Some courses in the academies can be opened to the public, making full use of higher education resources. By leveraging universities as focal points, these courses can provide a sound and scientific cognitive framework for people in modern society, moulding their outlooks on life, worldview, and values, and offering a stronghold of moral cultivation and a spiritual recharge station for those who have drifted away from their spiritual homeland.

4. The Dilemmas Faced by University Academies and Solutions

4.1. The Dilemmas Faced by University Academies

Professor Deng Hongbo pointed out in “The Overview of Chinese Academy Research 2023” that over 90% of academies in China are privately operated institutions and do not belong to the mainstream of Chinese education [7]. In recent decades, Chinese-style education which is also our indigenous education has already been marginalized outside the official education system in our country with the development space for Chinese civilization being severely constricted. Authentic Chinese-style education has reached a point of nonexistence. Looking into the twenty-first century, undoubtedly, modern universities that follow western education system still remain the mainstream of education. However, the blind spots of contemporary university education are increasingly becoming apparent.

Many university students are currently caught in a so-called “hollow” state, characterized by a lack of sense of life’s value and a state of perplexity. A significant part of the reason for this phenomenon is their failure to read or their inability to read Chinese Classics effectively. When it comes to the Four Books and Five Classics (The original Chinese is 《四书》, 《五经》), which are regarded as Confucian classics and traditional textbooks, very few people show interest. The second reason for their “hollow” state is that contemporary university students lack awareness and inheritance of the cultural history of the Chinese nation, the classics of Chinese studies, and the spirit of Eastern civilization, which severs them from the roots of our national culture. A mind devoid of the nourishment provided by a spiritual lineage may inevitably feel empty, helpless, and lacking in confidence.

To change the current state of restlessness and confusion among university students, it is indispensable to connect with their own civilizational culture and fully immerse themselves in it. Only then can their roots take hold, allowing the tree of life to grow thick with vital force and flourish. The term “culture” originates from The Book of Changes (《易经》), specifically from the hexagram “Bi” (贲卦), which states: “The interplay of hardness and softness is the celestial phenomenon; civilization brings about restraint, while human culture shapes the world. Observing celestial phenomena helps to discern changes in time, while observing human culture aids in transforming the world” [8]. Culture involves reversing and eliminating all the dark and negative aspects of human nature, while highlighting and promoting the positive and bright sides, thus spreading and transforming the world. Culture is the genetic code of a nation’s spirit, the imprint of the soul, the home of life, and the destination of human existence. Cultural heritage is fundamental to a nation’s unity and serves as a key indicator of its national identity. It advocates the importance of shared values, traditions, and history in fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among the people of a nation. “The relationship between a nation and its culture is one of blood and flesh, of form and shadow; thus, when one thrives, the other thrives, and when one declines, the other declines; they cannot be separated for even a moment” [9].

It should be noted that in ancient times, academies held a well-defined position within the educational landscape. They were recognized as important institutions dedicated to learning and scholarship, playing a significant role in the education of individuals and the dissemination of knowledge. However, today, most academies are privately operated non-educational institutions without an authoritative identity. Although some academies established within universities may have official recognition, they tend to adopt Western educational models. As a result, they fail to operate according to the principles of Chinese-style education, which prevents them from genuinely reflecting the true essence of traditional academies. In order to preserve Chinese culture and advance Chinese-style education, it is crucial to reinstate the educational significance and characteristics of academies. This involves proposing for their acknowledgment as an integral component of the national education system, thereby reinforcing their role in cultural transmission and educational development. Currently, many university academies face practical issues such as a lack of dedicated teachers, absence of systematic curricula, and scattered teaching content. New-style academies should fully draw on the mature experiences of modern educational systems and boldly explore and actively practice in areas such as educational models, teaching planning, curriculum development, textbook compilation, academic administration, and teaching practices.

4.2. Basic Ideas for the Construction of University Academies

The new era calls for new-style academies. Currently, university academies should redress the biases in the development of academies in this new period by offering a certain number of full-time, medium- to long-term courses, providing students with an immersive learning environment and conditions that engage them thoroughly. Restoring the educational status of academies is sure to encourage their focus on character education and lifelong learning. The model institution “Gele Academy at Sichuan International Studies University” (The Chinese version is “四川外国语大学歌乐书院”) possesses excellent infrastructure and would be potential to serve as a pioneering example for new-style academies. Specific educational strategies can be developed in terms of curriculum design, teaching materials and resources, and faculty qualification.

4.2.1. Curriculum Design

Elective and required courses should be set according to the principles of Chinese-style education, with small class sizes following a private school model. A credit system should be adopted, linked to students’ academic performance. Teaching plans and assessment methods should be developed that can assist students’ professional studies. This can ensure that students’ professional learning and the enhancement of their character development may progress simultaneously.

4.2.2. Teaching Materials and Resources

The curriculum should primarily adopt those classics that represent the essence of Chinese culture, such as the Four Books and Five Classics of Confucianism and texts from Daoism and so on. Bilingual editions (Chinese and English versions) are priorities for the purpose of incorporating the unique characteristics of Sichuan International Studies University. The textbooks should be recompiled with the inheritance of Chinese cultural moral traditions as the guiding principle. Supplementary materials ought to be written in a manner that aligns with Chinese ways of thinking and expressing habits.

4.2.3. Faculty Qualification

Faculty should be chosen from those teachers who are aspiring to engage in Chinese studies education and who must undergo intensive training on Chinese ethics and conducts. The academy also needs a group of dedicated instructors with a strong foundation in Chinese classical literature and culture to teach and serve as mentors. Foreign language faculty can take on part-time roles to assist full-time teachers in providing academic and cultural guidance to students, thereby demonstrating the advantage of the Dual Academy education (Chinese academy and modern college).

The educational philosophy of the academy is based on its distinctive methods of knowledge transmission

inherent in Eastern civilization. It focuses on sharing life wisdom, including values like moral character, open-mindedness, and inner conscience, through the interactions between teachers and students. Teachers involved in the transmission of civilization should fulfill dual roles as both academic advisors and life mentors. They are expected to facilitate a holistic inheritance of life lessons through both verbal instruction and practical experiences, so as to nurture a profound spiritual bond between themselves and their students. The reason the ancient academy system could better facilitate the transmission of civilization compared to modern classroom teaching is that this mode of interaction between teachers and students can more easily allow for a shared life experience and mutual understanding.

It's worth noting that all teachings of the sages are not meant for mere research or discussion but are to be "embodied (practiced)." To enter the range of Chinese culture, one must digest and inherit this civilization with their entire being—both body and spirit—and ultimately defend it with their whole life. Through the mentorship and sharing of experiences from one individual to another, life can remain in its most dynamic and genuine form. This process of "life passing to life" captures the essence of personal and cultural transmission. It further underscores the importance of academies in today's context, underlining their role in facilitating this vital exchange of wisdom and experience. By infusing the power of life inheritance into our foreign language institutions' talent cultivation model, we can form a Chinese-style "Dual Academy (Chinese academy and Modern college)" education model, thereby fostering language and cultural communicators with a firm cultural stance and a solid humanistic foundation, ready to promote the national strategy of "the global dissemination of Chinese culture".

5. Conclusions

Currently, promoting the spirit of Chinese academies, encouraging the study of Chinese classics, practicing the development of individuals' minds and character, and redefining the national identity of China are all critically important endeavors in contemporary domestic society. These efforts are of prime importance for strengthening the cultural values and enhancing the moral fabric of our nation. Chinese education should initiatively explore the establishment of new-style academies, with the inheritance of Eastern civilization as their core, following the inherent principles of Chinese culture, to transmit and practice the wisdom of the sages and revive Chinese culture. Professor Huang Yuanshen once lamented the loss of the Chinese language as the mother tongue of the Chinese people in modern times and called for the notion that "those who possess the Chinese language competence will win the world" [10]. Today, as researchers and learners of foreign languages and cultures, we should keep pace with the progress of the times and make foreign language institutions places nourished by Chinese culture. Contemporary educators must always carry a sense of responsibility and mission as stakeholders, contributing to the development of new-style academies and the great rejuvenation of Chinese civilization.

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