

Chinese Education

from

The Western Viewpoint

By

YEN SUN HO

M. A. NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

RAND McNALLY & COMPANY

CHICAGO

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I

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE following pages contain a general survey of the educational development of China up to the present time. This is, as far as the writer's knowledge goes, a pioneer work and, as such, contains probably many errors. He has tried, however, to be accurate throughout in the selection of material and the translation of original sources.

The occidental students of educational history generally have a hazy and inadequate idea of what the term "Chinese education" really connotes. Some speak of the examination system, which forms but a link in the whole chain of the educational development of China, as though it constituted the whole history of Chinese education. While it is true that old Chinese education since the founding of the Appointment System

had been of a humanistic type, it does not follow, as Professor Monroe dogmatically asserts, that Chinese literature is so inferior to the occidental classical literature that "when the general results upon intellectual life and social development are considered, there is little basis for comparison."¹ If Chinese literature has not produced great results upon social and intellectual life, it has been due not to its lack of content-value but to the emphasis laid upon its formal side. To look for real Chinese literature under the old system of education would be like the attempt to discover the real Aristotle in the period of scholasticism in European history. Monroe also states, in reference to the content of Chinese education, that in studying the teachings of Chinese literature "the principle is seldom discovered on account of the precepts."² He would reduce

¹ Monroe, Paul. *History of Education*, p. 43.

² *Ibid.*, p. 20.

the literature of China to a mere body of recipes and prescriptions. In support of his assertions, he cites a few passages from Li Ki, one of the thirteen classics, but does not seem to know that the book he quotes from is especially intended to be a book of "Don'ts." One is not justified in making a generalization out of a single instance.

I have no intention to engage in a polemic against Professor Monroe, but wish to point out the fact that the aim and content of old Chinese education has not been taken at its true value. In this paper I have endeavored to take an objective attitude toward the subject and to reduce the personal element to a minimum. Some errors, I hope, may be thus avoided.

The old education, too antiquated and defective to meet the needs of the modern man, has been discarded once for all, and in the effort to reorganize her educational system, China has much

to learn from the Occident. It is for this reason that the whole subject has been treated from the western viewpoint, that is, with the view to discovering points of resemblance and contrast between occidental and Chinese education.

II

EDUCATION BEFORE THE CHOW DYNASTY

(2357-1122 B.C.)

BEFORE the time of Confucius (552-449 B.C.) the wisdom of Chinese antiquity had built up settled principles as to education, and these settled principles had been handed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years, taught by father to son, and regarded as the highest wisdom.

The substance of these principles was that virtue is built up not so much through good statutes as by means of right customs and pious habits. Here imitation plays an important role. The ancients in China said that men naturally and unconsciously mold their lives according to the models they admire. A state is in a bad condition when it has to resort to legal enactments to hold

back vice and crime. They said that wise magistrates would not post up long proclamations and elaborate decrees in public places, but would rather see to it that the people have a love for justice and that honesty is firmly rooted in their minds. Natural sentiments are exalted above legal restraints. It is ineffective to try to reform a people by hedging them about with burdensome police regulations. Laws were in danger of degenerating into mere dead letters unless the people, for the control of whom they are designed, have been properly trained and bred to a strict obedience and respect thereto.

With these preliminary remarks, the aim of Chinese education in this period becomes obvious. Briefly stated, it was to give the people such training and discipline, both by word of mouth and by living examples, as to enable them to live the right kind of life and to be good citizens. Education was regarded

as the least expensive but the most effective means of social control. This aim is, to be sure, a narrow one. But that it was understood in that remote age is a significant fact. May we not regard it as an adumbration of the truth embodied in the modern systems of national education, which was first perceived in the Occident by a few great minds, as, for example, "the Early American settlers, who feared lest good learning should be buried in the graves of their fathers, and who held a simple faith in the divine efficacy of education with the same earnestness that they cherished their religion; and Luther who held it the first duty of citizens to educate their children; Knox, too, the father of Scotch education; and Mulcaster, the great English school-master."¹

The curriculum was determined by this practical and ethical aim. History

¹ Hughes, R. E. *The Making of Citizens*, p. 3.

records that the Emperor Shun (2357–2206 B.C.) appointed Chi Minister of Teaching to superintend the teaching of what ought to be translated as the “Five Humanities.”¹ These are the ethical principles that should govern five relations in old Chinese society, namely, those between father and son, king and subject, husband and wife, old and young, and friend and friend. These relations are respectively love, righteousness, attention to their honors, respect, and sincerity. The idea was that with these principles inculcated in the minds of the people, social stability was secured.

As to the organization of the schools, we have no sufficient data to enable us to arrive at any definite conclusion. Education was yet in its rudimentary stage. The name for the common school during the Hsia Dynasty (2205–1766 B.C.) was Si Haü, which was later changed to Tso Hsioh in the Yin Dynasty

¹ Giles, H. A. *Chinese Four Books.*

(1766-1122 B.C.).¹ This brief survey prepares us for a study of the education in the next period, the Chow Dynasty.

¹ Giles, H. A. *Ancient History or Shu Classic.*

III

EDUCATION DURING THE CHOW DYNASTY

(1122-249 B.C.)

WE ARE now entering upon a period which the Chinese regard as the Golden Age in their history. It was marked by great changes in the various departments of life. Great advance was made in different directions, in science, education, philosophy, and the like. Indeed, it was in that age that Chinese culture reached the highest development that it has ever attained: hence the constant reference to the Chow Dynasty in the writings of Chinese writers. Here our interest is limited to the educational aspect. The education of this period has never been touched upon by foreign writers on Chinese education, not even by Professor Monroe in his *History of Education*. Hence it is

with the view of supplying this deficiency that this chapter is written.

Aim. The aim of education in this period was, as might be expected, a further development of that in the preceding one. It was still social and ethical, but its broad and much more liberal character admits of a variety of subjects of instruction of which the preceding period had not the remotest hint. Confucius speaks of this period as an age of refinement and culture.¹ It was really the Periclean Age in Chinese history. It might be said that here we have the first attempt made to secure what is now known as a liberal education, as we shall see when we turn to consider the content.

Content. The curriculum of the lower schools consisted of reading, music, poetry, calisthenics, and ethical training, while that of schools of a higher grade (corresponding to the present-day colleges)

¹ Giles, H. A. *Chinese Four Books.*

embraced what may be called the "Six Liberal Arts." They were (1) the five ceremonies, (2) the six kinds of music, (3) the five kinds of archery, (4) the five kinds of chariot driving, (5) the six kinds of writing, and (6) the nine kinds of mathematics.¹ Here the content of education reminds one of the Trivium and the Quadrivium, or of "the rudiments of love, of war, and of religion" which formed the educational ideal in the age of chivalry. It was a combination of the Spartan and Athenian ideals, intellectual and æsthetic elements mingled with a considerable amount of military and physical training. However far short of the ideal this may fall, it can hardly be gainsaid that here we have a manifest endeavor to secure an harmonious and symmetrical development of body and mind, so characteristic of the Athenian education. Moreover, we find here a dim realization of the

¹ *Chou Li*, one of the thirteen classics.