The Impact Of Confucianism On Chinese Education

Education is one of the most important developments in society. It is not just about reading, writing, and being able to do basic arithmetic. Education allows people the advantage of being the leader of their own lives. Finding out answers to mysteries and curiosities has led our species for hundreds of thousands of years. Gain knowledge and understanding is an integral part of our daily ritual. Education empowers people to obtain a good job and be successful in their endeavors. The gift of knowledge allows people to reach their life goals and ambitions. It allows people to do things that are able to improve the lives of everyone in society. Enhancing living conditions and ways of life has been the goal of human civilization since the beginning of our species. The education system in China instills values and skills to its students. Building up a person's value and worth through education is heavily influenced by China's traditional culture. Most of this culture stems from Confucianism, a system of thought and behavior originating in China's ancient history. Confucianism is a structure of philosophical and ethical teachings founded by Confucius and later refined by Mencius. This structure was built on a religious foundation in order to establish social values, institutions, and abstract ideals of Chinese society. Confucianism is important to the Chinese people as it heavily influences Chinese education due to its model that supports achievements.

Confucian ideologies have a strong impact on how school subjects are taught and learned through education, especially in STEM-related subjects. Over the past few decades, it has become evident that East Asian countries consistently produce top-level mathematics and science students. East Asian students in grades four and eight routinely outperform students of other countries (Wang, p. 305). While some education researchers are able to deduce that Chinese students do well in mathematics because they are taught using rote learning or repetition, others have concluded that it is due to China's more abstract way of teaching. Instead of emphasizing the understanding of subjects with concrete examples, China makes a point of emphasizing theoretical thinking after the students had shown an understanding of the concrete examples. Chinese teachers strongly emphasis mathematics content, process, and students' learning when preparing lesson plans in order to better follow Confucian beliefs and methodologies (Wang, p. 306). Confucianism heavily impacts Chinese collective understanding and insight. By the late 19th century, China was heavily "Confucianized," meaning Confucian values and practices took part in the daily lives of most of their population and their systems of government.

Confucius knew that environment and practice played a key role in education. A person's future depends on what they are surrounded by in their youth. "People can become different through learning and practice" (Wang, p. 307). Because of this, a teacher's role is extremely important to the development of students. There is an old Chinese saying that "If teachers want to give students one cup of water, they should have one bucket of water of their own," meaning that Chinese teachers are supposed to have superiorly refined knowledge on whatever subject matter they are educating their students on. The Confucian ideology of learning and teaching allows Chinese scholars and educators to retain an open mind in order to see what way best fits when educating. Confucius' heuristic teaching which requires mathematics teachers to encourage students to learn enthusiastically and to excite they're wanting to learn and think is popular in Chinese education communities (Wang, p. 312). An example of this is with Chinese

textbooks which are usually incomplete in order to require inductive reasoning to introduce the concepts and procedures. Confucian philosophy in education has deeply affected Chinese learning and teaching and has without a doubt had a large impact on mathematics education. The success of Chinese students from kindergarten through high school in mathematics can almost certainly be attributed to the ideologies and methodologies of Confucius.

Confucianism's principle of harmony impacts education and its sustainability in China. Harmony was taught by Chinese sages as a practice of acceptance, fortitude, respect, patience, and civil rights. This Confucian concept has significant associations for moral education. Confucian tradition in which society is in harmony is viewed as one of the highest moral ideals and goals of personal conduct. The value held on harmony is able to be seen as a preference for agreement and adjustment over conflict. Historically, this Confucian force has allowed Chinese people to act in accordance with one another in order to reach meaningful goals together. Chinese students are raised and encouraged to respect people and educators instead of disputing or questioning them (Feng and Newton, paragraph 3). Confucianism demonstrates an array of laws and rules of behavior and actions regarding the role and allowable ways of behavior for different members of Chinese society both public and private. These rules are not entirely a thing in Confucian ideals since singular morality is also public morality. Confucianism suggests that everyone who governs and leads should do so with altruism, compassion, and justice. In return, those who are in the leading position should be treated with respect. Obedience is a moral act that needs to be ingrained into people in order for them to understand what is right and wrong. "The end of Confucian education is to guide people to pursue moral perfection in realizing the life that performs goodness and benevolence" (Feng and Newton, paragraph 11). Although Confucian ethics may seem authoritarian or prescriptive, the goal of Confucius was to make moral education not something to be commanded but something to incentive and invigorate a person's moral beliefs. Confucius discussed classical poetry in the Analects, saying that it entices one's imagination and allows them to seek unity and harmony with others. He also discussed how a man could be in agreement with others without being an echo and can echo without being in agreement (Feng and Newton, paragraph 15). By this, Confucius meant that being in harmony is not just a convention but a connection that has to have consented with complete understanding and spirit. This Confucian principle has allowed China to positively grow and develop over the past two millennia. Not only did this standard hold up in the past, but it also continues to play a prominent role in the education of students in modern-day China.

A case study done on a master's course on sustainable education in China shows the implications of the principle of harmony for Chinese sustainability education practices. The course advocated for unanimous and consistent thinking as well as the recognition and attempt of realistic activities. This differs with the stance of learners being individuals with thoughtful analytical skills who are able to accommodate different values. The study allows one to argue that the way in which the principle of harmony both advocates for something productive to be done but also narrows the greatest extent to which the action can be accomplished. Collective reasoning and thinking assist in the progress of unified action. Because of this, "The Confucian moral framework in which it is rooted, invokes the possibility of negotiating the simultaneous yet contradictory demands for social change and social stability" (Feng and Newton, paragraph 35). The principle idea of consensual thinking is that it incites people to figure out what it is that they agree upon and then allows them to act together in order to accomplish that common goal. Harmony is able to dishearten and dissuade critical thinking because those critical thoughts may call into question the genuineness of the agreed-upon plan. The Confucian concept of harmony is settled deep inside the people of China, whether consciously or unconsciously. Education is

the main focus of the Chinese government as they plan on building the country to be more and more innovative. The concept of harmony is a way in which the country is able to promote people to participate in decision-making and unified action. In this way, harmony is not an obstruction to analytical reasoning, but a strong power for attracting and allowing Chinese learners to create a viable future for the coming generations. Its emphasis on mutual respect based on the moral character of the single person rather than the command of an authority figure is a strong ethical principle in modern Chinese education. The case study shows that harmony is able to empower people to act in unity as a strong force for the betterment of society. Harmony may act as an obstruction to analytical reasoning, but it can also be used in ways that allow people to focus on critical problems that face the country.

Chinese universities have a unique aspect that traces back to their Confucian learning traditions, reflecting an anthroprocosmic worldview. The “Anthropocosmic view is central to Confucian holistic humanism, which asserts that humanity is part of a continuum consisting of community, Earth and Heaven. With the self as a ‘centre of relationships’, the individual is interconnected with an ever-expanding network of human relatedness, extending from the self to the family, the community, the country, the world and beyond” (Lu and Jover, paragraph 1). The unity of humanity and the universe is an ideal that many leading scholars of classical Chinese studies conclude as the most important contribution to the world. Tu Weiming, an important representative for the Third Wave of Confucianism, conceives that the anthroprocosmic worldview is a compelling addition to the equilibrium and sustainability of the development of the world in today’s age. Even though everyone is self-governing and free, everyone is also inescapably co-dependent and attached with an always growing system of connections throughout the world and beyond. “The human form of life envisioned by Confucius is not anthropocentric. Rather, it is anthropocosmic in the sense that there is implicit mutuality, constant communication, and dynamic interaction between the anthropological world and the cosmic order” (Lu and Jover, paragraph 19). This perspective about life is seen in Chinese education. Self-dependence and growth through learning is key aspect of Confucianism. Chinese scholars do not stop at the search of information, but rather use the information in order to better society. Confucianism promotes engaging in society, being involved in politics, and dedicating oneself to the spiritual transformation of the world. Education is valuable for both the individual and the public, as stated by the earliest Chinese books on society and education. “Education is essential in building a country and in guiding its people. Excel in public office and learn. Excel in learning and assume public office” (Lu and Jover, paragraph 20). As a teacher, Confucius believed that education was the backbone of a good society and country. Focusing on ethics and morality, Confucius’ teachings served as a moral code of administration. This moral code was successfully integrated into state administration through an award-based system that eased the progress of selecting people that were best for the job. For over two millennia, the population of China has reaped the rewards of education by attaining a higher individual status in order to serve the country.

China understands the importance of an educated workforce. Confucian higher education is propped up by an ancient tradition of respect and appreciation for education and scholarship. An educated population encourages economic growth and societal betterment. Confucianism influences the higher education system throughout China, where they have been following a “Confucian Model” since the 1990s. This Confucian system has four complementary features. Each feature depends on one other. The first feature is a strong nation-state policy with close management of people and projects, which is the core of the model. This guides the course for the design of investments and research. These selected investments push for an increase in

participation in education. The Confucian Model without this nation-state feature is impossible. It also could not exist without family commitment. The goal of the Chinese government is to guarantee that their universities and colleges are able to sustain themselves. The second feature is the growth of college and university education participation along with an increase in the ratio of tuition costs being funded privately rather by the public. The third feature is a “one chance” national test procedure at the end of a student’s education, where it is decided whether or not they are able to attend college or university. “The examination mediates social competition in education and focuses the investment by families while legitimating the university hierarchy and harmonising educational/social outcomes on behalf of the state” (Marginson, paragraph 20). The fourth feature is a growing public investment in research science along with quick growth in and enhancement of research activity in general. This method is distinguished by the rapid expansion in both educational participation and research activity simultaneously. The Confucian Model accomplishes these expansions with a small quantity of taxes, allowing for the growth of capital resources without being a burden on the population. Confucian values are an important aspect as to how this evolution in education and research is able to work. The want for higher education is stronger in China and other East Asian countries than anywhere else in the world (Marginson, paragraph 22). Participation in education is deeply embedded in the culture of the Chinese people because of Confucianism. Confucian traditions in education are the basis of cultural conditions that help the roles of the government and population.

An exemplary Confucian text on Chinese education is the Xueji, which speaks of teaching and learning. The text was officially declared as a separately published portion in Liji, a text speaking of ritual that was included as one of the Five Classics which are associated with Confucius who formed the foundation of Confucian education. It is one of the earliest texts in ancient China to methodically go over the systems of teaching, learning, philosophy, methods, roles of students and teachers, and educational practices. The Xueji helps people to understand the method and practice of teaching in China. The Xueji states: “Exemplary persons (junzi??) have said that the highest virtue is not manifested through any official position or authority, that the greatest dao in the world is not a matter of mastering any particular skill or occupation, that real trust and credibility among people transcends any particular agreement, and that the great rhythm of nature is not limited to any particular season. Scrutiny into these four phenomena will provide insight into both teaching and learning” (McEwan and Di, p. 5). This is the root of Confucian philosophy on education.

China’s Confucian tradition is highly relevant in the dynamic state of society in the modern day. Confucian education since the beginning was focused on the self-improvement of people who had the potential to be leaders in society. A good portion of what was said in the Analects, Mencius, Xunzi, and other classic texts is applicable in government today. When dealing with personal issues that have the possibility of intruding into the political and educational spheres as well as disturbing the peace, Confucianism is often looked towards for guidance. Confucianism’s conception of the self “Recognizes not only external limits imposed on the pursuit of self-interest, or even on the pursuit of certain ideal values, but also the need for an inner, self-limiting process by which opposing or competing values are held in balance” (de Bary, p. 7). The true pursuit of self-interest in Confucianism is done through reciprocity (shu) with others in the family, community, school, and country. There are limitations on how far one is able to push their reciprocity. An example of this would be education, which of course is highly valued in Confucianism. Education is important to democracy as it allows the population to be able to analyze and utilize the information given to them. The ability for everyone to have access to education on all levels is crucial to Confucians, but in reality, that is hard to

accomplish. In practice, schooling for all became a difficulty as it was realized that there are limited resources and a high amount of competition for them. In order to balance this, Confucians needed to look towards more democratic values, taking forms in examinations and assessments of community ideals. The government also set up stricter models for how to conduct oneself in the community, valuing conformity in the population. “Be filial to your parents, respectful of seniors, kind and helpful to neighbors, conscientious in the practice of one’s occupation,” became the moral motto of East Asia in the late Meiji period (de Bary, p. 9). Zhu Xi’s philosophy on education was about intellectual and moral learning. He wanted these lessons to be for the whole person, starting early with elementary school and going on until the maturity of the Great Man (daren) into a Noble Person (junzi) (de Bary, p. 14). Being a better person in order to support the whole community is the foundation of Confucianism.

Confucianism has clearly been a substantial aspect in the growth and development of China through means of education. Everyone’s life is impacted by what they learn and how they utilize what they learn. The education system in China instills values and skills to its students. Confucian ideologies have a strong impact on how school subjects are taught and learned through education. China’s Confucian tradition is highly relevant in the dynamic state of society in the modern day. Chinese universities have a unique aspect that traces back to their Confucian learning traditions, reflecting an anthroprocosmic worldview. The Confucian value of community allows students, scholars, and educators to think not just of themselves but of the country as a whole. If one person benefits from education, then everyone benefits. China understands the importance of an educated population for the growth of society. No matter the difficulties and practical failures the country of China has faced in recent centuries, Confucianism has remained a strong source to look back on for support.