

On the Relationship Between the Rhythm of Education and Human Society

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Abstract

The founder for process philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead, once clearly proposed the principles for “the rhythm of education”. With the increasing popularity of process philosophy, people became more aware of the importance of “process”, starting to turn from inquiry into the ontology of things to paying close attention on the “existence” itself, which in education appears as emphasizing people’s living conditions and way of practice. However, because of the complicating factors of society and people, in the actual process of education, people do not have a comprehensive understanding and accurate grasp to the issue of the rhythm of education, which in turn results in the chaos in the rhythm of education, causing education to deviate from the rules and needs of social development and people’s physical and mental development. Social development and people’s physical and mental development all have their own rhythm, therefore, only when the rhythm of education matches the rhythm of these two can it be made possible to have a harmonious and sustainable development for people, society, and education itself.

Key words: Educational law; Educational rhythm; Social rhythm; Physical and mental rhythm; Life rhythm

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INTRODUCTION

Whitehead once used “the rhythm of education” to refer to an educational principle: “Different subjects and different learning methods should be adopted when the intelligence development of students reaches a proper stage.” (Whitehead, 2002), and pointed out that the intelligence development will experience “the romantic stage, the precise stage, and comprehensive utilization stage”, and the existence and change of stages is a continuously cyclic process. With the boom of process philosophy, people became more aware of the importance of “process”, and started to gradually turn from inquiry into the ontology of things to paying close attention on the “existence” itself, which in education appears as emphasizing people’s living conditions and way of practice. However, because of the complicating factors of society and people, in the actual process of education, people do not have a comprehensive understanding and accurate grasp to the issue of the rhythm of education, which in turn results in the chaos in the rhythm of education, causing education to deviate from the rules and needs of social development and people’s physical and mental development. As we know, social development and people’s physical and mental development all have their own rhythm, only when the rhythm of education matches the rhythm of these two can it be made possible to have a harmonious and sustainable development for people, society, and education itself. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a thorough discussion on the rhythm of education and the rhythm of social and people’s physical and mental development, opening up roads for the further development of education.

1. THE PRIVITY BETWEEN “RHYTHM” AND “EDUCATION”

Rhythm, normally refers to the alternate, regular strong/weak, long/short phenomena in music. In today’s society,

it is widely used to describe the rhythmic changes of nature, society or people's activities. "Jie" refers to an instrument that uses knocking to control the rhythm of music in ancient China (Xu et al., 1992). In modern Chinese, jie mainly refers to the mark of the critical point in the connection between one thing and another. In addition, jie also has a meaning which means restriction, control and moderation in the transitional point between quantitative and qualitative change, having a limitation is jie (Jin & Lü, 2005). "Zou", means contribution in its basic meaning, it also means having a movement. After jie and zou are used together, extending from music to many aspects in nature, society, people and things, they become a word with rich connotations. However, in the complex meanings of "jie zou" we can still find its characteristics and law.

The characteristics of rhythm, on one hand, lie in its regularity and timeliness; on the other hand, lie in its flexibility and creativity. The former appears as the specification and adjustment conducted by the development of things according to their own outside and inside conditions. *Ci Yuan* says: "Jie, means stop. Zou, means advance." Rhythm can be understood as an inter-relationship between "stop" and "advance". "Advance" is the inexorable trend for things' development and change, "stop" is an acknowledgement for things' "time" and "position" as well as a controlling principle for the primary and secondary order, order of priority for their developments. These two are mutually conditional and blend with each other. *Xiang Zhuan - Gen* says: "A gentleman only considers what he can control about", which embodies a rhythm of work that is obeying time and position. *Li Ji - Yue Ji* says: "Music is the touch by heart; sound is the expression from of music; rhythm is the decoration of sound." Here, rhythm was regarded as a decoration for "xiang", i.e., the outside expression form of xiang, and this form has unlimited possibilities, it is also flexible and can be created. What it embodies is the space for rhythm change, which is recognition to the diversity and possibility of development of things.

Education is an activity of "the teachers teach and the students imitate" and "making the students do the right things" in human society, which is a process of constantly transforming people's experience on the road of life. This process has rhythm, and correlates closely with the development laws of society and people. Rousseau (2010) once said, every one of us will receive three types of education, "the intrinsic development of our talent and organs, which is the education of nature; others teach us how to utilize this development, which is the education of people; we receive excellent experience from the things that influence us, which is the education of things". Just as *Zhong Yong* said: "The natural gift of people is called XING, following natural instincts to do things is called DAO, following the principle of DAO is called JIAO", the education of nature is just as the

education of natural gift, everyone's natural instincts have their own gene forms and the possible space and direction for development; the education of people is as the education of following natural instincts to do things, everyone forms the principles and methods for behaving themselves in society according to their own "xing", which reflects the characteristics and personality of people, is the foundation for people to conduct exchange activities; the education of things comes from the test of practice, people's "following natural instincts to do things" brings about the collision between ideal and reality, the verification between cause and result, people gradually realize the pros and cons, true and false, good and evil of their own way of practice, thus conducting self-criticism and modification, offering guidance for their own future selection of practice.

During this process, in order to reach goals or aims, education must follow the rhythm of various related things. Previously *Xue Ji* said:

The education methods in a university are: Stop before the inappropriate things happen, this is called forestall, guide at the appropriate times, this is called timely, teach without exceeding students' receptive abilities, this is called acclimation, let students view each other to obtain benefits, this is called learning from each other by exchanging views. These four points are the reasons for education to be successful.

Confucius also said:

Children should filial to their parents at home, respect old brothers outside, be cautious in what they say and do, keep creditable for what they say, broadly love people, stay closely with people with virtue, and if they still have strength or energy to spare after doing so, they should use it to learn various knowledge.

Education is a marathon penetrating one's whole life, which occurs gradually and subtly following the needs of social and people's self-existence. Education is not single direction; it is an exchange experience between the educator and educatee, the two sides all have room for growth during this period. Jaspers (1991) once said,

people's education re-appears at everyone's body; in the world where people grow, through parents and school's planned education, freely utilized studying institution, at last combining what they saw and heard in life with personal inner activities, till then, people's education can become people's second natural instinct.

Good education needs to proceed with rhythm, keeping a privity between education and rhythm, conducting educational activities orderly, in a fast or slow, intense or relaxed way, always based on the developing laws of society and people.

2. THE SOCIAL RHYTHM AND EDUCATIONAL RHYTHM

The social rhythm refers to the rhythm by which people conduct daily social and personal activities, learning the

social rhythm is one of the foundations to make education proceed with rhythm. In ancient China, people study astronomy, following the heaven, learning from “heaven” the doctrines of conducting oneself, regulate people with astronomy, regulate people’s rules with rules of heaven, regulate life and social order with the laws of heaven. In such a society, people’s daily activities almost always follow the “time of heaven” and “law of season” to proceed, and through the “order of government” regulate the increasing complex social affairs. Our country’s most authoritative seasonal literature, *Li Ji – Yue Ling*, exhibits the model examples of Chinese ancient social rhythm following the rhythm of nature. *Yue Ling* used many natural phenomena (including astronomy, weather, and biology) as indicating marks, with one year twelve months as a period, deeming that all people’s activities should follow the main melody of natural change in a year, i.e., planting at spring, growing at summer, harvesting at autumn, and storing at winter.¹ Star images and phonological change are also the basis for setting the times of social activities (Wang, 2014). In addition, Chinese calendar sets “leap month” based on the moon’s profit and loss cycle, exhibiting Chinese people’s specific accommodation attitude toward natural tempo and life tempo, exhibiting a cyclic alternation abounding in ups and downs, elasticity and resembling the moon’s profit and loss, which is different from the western calendar that resembles the evolutionism-like linear addition, facing unlimited mechanical progress (Li, 2007).

The social rhythm during the agricultural era fits with the natural rhythm, at the same time keeping people’s simple natural instinct. With the arriving of the industrial era, the social rhythm had a sudden change. The development of society accelerates, the replacing speed for all kinds of science and technology is gradually quickens, the period for the birth, pass, consumption, and feedback for all kinds of information is gradually shortened, this requires people to grasp more knowledge than others in a limited time and handle things more efficiently than others, forcing people to adapt to a “fast tempo” atmosphere. However, not everyone can or must adapt to this fast tempo. This atmosphere not only disturbs people’s life rhythm, but also results in various physiological and psychological diseases of people, also causing the immoral phenomenon in society to become increasingly severe and resulting in the chaos of social rhythm.

¹ The main melody in spring is about the intercourse of yin and yang, integration of heaven and earth, initiation of all things, thus people’s activities should be about helping and protecting life; the main melody in summer is about the peak of yang, life continuously growing and increasing of length, people’s activities should foster the growth; in autumn yin grows, yang retreats, it is harsh, people’s activities should be mainly about storing; in winter yin and yang separate, heaven and earth are not connected, all things hide, so people should stay inside and rest quietly to cope with it.

The chaos of social rhythm in some degree covers the positive development trend of the whole society. What people see and hear is more about degeneration and corruption, and is less about harmony and joy. All these raised higher requirements for education. On one hand, education needs to face the emerging practical issues; on the other hand, it needs to lead the social development trend and cannot ignore the sprouts and developments of some social phenomena, instead, it should carry out rational analysis and reasonable management and control to them. This requires that education, on one hand, can keep up with the speed of real development, i.e., allowing its own response to “quicken”; on the other hand, can also control the unreasonable development speed in society, i.e., leading something to “slow down”. During this process, accurately identifying things’ priority and relative importance is the key to deciding whether or not the rhythm of education is correct.

The mode of depending on investment to fuel rapid economic development in China in the past is somehow obsolete, at present Chinese economy enters new normal. The economic growth cannot depend on the mode in the past; instead, we must capture the economic “downshift period” and speed up the process of solving overcapacity, promoting the industrial transformation and upgrading. Under this background, the industrialization trend of education and the resulting system and structure of education should also change; they also need “downshift” and need to slow down and see clearly the road ahead. The natural environment on earth continuously deteriorates, natural resources shrink sharply, diseases jump. All these are closely related to the overquick rhythm of social development. For better living environment of human being, social development needs to reposition, and the value of education also needs to redefine. For the whole human being, what is truly troubling is not the enrollment rate, employment rate; instead, it is the health rate, survival rate..... “A harmonious society must be one that puts life in the No. one place! Life needs to be taken care of, and needs to control the rhythm a little bit.” (He, 2012) What the Chinese society that needs “downshift” currently needs most is balance, the balance between material and spirit, the balance between poor and rich, between gentle and simple. The difference between poor and rich, gentle and simple, does not exist naturally, instead, it is a man-made standard, resulting from authority and bias. During the process of promoting the socialization of people, education needs to overcome as far as possible the influence of human factors such as authority and bias in the social orientation and people’s orientation, allowing the educatee, and especially the educators themselves, to be able to constantly improve their judging abilities toward right, wrong, good, evil, beautiful, and ugly, not blindly using others’ standard or the opinionated social

standard to guide own practices, instead, inspecting the outside world based on own actual needs. Only by this way can our country's education control its own rhythm, in turn controlling the social rhythm.

3. PEOPLE'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DEVELOPMENT RHYTHM AND THE EDUCATIONAL RHYTHM

For people themselves, the rhythm of education needs to match the rhythm of people's physical and mental development. Because education is not the tool for cultivating what the social development needs, people's physical and mental development, besides being influenced by certain social environment, is more closely related to the natural rhythm. From ancient time to today, through the exchange with nature, human being gradually deepened the recognition for natural rhythm during continuous practices. Chinese ancient people used "the theory of Yin Yang and five elements" to explain seasonal alternation and astronomical change, "Dao makes one, one makes two, two makes three, three makes everything", this kind of thought of life in endless succession, and Yin and Yang interactive movement and change deeply influences the thinking and way of doing things of Chinese people. People gradually formed a character of depending on nature during the process of experience natural rhythm.

In some aspect, the living and development of life essentially lie in the obeying and compliance to the objective environment. The basic biological mode of all living objects is the cycle of life rhythm which is restricted by conditions, but also adapts to this restriction.The life rhythm of rising early and retiring late is more like adaption to nature by people than the original form of life rhythm, or say it is people's compliance to nature, is "having no other choice but to do it". Making own life rhythm matches the rhythm of environment is an important aspect for the form of life movement. (Yu, 2013)

Nature establishes a connection with the life of people through the "time" dimension. Cell is the miracle during the evolutionary process, which is the basic material constituting life. It has many magical functions, and the most astonishing one is that they can perceive time (Forster & Kreitzman, 2004). From the angel of biology, human being is just one of the species living in the great nature, all the activities of human being need to obey in some degree the prescription and selectivity of nature, the "biological clock" is a precise "clock" designed by nature for human being. However, human being does not passively belong to nature, instead, through exchange with nature, the evolution of species occurs, which results in continuity and perfection, "the life rhythm of human being is the result of natural evolution and selection. The life rhythm of human being is the highest model of natural rhythm" (Chen, 1992).

The physical and mental condition is the important consisting part of human life; it is the foundation of conducting various activities by people and the transition from natural people to social people. Education must consider the stage and law of personal physical and mental development. However, due to the chaos of whole society's rhythm, it seems that education already has no time to take care of people's physical and mental development as well as the stage and law of education's own development. The rhythm of education is in disorder, the rhythm of people's physical and mental development is also destroyed. Socrates once said, "the unexamined life is not worth living", thus we should realize that life is not like pressing forward without stopping, rather, we should slow down our steps timely, turn around, calm down and get down to reflect our life, and think about that, is our current condition what we had hoped for? Why we have reached today's situation? What we initially start for? It seems like a waste of time by doing so, but actually it is on the contrary, because we will see more clearly our direction due to this action, and have opportunities to choose the road that fits us best. Thus, we will travel less, or not at all, the unnecessary or no-return road that truly wastes our time. Zeng Zi once said, "I reflect on myself multiple times every day: Did I try my best to help my friends? Am I honest when communicating with friends? Have I reviewed the knowledge my teacher taught me?" That is to say that we need to reflect on what we did at any time, inspect the interacting things with our body and mind, how they are, or may, affecting our rhythm of development.

In summary, the rhythm of education interacts with and complements the social rhythm and the rhythm of people's physical and mental development. From the education aspect, all the things that correlate with people are all related to education. Education cannot avoid being influenced by these things, but it cannot completely controlled by these things. Education should have a relatively independent space, it has its own development rhythm, it can pry about the social rhythm and people's development rhythm, and control and lead these two, exerting the positive effects to a country, a nation, or even the whole human society's development.

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