The Influence of Confucius' Moral Standards on Wellbeing of Academics in Higher Education in China in the Context of the Chinese Dream^{*}

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The Chinese Dream, adopted by General Secretary Xi Jinping, was used and spread in China. It is about Chinese prosperity, collective effort, socialism and national glory. It is also about the welfare, wellbeing, and quality of life of every Chinese. Academics in higher education in China are facing changes both across the globe and in China, they must take the challenges. This paper does research on wellbeing of the academics from the aspects of the definition of wellbeing, the situation both in the world and in China, the Chinese concept of happiness, the possible influence of Confucius moral standards on wellbeing of Chinese. This paper may help school leaders implement policies that foster effective work environment in the new era in China.

Keywords: wellbeing, Confucius' moral standards, the Chinese dream, academics, higher education, China

Introduction

In general use the term *wellbeing* describes a person's state of happiness (Diener, 2009). Current research on wellbeing has been derived from two general perspectives: hedonism (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999) and eudaimonism (Waterman, 1993). Hedonism posits that wellbeing is pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. Eudaimonism focuses on self-realisation and emphasises that wellbeing is the personal fully functioning. The happiness and pleasure of hedonism are obtained from the successful pursuit of human goals, while the happiness and pleasure of eudaimonism arise from integrity to one's true self, which is understood to be natural and universal. Thus people's wellbeing is seen as a psychological state, and it is interpreted as a fulfilment of a natural human potentiality, needs to be nurtured by society and culture in order for individuals to feel happy. Therefore, people's wellbeing is dependent on their adjustment to the values and norms of their culture. Diener and Suh (2000) formulated this cultural relativistic position in the following way: "If societies have different sets of values, people in them are likely to consider different criteria relevant when judging the success of the society" (p. 3). By the success of the society they mean the ability by which the society provides for conditions for people to

^{*} This paper is a part of the results of the academic project "Research on psychological rights of lecturers in higher education in China".

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accomplish their own values and goals. As the values and goals are predetermined by their society, the better people are adjusted to their social environment, the better their sense of wellbeing.

This paper aims to do research on wellbeing of academics in higher education in China. China is in a new era with the development in economy and international relations. The Chinese Dream, adopted by President Xi, Jinping as a slogan began to be used and spread in the whole China. In this case, how do the academics in the universities work and how do they perceive their wellbeing under this context? Let's begin to discuss the issue with the situation of academics in higher education in China.

The Chinese Dream and the Situation of Academics in Higher Education in China

The "Chinese Dream" has been a popular topic of recent days. It embodies the aspiration of all Chinese people for a beautiful country and better life. The Chinese Dream was elaborated by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the closing ceremony of the 1st session of the 12th NPC, 2013. President Xi has described the dream as "national rejuvenation, improvement of people's livelihoods, prosperity, construction of a better society and military strengthening". Xi Jinping has also claimed that the Chinese dream is about Chinese prosperity, collective effort, socialism and national glory. In short, the Chinese dream is about the welfare, well-being, and quality of life of every Chinese today and in future.

To the academics in higher education in China, their work is complex, and located in contexts that are both demanding (of knowledge, classroom management, and teaching skills) and emotionally and intellectually challenging" (Day, 2005, p. 13). They are facing new changes both across the globe and in China. In the world, in the 21st century, change is a constant in institutions of higher education across the globe and no less so in China. According to Lee (2008), the changes are changes in the university students (e.g., greater diversity, higher proportion of women, and greater concern for future employment); changes in the professoriate (e.g., greater diversity and increase in vulnerability due to increases in part-time and sessional appointments); changes in academic administration (e.g., administrators increasingly professionally trained as administrators rather than as academics); and internationalisation (increase in the number of foreign students as well as closer links among universities).

In China, the Fourth National Education Conference, which was held in July 2010, presented an outline of China's education reform and development with mid-term and long-term projections. The aim is to build a modern education system and to become a strong society through increasing the quality of education (Han, 2010). To achieve the required quality of education, policies have been introduced that have two primary foci: enhancing the teaching capability of lecturers and further implementing educational reform. That is, on the one hand, personnel, lecturers, and administrators must change their methods of teaching and conducting administration. On the other hand, from the perspective of the institutions, the management system must be transformed to be consistent with educational reforms. Following the institution of the new national policies, educational leaders and administrators have been encouraged to adopt management policies in which traditional Chinese culture, socialist values, and modern entrepreneurial values are integrated.

The changes across the globe and in China create a pervasive sense of unfamiliarity for academics who have lived their lives in those context. They are facing new challenges. As the academics' values and goals are shaped

by the Chinese culture. It might be expected that the better the academics are adjusted to their social environment, the better their sense of wellbeing.

The Concept of Confucius on Wellbeing and Happiness

Concepts are moulded by culture. Chinese culture has its own cultural perspectives on wellbeing. 福 or 福气 (*fu* or *fu qi*) is the happiness in Chinese ancient thoughts (Lu, 2001). *Fu* appeared as early as the bone inscriptions of the Shang Dynasty. It meant “presenting the filled wine container at the altar” (Bauer, 1976). The original meaning of *Fu* was the desires expressed by humans when they worshiped a god.

Later, in the *Shang Shu* (a book of documents) in *Zhangguo* phase (475-221 BC) in the history of China, the word “*fu*” meant “longevity, prosperity, health, peace, virtue, and a comfortable death” (Wu, 1991). In another important ancient work, *Classic of Ritual*, “*fu*” meant “fortunate, lucky, smooth and free of obstacles”. This suggests that the Chinese people’s conception of happiness seems to include material abundance, physical health, virtuosity and peaceful life.

In the history of folk philosophies of China, there were three philosophies which influenced Chinese concepts of happiness: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism (Lu, 2001). These are now addressed in turn.

Confucius was the first Chinese philosopher to formulate a thought system (Lu, 2001). In *The Book of Conversations*, which records dialogues with his disciples, Confucius did not talk about 福 (*fu*), rather, he proposed 礼 (*li*), meaning ritual, as the most important concept of his system. Confucians valued ritual more than mundane happiness. Confucius spent his life touring countries, introducing his thoughts on Chinese humanism to each ruler. He suggested that a wise ruler should rule with “virtue” and treat people equally by using 礼 (*li*). People can then regard virtue and 礼 (*li*) as matters of personal concern in their social categories. Confucian philosophy postulates that happiness is integral in accomplishing life goals; accumulating material resources by hard work and frugality; obtaining respectable social status by intellectual labour; having a virtuous life by suppression of selfish and earthly desires; and ultimately, fulfilling one’s social duties. In summary, “Confucians regarded happiness as spiritual, not material; as moral, not circumstantial; as self-identified, not other-judged” (Lu, 2001, p. 411). This discussion turns now to Taoism—another of the three major systems of Chinese thought.

Taoism rejects the philosophy that material happiness leads to satisfaction and the Confucian idea of happiness as constant self-cultivation to achieve moral greatness. Taoists advocate that everything in the universe must follow 道 (*dao*), which was interpreted as a great natural force that made everything start in the first place. Taoism posits 无为 (*wu wei*), which means not-doing, and asserts that perfect happiness is the absence of happiness, and perfect glory is the absence of glory. Happiness in Taoism is to liberate human beings from all desires, through following the natural force of not doing anything, accepting fate calmly and facing life with a peaceful mind. They called this state 天人合一 (*tian ren he yi*). Taoists have a lifestyle of withdrawal, isolation, and quietness. Happiness in Taoism, therefore, “is not an emotional feeling of joy, rather, it is a cognitive insight and transcendence” (Lu, 2001, p. 411).

In contrast with Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism is not an indigenous Chinese philosophy. However, it influenced Chinese beliefs for over a thousand years after it was introduced from India in *Tang* Dynasty. Buddhism argued that “there is no such thing as absolute, lasting happiness in life, all existence on earth was

poisoned by unhappiness from the very start, and only 'nirvana' can offer salvation" (Lu, 2001, P. 412). After nirvana, humans can not only turn away from the world, but also from happiness itself. Buddhism posits that humans lift their souls to reach nirvana and eternal happiness through physical exercises, meditation, doing charitable deeds and eliminating all human desires (Lu, 2001).

According to Lockett (1988), Chinese traditional cultural heritage—Confucian of moral standards regulate Chinese behaviour in the greatest extent. It influenced Chinese wellbeing in the following six aspects: harmony; group orientation; guanxi (relationships); self-learning and diligence. How these Confucian moral standards influence the wellbeing of academics in the context of the Chinese Dream will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Harmony

Confucianism emphasises harmony as a social standard (Ginsberg, 1975). This can be traced in some old sayings in China. For example, 国泰民安 (*guotaiminan*), refers to the country being prosperous and people living in peace. 安居乐业 (*anjuleye*) refers to people who live and work in peace and contentment. 家和万事兴 (*jiahewanshixing*) refers to harmony between family members and how this makes everything prosper. These sayings express social harmony in Chinese society. In the university, academics view their schools as a big family and try to build and maintain harmonious relationships (Liu, 2003). Chinese believe that harmony contributes to unity in resolving problems. 同舟共济 (*tongzhougongji*) refers to working together with harmony and faithfulness in times of difficulty in the school. Academics are expected to go through "thick and thin" with their university (Han, 2010).

Group Orientation

Collective outcome or group orientation is another Confucian social moral standard (Earley, 1989). Confucianism emphasises that a human being is not an individual, but rather a member of a family; people in the society are interdependent. The family in Chinese can be translated into 家 (*jia*). A group is a big family, which in Chinese means 大家 (*dajia*). Country refers to national family, which in Chinese means 国家 (*guojia*). Therefore, being a member of a family, one is expected to contribute to the betterment of the family (Liu, 2003). Conformity to group orientation means individuals are subordinate in their personal interests with respect to the goals of the group (Earley, 1989). In the university, high levels of group orientation can enhance academics' collective identity; thus increase the group potency and performance (Han, 2010).

Guanxi

Guanxi means "relationships". It can be found in 伦 (*lun*), which "are moral principles regarding interactive behaviours of related parties" (X. Chen & C. C. Chen, 2004, p. 308). *Guanxi* involves positive relationships at the interpersonal level and at the level of the group. By belonging to a community and being aware of what is going on, academics feel secure and develop a sense of harmony with the lecturers' group.

Diligence

The next social moral standard in the Analects of Confucius (Yuan, 2001), which is a record of the words and behaviours of Confucius and his students, is a diligent work ethic. Confucian thought postulates that "when a person is given a great responsibility, heaven may test him with hardship and frustrated efforts in order to toughen his nature and show up his inadequacies" (Han, 2010, p. 40). Consequently, a sense of diligence transcends the

whole life of the Chinese individual. Confucian thought states that diligence brings fortune. Therefore, those people who are diligent and endure the hardship of favourable or unfavourable conditions are respected. In the school, lecturers are likely to be diligent and persistent in work so that they may contribute to the betterment of the school.

Self-learning

Self-learning or education is another social moral standard emphasised by Confucian thought (Yuan, 2001). Influenced by Confucians, Chinese employees develop themselves in order to achieve their educational goals. Academics learn knowledge and skills to adapt changes in the external environment. Thus, self-learning plays an important role at work in acquiring, reflecting, contributing, and carrying out knowledge to reach spiritual and moral development.

Conclusion

The wellbeing in higher education in China can be regarded as a mental state of satisfaction and contentment: as positive feelings/emotions; as a harmonious homeostasis; as achievement and hope; and as freedom from ill being. The happiness is also a state of being where one maintains a harmonious relationship with oneself, and with the environment. This harmonious relationship is of fundamental importance to one's survival and wellbeing. The academics in higher education can achieve wellbeing through: the wisdom of harmony; the wisdom of group orientation; the the wisdom of guanxi; wisdom of diligence; and the wisdom of self-learning.

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