

The Analysis of “Edification”

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Abstract: The concept of “edification” has been defined in different ways at different times. Broadly speaking, edification refers to the process of educating members of the society on political, ethical, moral and legal norms through school education, family education, public education and legal discipline for the purpose of integrating social behaviors of the state; narrowly speaking, edification refers to the process of educating the people on Confucianism with the core of “rites” by the rulers of the traditional society. The characteristics of edification are mainly manifested in the official nature of the main body, the systematic nature of the pathway, the object of the whole population, the supremacy of moral education. The concepts of edification and education, ideological and political education, moral education and ethical education need to be strictly distinguished.

“Edification” is one of the core concepts of traditional Chinese culture. The clarification of the concept of edification plays a very important role in the development of educational theory and practice as well as in the related academic exchanges among researchers. Academic research on “edification” has been quite rich, the author on this basis, to be comprehensive and systematic analysis of “edification”.

1. What is “edification”?

1.1 Different Definitions of edification

Researchers have interpreted the viewpoints on “edification” from different perspectives and positions. Through the analysis of previous literature, the concept of “edification” has been defined in the following ways:

1.1.1 Definition from the Perspective of Political Science

From the perspective of political science, researchers have formed the following three understandings:

First, “political-ethical measures”. For example, as explained in *Shuowen Jiezi*, “Teaching is what is practiced at the top and what is practiced at the bottom.”^[1], meaning that the ruler, through the implementation of ethical measures, makes the people follow the example of the common values and patterns of behavior, that is, to define “edification” as the political-ethical measures to maintain political rule.

Second, the “ruling art”. Some researchers believe that “edification” belongs to the political

category, which is the ruling art of the early ruling class in order to regulate morality and maintain the rule, and to seek the unity of politics and religion by using political, moral, customary, and educational means.^[2]

Thirdly, “the process of political education”. Some researchers understand “edification” as a synonym for “moral governance”, which is closely related to politics and is the fundamental strategy for governing the country. As the Analects of Confucius says, “To govern with virtue is like the North Star residing in its place and all the stars sharing it”^[3], is this meaning.

All of the above are the understanding of “edification” formed from the perspective of political science, and “edification” is regarded as a kind of measure, strategy and concept of political rule. The creation of “edification” itself is inseparable from political life, but such a definition ignores the requirement of formal logic that there should be no ambiguous concepts or words in the definitional items ^[4]. What is the difference and connection between “political-ethical measures”, “ruling art” and “the process of political education”? This becomes another question we must ask.

1.1.2 Definition from the Perspective of Pedagogy

From a pedagogical point of view, researchers and scholars have formed the following different opinions:

First, “moral education”. Some researchers believe that “edification” is the process of forming social norms and systems through moral education and ideological edification of the masses ^[5].

Second, “behavioral edification”. On the basis of emphasizing the importance of moral education in “edification”, some researchers highlight its role in strengthening the moral model of the ruling class itself, and through their own cultivation, they can influence the people.^[5]

From the above understanding, we can see that each viewpoint has elaborated and expressed the connotation of the concept of “edification”, but it lacks the exploration of the extension as an important component of the concept, so that it is still difficult for people to grasp the concept of “edification” correctly and comprehensively in these expressions. The concept of “edification”.

1.1.3 Definition from the Perspective of sociology

By exploring the object, means and content of “edification”, some researchers have formed the understanding of “socialization process”, believing that “edification” is a process of socialization of all members of the society through implementation, edification, dissemination and demonstration of initiatives, in order to stabilize people's morals and customs and to maintain social order ^[5].

Understanding “edification” from the sociological point of view helps people to recognize the relationship between “edification” and the national society from the macro background of the historical society in space and time, but the specific understanding of the connotation and extension of “edification” is still not comprehensive and specific. However, the specific understanding of the connotation and extension of “edification” is still not comprehensive and specific.

1.2 Connotation and Extension of edification

As can be seen from the above definitions of the idea of edification, researchers have not yet formed a unified understanding of the connotation and extension of “edification”. By sorting out the ideas of edification in history, we try to comprehensively and systematically understand and grasp the connotation and extension of “edification”.

1.2.1 The Connotation of “Edification”

The concept of a thing is a form of thinking that reflects the unique attributes of a thing. To grasp

the concept of “edification” is to objectively recognize, analyze and evaluate the unique attributes of “edification”. In our opinion, “edification” has both broad and narrow meanings. In the broad sense, “edification” refers to the political, ethical and moral education of the whole society or individuals by the state or individuals through the means of school education, family education, public education, legal discipline and inter-individual influence in order to influence the life state of human beings and to consolidate the behavior of the society. In a narrower sense, and only in relation to Confucianism, which is the dominant ideology in traditional Chinese society, “edification” refers to the process by which rulers educate their subjects in Confucianism, with “rites” as the core, by means of literature or law, in order to maintain the rule of the society. The connotations of the concept of “edification” in this context are as follows:

1.2.1.1 “Edification” refers to the process of activities carried out by the state through school education, family education, public education, legal discipline and inter-individual influence in order to influence the state of human life and integrate social behavior

As far as traditional China is concerned, the main body of edification is the state, but when it comes to “people”, there are not only sages and scholars with noble character and a heart for the world, but also grass-roots officials, scholars and squires who promote the development of the practice of edification, as well as students of the cloth who are not successful in their careers but have a sense of the family and the country. These subjects of edification have all contributed to popularizing traditional cultural values and upgrading the moral and ethical standards of the grassroots. Their ways of edification are compatible with school education, family education, public education, legal discipline and inter-individual influence. In ancient China, traditional edification thought not only emphasized the edification role of schools (official and private) and families, but also emphasized the edification influence of officials on the public, and required that the main body of edification should cultivate itself and correct its morality, and carry out edification activities for the general public through a series of traditional rites and music education, such as sacrifices, wedding and funeral rites, and commendation activities. Through a series of traditional rites and music education, such as rituals, marriage and funeral ceremonies, and recognition activities, the public is indoctrinated. Of course, the way of edification does not exclude the means of punishment, not only to persuade the good but also to punish the evil, but only the main moral punishment, the emphasis on moral education and light punishment.

1.2.1.2 “Edification” is the process of educating society on political, ethical, moral and legal norms

The subject of edification and the diversity of edification paths determines the object of edification is the overall members of society, including government officials and the people (of course, also including individuals). In China, the object of edification is firstly the officials and mainly the people, that is, all the members of the society, which makes the theory of edification produce two major branches in the feudal society of China, one pointing to the officials of the monarch and the other to the people. As the ruling class gradually weakened its demand for edification of the monarchical officials out of its own interests, the idea of edification evolved into a code of ethical values aimed mainly at the general public. The content of edification, on the other hand, included political, ethical, moral, and legal norms education. As far as traditional Chinese culture is concerned, morality and politics are the two main components of edification, and through the learning and internalization of daily ethical and political thoughts, the moral sentiments and political identity of the members of society are cultivated.

1.2.2 The Extension of “Edification”

Traditional Chinese edification is the process of educating the people through various ways by the social rulers with “rites” as the core, covering political education, ethical education, moral education, legal norms education and knowledge education. With the changes in the social and economic structure of modern China and the deepening of the “Eastward Progression of Western Learning”, the traditional education ideology was constantly deconstructed and gradually transformed into modernity. The spreading of the ideology of the Restoration, the actions of the bourgeois revolutionaries, and the critique of Confucianism by the New Culture Movement all contributed to the qualitative transformation of traditional edification. Chinese traditional edification came to an end and began to turn to “modernity edification”. Modern edification thought is mainly expressed in the ideas and concepts of “new national” and “opening up the people's wisdom”, guided by the concept of freedom and equality, and taking the idea of democracy and science as the content of edification, it attacks the feudalistic and conventional ethics, opposes the idea of slavery, and advocates the cultivation of individuality and independence of personality. The idea and concept of freedom and equality are the guiding principles of education.

From the moral nature theory of traditional edification to the complete, rich and genuine restoration of human life after the deconstruction of the modern edification system, the modern transformation of edification thought has also made some changes in the extension of edification. On the one hand, the scope of edification has been greatly expanded. Modern edification has inherited the political and moral excellence of traditional edification theories and has been extended to science and technology, economy, law, culture and education, etc., and has evolved into the theory of “comprehensive edification”, which includes knowledge, skills, moral education, physical education, and labor; on the other hand, the focus of the idea of edification has changed greatly. On the other hand, the focus of edification changed greatly. The traditional concepts of edification, such as the concept of education for “subjects”, were transformed under the influence of new ideas, such as the gradual spread of Western learning and the domestic concept of “new people”. The cultivation of “subjectivity” in traditional moral education or political edification was transformed into the pursuit of a sense of equality and freedom, and the content of edification, which had traditionally focused on principles and ethics, was transformed into the establishment of the spirit of science, democracy and rationality. Since modern times, the connotation and extension of the traditional term “edification” has gradually converged with that of “education” in the modern sense.

From the above historical changes in edification, we can see that the extension of the concept of edification is constantly being generated and developed. However, from the historical materials, we can still find the universality in the particularity of the extension of edification in different historical periods. The extension of edification, in terms of its commonality, mainly includes different types such as “political edification”, “moral and ethical edification”, “legal edification” and “intellectual edification”. “The so-called political edification refers to a process of political education. The so-called political edification refers to the educational nature of political concepts and ideas in a society's history and current period for the development of society or individuals; the so-called moral and ethical edification refers to the shaping of attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of members of a society by the concepts and systems of ethics and morality in a society's history and current period. The so-called legal edification refers to the role of laws, norms or systems in the political, economic and cultural fields in the history and current period of a society in regulating and influencing the society. The so-called knowledge and ability edification refers to the education of knowledge, ability and skills acquired by social individuals from various social edification activities.

2. Characteristics of Edification

The historical generation of the concept of “edification” determines that its connotation and extension are changing and developing in different historical periods. In order to fully understand the concept of “edification”, we need to deepen our understanding of the characteristics of “edification”, which can be summarized in the following aspects:

2.1 The Official Nature of the Subject of Edification

In ancient China, edification was officially led from the very beginning. Schools became the organizational vehicle for the government's policy of edification, and edification has always been the purpose of schooling, and they have become an important tool for the government to implement social edification, propagate the culture of consciousness and maintain class domination. During the development of social edification, institutional norms and programs were gradually formed, which enhanced the normality and operability of official edification. It can be seen that in ancient China, edification took the school as an organizational carrier and formed a series of institutional norms and programs, which were mainly led by the officials.

2.2 The Systematic Nature of Edification Paths

The ways of edification included school education, family education, public education, legal discipline and inter-individual influence, showing diversified and comprehensive characteristics. The “elite class” assimilates the lower culture through decrees, norms, rituals and admonitions. In the choice of edification paths, they emphasize the supremacy of morality, oppose harsh government and punishment, but do not exclude the use of disciplinary means. So it has formed the characteristics of the combination of school education and family education, government instruction and social education, moral culture and legal education.

2.3 The Universal Nature of the Object of Edification

The object of edification was all members of society, including the government and the people, which led to the formation of two sets of theories of edification in feudal society, one pointing to the monarchs, aiming at cultivating the “gentlemen”, and the other pointing to the people, aiming at cultivating the “submissive people”. The first aimed at the monarch and the second aimed at the people, cultivating “obedience to the people”. The monarch was the primary target, and through the study, he aimed to develop the skills to serve the ruler, to correct the people, and to make the people rule. The populace was the main target of edification. Confucius started to educate all without regard to their birth, status, wealth, while Mencius advocated that “everyone can be Yao and Shun”, which provided a rationale for the common people to receive edification, and the work of edification gradually became an activity to mobilize the strength of the whole society. Later, due to the weakening of the ruling class's demand for edification of monarchs and officials, the theory of edification evolved into a code of ethical values mainly for the general public. However, there is no doubt that edification in ancient China was oriented to the members of the whole society and was characterized by the universal character.

2.4 The Supremacy of Moral Education in Edification

The supremacy of moral education in edification is mainly reflected in three aspects. First, the concept of edification is based on the priority of moral education. All the times have made the moral

education the prerequisite for the governance of the country and the stability of the state, and the priority of moral education has become the recognized concept of edification; second, the content of edification is based on moral education. Secondly, the content of edification is based on moral education, traditional Chinese edification is mainly based on the Confucian moral education idea of “rites” as the core; thirdly, the means of edification is based on moral education, and morality has become the ruler's strategy for governing the country.

3. The Connection and Difference between Edification and Related concepts

The connection and difference between “edification” and related concepts can be discussed in greater depth based on the above characteristics of “edification”.

3.1 Edification and Education

At present, the definition of “education” in the academic world is very clear. It is generally believed that “education” has two meanings: broadly speaking, it refers to any social activity that affects people's physical and mental development, including knowledge, skills and ideology for the purpose of morality, and narrowly speaking, “education” refers to school education.

For the difference between education and edification, we can be elaborated from three aspects: First, the use of different periods. The term “edification” was frequently used only in ancient times, but rarely used in modern times, while “education” is a modern reference to educational activities; Second, the content is different. “Edification” mainly focuses on ethical and moral and ideological-political education, ignoring the cultivation of knowledge and skills, which basically belongs to the scope of ethics and political science, whereas “education” covers moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor aspects, and it is a purely pedagogical concept; Third, the focus is different. “Education” mainly refers to school education, which is different from ‘edification’, which focuses on social activities such as rituals, marriage and funeral ceremonies, and recognition activities. The connection between education and edification is mainly manifested in the essential characteristic of “subject-object influence activities”, and educational activities are separated from edification activities in the specialized social activities.

3.2 Edification and Ideological and Political Education

There are two main types of views on the relationship between edification and ideological and political education: one type thinks that ideological and political education in the modern sense is the result of the development of edification in the ancient times, which is in fact the ancient ideological and political education, and the other type thinks that edification is only one of the means or methods of ideological and political education.^[5] We believe that edification and ideological and political education are just different forms or titles in different historical periods.

The homogeneity of edification and ideological and political education is mainly manifested in the role and function, both of them are a mode of political socialization, both of them are power-oriented socialization institutional system and system acting on the social system in a specific historical period, with the socialization of politics as the ultimate goal. The difference is that edification is an activity guided by the feudal ruling ideology with political and moral edification as the main forms of expression, while today's ideological and political education is based on the scientific principles of Marxism and focuses on political socialization.

3.3 Edification and Moral Education

The difference between edification and moral education is mainly manifested in the following three aspects: firstly, “moral education” is different from “edification”, which is a modernized term; secondly, “moral education” points to the education of ideology and morality, mainly focusing on people's moral awareness. Secondly, “moral education” refers more to ideological and moral education, mainly focusing on people's moral awareness, moral emotions, moral will and moral behavior, which is part of the category of “pedagogy”, while “edification” is more of a sociological and political concept, which refers to the complete activities carried out by the ruler on the whole members of the society, including political, moral, legal, etc.; first, “moral education” is different from “edification”, which is a modern term, Thirdly, “moral education” mainly refers to moral education in schools, which is also different from “edification” that focuses on family training and social moral education. The connection between moral education and edification is mainly manifested in the influence on people's ideology and morality, and both focus on influencing and integrating the moral behavior of individuals or the whole society through the shaping of moral cognition.

3.4 Edification and Ethics Education

The Dictionary explains that “ethics” has two meanings: one is the organization of things. The second is the reasoning and guidelines that should be followed in dealing with people's mutual relations. From the perspective of social science, we grasp the connotation of “ethics” from the second interpretation. From the social science point of view, we grasp the connotation of “ethics” from the second definition. From this, we can see that ethical education refers to the educational activities that enable the educated to master and abide by the moral rules and norms between human beings.

Ethics education historically refers to the educational activities in which rulers use Confucianism as the core content to cultivate talents for family unification, national governance and world peace. With the development and change of the society, combining the western ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity as slogans, modern ethical education is characterized by personal focus. The difference between edification and ethical education lies in the fact that ethical education is a more modern term than edification, which is more historical.

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