

A Qualified Person^{*} as the New Target of Compulsory Education in China

UNE PERSONNE QUALIFIEE POUR LA NOUVELLE CIBLE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT OBLIGATOIRE DE CHINE

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Abstract

Whereas Chinese compulsory education designates the scope of people, it fails to accomplish the objective of nurturing a qualified person. The plasticity, generality and universality should be the basis of the education of a qualified person. The objective of the compulsory education is not only the theoretical conception, but also speaks for the common demands of family, school, and society.

Key words: Compulsory education; Objective of education; A qualified person

Résumé

Alors que l'enseignement obligatoire chinoise désigne la portée des gens, il ne parvient pas à atteindre l'objectif de nourrir une personne qualifiée. La plasticité, la généralité et l'universalité devrait être la base de l'éducation d'une personne qualifiée. L'objectif de l'enseignement obligatoire n'est pas seulement la conception théorique, mais aussi porte-parole des revendications communes de la famille, l'école et la société.

Mots clés: L'éducation obligatoire; Les objectifs de l'éducation; Une personne qualifiée

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Education is a kind of activity to train people, and this kind of activity is in stages: different stages have different training objectives. Since the founding, the objective of compulsory education in our country has several typical formulations, such as to foster "laborers", "talents", "builders and successors" and "citizens" and so on. Among them, training "laborers" is the most authoritative formulation within the ten years before the "cultural revolution"; Training "talent" is a common term from the "cultural revolution" to the 1980s; Training "builders and successors" is the most official formulation the 1990s; Training "citizen" is a strong political and moral mean formulation gradually warming in the late 1990s (Zhongping, 2004). The formulations have modernity and targeted, but one of the important questions is that it only raises the question of what kind of talents to cultivate, paying attention to a certain role or a certain respect failing to regard the educatees as a whole in the sense of people to view and training, without solving the problem of becoming a person in first. In fact, compulsory education should solve the problem of creating "a qualified person", the initial stage of the school education, i.e. "A qualified person", rather than a natural person, meets the needs of a society. Therefore, compulsory education is oriented at cultivating "a qualified person".

^{*} A qualified person in this thesis refers to a qualified one who can support himself in this society.

1. A REVIEW OF THE TRAINING OBJECTIVE OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN OUR COUNTRY

Since the foundation of People's Republic of China, the training objective of compulsory education is expressed with such expressions as training "laborers", "talents", "builders and successors" and "citizens". Although these formulations or statements have their roots in certain historical rationality, but with the education stage of internal regulations education and natural appeal in compulsory education in mind, they are all more or less of certain disadvantages.

1.1 Limitations About "Laborer" as the Objective of Cultivation

The so-called laborer is the natural person who arrives at a legal age of 16, with the laboring ability to engage in some social work with whose income as the main source for life. Managed by the employers, laborers get engaged in work and get labor reward according to the provisions of the contract or law. Although labor constitutes one of the basic attributes of human, it is not the whole. The objective of cultivation of compulsory education should concern about human itself and the development of human as the laborer, rather than cultivating human as laborer and "tool". Human is not merely a laborer, who lives just for labor. Instead, labor is only part of human life. Therefore, the development of laborer constitutes just one aspect of the development of human. A colorful life of human asks for comprehensive development, all of which could be realized only when a natural person becomes a social person in the real sense.

1.2 Limitations About "Talent" as the Objective of Cultivation

The so-called talent refers to "the one who has made great contribution in a certain field, industry or job to social development and human progress in one's creative work" (Tongxun, 1985, p.1-2). Compulsory education, however, as the school education necessary for all school-age children initially, acts as the basic education of the country to cultivate talents at all levels and of all kinds and the threshold education for everyone's survival and development in the modern society. What it provides youth with are the most fundamental and important moral awareness, life experience, scientific knowledge and basic capability as a man, which differ greatly with professional quality, innovation ability and social contribution required by "talents". Therefore, "talent" as the cultivation objective of compulsory education runs counter to the universal and foundational compulsory education, while "a qualified person" is foremost and fundamental. It is not only prior to "talent", but also of greater importance than "talent".

1.3 Limitations About "Builder and Successor" as the Objective of Cultivation

"Builder and successor" is the uniform requirement of two functions of socialist laborers, who are both qualified builders in the construction of socialist material civilization and spiritual civilization and successors in the cause of socialist revolution. "Cultivation of builders and successors of socialist cause" is actually a political and economic objective, reflecting the economic needs and political will of those in power. As this objective explicitly requires education to completely serve for politics and economy and makes nurturing objective economic and political, it suppresses the true objective of education to enable people to perform good deeds and cultivate educatees' healthy personality and deviates orientation of school education from the normal objective, easily resulting in education ecology imbalance and turning students into "defective person" insufficient of normal character and emotion in "revolutionary" process (Changle, 2008). However, compulsory education only lays foundation for the whole life of human, instead of cultivating builders and successors directly. Moreover, "successor" is obviously characterized by politics, which lays emphasis on political talents. For all school-age children, builders and successors of socialist cause only constitute one of their future roles in the society, and this aspect of quality is just one aspect of the overall quality of human.

1.4 Biases About "Citizen" as the Objective of Cultivation

Citizen generally refers to "one who holds or gets nationality of a certain country, and enjoys rights and undertakes obligations according to the laws and regulations of that country" (Modern Chinese Dictionary, p.435). This definition indicates "citizen as a member of the country is not confined to natural person biologically only, but also 'human' that enjoys sovereignty politically" (Xiaohong, 2003, p.10). In other words, citizen is a concept of politics, law and moral in essence. It is a kind of practice personality of social and political life, as well as social role and social status in the specific social practice. In spite of the important aspect of school education in forming citizen quality, focus on citizen education and training objective targeted at citizen are different. Being political, legal and moral, citizen education is a kind of practical education which requires students to know how to be qualified citizen in practice; while compulsory education is a kind of preparatory education, which equips students with knowledge and capability for further study and future life. Difference is found between them, as well as the objectives of cultivation. Therefore, it is not appropriate for compulsory education in our country to take this kind of "political person" and "legal person" as its own objective of cultivation.

In short, compulsory education in China as the

beginning of school education, the object of education should cover all school-age children, of which the objective of cultivation should be both foundational and universal. “Laborer”, “talent”, and “builder and successor” are concerned about the instrumental value of the objective of cultivation. Although human is involved, the focus is on the cultivation of a certain kind of person instead of human itself and all that it realizes is what happens after a natural person really becomes a social person; As for the legal term of “citizen”, it is a born legal qualification, which fails to fully reflect the nature of compulsory education and the actual physical and mental development of children.

Reflecting compulsory education in our country, we have always been cultivating students with the standard of “laborer”, “talent”, “builder and successor” and “citizen”, molding living person as “laborer” engaged in a certain profession. In fact, all these objectives of cultivation are characterized by the ultimate objective, which makes it hard to reflect the staged, fundamental and human-oriented compulsory education. It thus ignores the building of “human”, the “fundamental” provisions of human and its own existence, treating people as “tools”. Even if it takes the improvement of knowledge and ability structure into full consideration, it only proves the multiple functions of “tools”, failing to achieve the fundamental purpose of building human. In fact, compulsory education is targeted at children aged 6-15, and our objective of cultivation should fully reflect the students’ physical and mental development of this stage; as basic education, the cultivation objective of compulsory education should reflect the foundation; our education promotes human-orientation, and compulsory education should be even more so, of which the objective of cultivation should reflect the human-orientation. Therefore, we propose the cultivation objective of “a qualified person” of compulsory education.

2. CONNOTATION OF “A QUALIFIED PERSON”

The so-called “qualified person” refers to a person who turns from a pure natural individual into a social individual that differs fundamentally from other animals. “Person” here is first of all a natural person, a living organism and a natural individual capable of physiological activities. Secondly, “person” here should also be a social person, who must live in family, school and society, learn language, behaviors, habits and customs, and characters of human, gradually form self-awareness and self-control, learn to interact with others or create human mind and develop human behaviors to form a person. Therefore, “a qualified person” here refers to a qualified person who gains relatively comprehensive and full development in physiological, psychological and social quality, etc.

Among them, physiological quality of human mainly refers to vital activity ability of human organism, including sports, digestive, respiratory, sensory, neural activity, reproductive status and other physiological functions, as well as the human body’s ability to adapt to the changing external natural environment. It is human’s “material” system and the basic human quality of life-sustaining activities. People’s psychological quality refers to their desire, emotion, perception, memory, association, will and other mental functions, as well as the psychological ability to adapt to the change of external natural environment and social environment. It is the accumulation of cultural heritage and psychological heritage formed in the process of object cognition and reconstruction by the subject. Human’s social quality refers to the accomplishment, capability and competence consistent with the requirements of social development and formed by people in the specific social environment through study, education and others’ influence, including ideological and political quality, ethical and moral quality, scientific and cultural quality, aesthetic quality and the quality of life practice, etc. These three aspects of human quality are interdependent, complementary and mutually reinforcing, constituting the necessary overall quality of a complete person. In this sense, the objective of “a qualified person” is basically consistent with psychological knowledge structure (feeling, consciousness, technique, thought, imagination---wisdom, mood, emotion, temperament---virtue, skill, ability, perseverance---body) and Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives (cognitive domain, affective domain and psychomotor domain) and matches with emphasis of “vivid, lively and initiative development in various aspects of morality, intelligence and physiques” in education policy in China. It is exactly the education objective and ultimate objective of life-long learning that we pursue (Dalu & Hongji, 1999, p.9-10).

Children of compulsory education stage have a rich foundation in “a qualified person”. This is the intrinsic characteristic of “qualified person” property of children, which finds its expression mainly in the following aspects.

2.1 Plasticity

Human life is incomplete in nature, with rich possibility and high plasticity. This is not only the consensus of all educators, but also that of many philosophers and sociologists. Well-known educator Herbart writes in the first article of his *Principles of Education* that Pedagogy is the science that takes human plasticity as premise to explore how to change this plasticity from possibility to reality. In fact, this is also where the logical starting point of education is. Only a full awareness and understanding of high plasticity and possibility of human can education fully perform its function.

2.2 Generality

Different from other animals, human could enable itself to

go beyond instinct and realistic environment in accordance with their wishes. Through its own creative practice, it breaks the relational bond of life instinct and realistic provisions and obtains an open, ideal and generative property for its own survival. Since human life has always been full of possibility and plasticity, he would not stay at a fixed point or a certain state. He would gradually change various possibilities into the reality while continuously adding new possibilities in the adaptation to and interaction with the external environment.

2.3 Openness

If life out of mother uterus is the first time for human to be open to the world, it is the second time of openness when children enter school. That life opens to the world indicates that life is completely introduced into openness. Life surmounts the existing experience. Every established domain continuously opens to the outside, and even the opening of life goes beyond world. This kind of openness is the openness to all possibilities of life. This possibility has always been in the possibility relevant to the world, and world in this sense becomes the resource to explore and display possibility and gain new life experience.

2.4 Relation

Life morphologically is of individual, but the essence of life is of all living things. An individual life cannot survive and develop without the support of all living things. Any life is in a certain relation. The possibility, generality and openness of life in education are in a unique relation, which is the relation of education. Specifically, life of individual in the world of education has always been the life continuously generated in the meeting of educators and educatees.

The abundant connotation provided by “a qualified person” and “a qualified person” basis of children have laid a solid theoretical basis for the establishment of the cultivation objective of “a qualified person” during the compulsory education stage.

3. RATIONAL DEFENSES FOR “A QUALIFIED PERSON” AS THE CULTIVATION OBJECTIVE OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN OUR COUNTRY

Today’s compulsory education, often does not take “a qualified person” as the purpose, but treats human as a kind of tool and cultivates them to be modern robots that have received certain education. The main contents and purpose of people’s study and education are to teach people the ability of “how to live”. However, the lack of education of “live for what” makes many people fail to know why to live and study, “what human is”, “who

I am”, etc.. Therefore, in spite of rich material life, the spiritual life is poor without correct world outlook, life outlook and values. People fall addicted to the enjoyment of material life, and humanity is captured and engulfed by materials.

3.1 Objective of “A Qualified Person” Embodies Human-Oriented Education Idea

The so-called human-orientation takes human value core and society as the orientation. As a kind of education philosophy, human-orientated education should fundamentally respect, attach great importance to and give priority to human, focusing on respect for, liberation of and all for human. It thus requires education to be human-oriented and affirms the subject status of educatees, rather than compelling educatee to passively receive education only; with human as the power, the internal driving force of education is no longer the requirement of national development, but that of the development of educatees themselves; with human as the purpose, the fundamental objective of education lies in the development of human, especially the harmonious development of the individual educatee. In other words, human development should be taken as starting and ending point, treating and cultivating all students as human beings. During the compulsory education stage, the objective of “a qualified person” is proposed to truly regard children as human and render them education of human.

1. Objective of “a qualified person” requires viewing children as vivid and concrete persons with potential. People are fundamentally different from animals in that people are individuals with enormous development potential. Human is unwilling to passively withstand the pressure of the outside world, and he will develop his initiative and make independent creation of the external world to meet self-development according to his wishes and needs. Therefore, compulsory education should conform to the person’s endowment, face up to the individual differences of students, enrich every student’s mental world, explore their life potential and promote their life significance and value, in order to enable compulsory education to pay attention to every life itself, and freshness, experience and independence of life, providing their full development with a broad and free space and returning students a vivid and true self.

2. Objective of “a qualified person” requires regarding children as whole and complete people. The growth of people is not unilateral, but organic and holistic. From contents, it includes the moral, intellectual and physical growth; from psychological structure, it is the all-round development of knowledge, emotion and mood. In the education process, teachers should regard student as a whole person, a person organically unified in flesh, reason, emotion and morals, instead of a unilateral, split and fragmented person. It requires teachers to develop students’ abundant potentials with an overall view of

education, rather than attaching importance to score only.

3. Objective of “a qualified person” demands to view children as human in development. In the process of education, it should be advocated that teachers treat every student with appreciation, positive and optimistic attitude, firmly believing them to be promising young talents. Therefore, school should attach great importance to the staged characteristics of students’ own development while establishing training objective. It should start from the guarantee and satisfaction of the development requirements of every student, focusing not only on students’ present status, but students’ future. It should help them to realize themselves with all possible means, enabling them to become the subject of discovery and creation, and gain the greatest development on their respective original basis.

3.2 Objective of “A Qualified Person” Embodies the Common Desire and Requirements of Family, School and Society

“The core of education is to learn how to be a person”, which should firstly cultivate a real person. “If a child fails to be cultivated to be a ‘person’ firstly, there might be problems even if he is later cultivated to be a ‘talent’” (Yunxiao, 2004, p.13). The accomplishment of “a qualified person”, however, mainly comes from acquisition, fostering and education. It is the cultural crystallization acquired on congenital basis, which forms and develops under the influence of education of various aspects of family, school and society. Therefore, for children, to be a qualified person is the common desire and requirement of family, school and society.

1. Objective of “a qualified person” embodies desire and requirements of family on children. As the first belonging social community after birth, family is the most fundamental place of children life and the initial socialized cradle, while parents become the first teacher of children. For parents, they not only hope that their sons and daughters could form a good moral quality and behavioral habit, who gradually become mature physically and psychologically, and grow and develop successfully into qualified persons. Moreover, they always treat and cultivate their sons and daughters as complete persons. In families of many sons and daughters, both young and old, boy and girl, clever and not clever, beautiful and ugly children are persons that need equal treatment in the eyes of parents. The so-called equal justice proves this truth. In one-child families, when children make achievements and parents are pleased to give encouragement; when children do anything wrong or perform unsatisfactorily, parents could always forgive and understand, because he (she) is their own child. It indicates that desire and requirement of family on sons and daughters are consistent with the objective of “a qualified person” in compulsory education.

2. Objective of “a qualified person” embodies desire and requirements of school on children. School is the

major place of life of children, and life of children in school is the most valuable time in their life. They not only acquire knowledge in school, but also become qualified persons primarily. As teachers, they not only hope that students could successfully gain the qualification of further study and participation in social activities in higher school, but also treat and cultivate them as complete persons all along. In a class, in spite of students’ academic achievement, family background, conduct and intelligence, they are all persons in teachers’ eyes. They are all students, who have the right of receiving education and obtaining development and deserve respect, understanding, care and help. Just as what is proposed by many schools, “all for students, for all students, for students’ all”. In other words, school should not only develop all its work around students, but also around all students’ growth demand and life development. What students need is the work direction of school and teacher, and recognition of students and parents is the greatest affirmation of school and teacher. It indicates that desire and requirements of school on students are consistent with the objective of “a qualified person” in compulsory education.

3. Objective of “a qualified person” embodies desire and requirements of society on children. Society is a large school cultivating students and the large classroom for students’ learning. From the requirements of social development on human accomplishment, one should be exposed to human community and live, study and work in the interaction with others whether he is a farmer, worker, doctor, teacher or student. In other words, he does not survive as an isolated individual, but a person in the society firstly. He must understand how to deal with various social relations, such as interpersonal relations, blood relations, group relations, relations between the upper and lower, etc. He should perform appropriate words, actions and attitudes when confronted with these relations. It requires everyone in the modern society to have certain accomplishment of “a qualified person”. For children, the whole society hopes that children could be mature physiologically and psychologically, have the capability to analyze and solve problems, have certain understanding of the society and make manner consistent with the common code of conduct of the society through “a qualified person” education carried out by family and school; meanwhile, they should have certain professionalism, serious and responsible work attitude and innovative spirit, ability to live and work independently in future society, work individually as a member in the society, obtain the qualification of social life, and become a person recognized and accepted by the society.

3.3 Compulsory Education Stage Is the Critical Period of “A Qualified Person”

“A qualified person” is the process that a natural person changes into a social person. The process of “a qualified

person” is absolutely carried out during a certain stage. Before compulsory education, it is the most fundamental stage of “qualified person” of individual, and compulsory education stage is the critical period of “qualified person” of individual, as well as the critical period of individual “qualified person” physiologically and psychologically and that of the society.

1. Physiologically, compulsory education stage is the critical period of “qualified person” for children.

Medical research shows that the growth of one’s life has two peaks. The first growth peak is from the birth to two years later. The second growth peak is during the puberty. It finds its expression in the following aspects. Firstly, height and weight grow rapidly. As children enter puberty, height and weight grow rapidly as the bones and muscles develop rather rapidly. Height increases by 6~8 cm per year, some up to 10~11 cm; weight increases by an average of 5~6 kg per year, or even 8~10 kilograms. Secondly, genital development is so significant and secondary sexual characteristics begin to appear. Girls have menstrual cramps and boys have wet dream. Thirdly, physiological function enhances. With the increase of practical activities of children, the internal structure and function of the brain continue to divide and develop rapidly. Physiologist studies have shown that children’s brain development has two accelerated phases. 5~6 year is the first accelerated phase of brain development, of which the brain weight is about 1280 grams, 90% of that of a qualified person; 13~14 year is the second accelerated phase of brain development, approaching the brain weight of a qualified person, about 1400 grams. Meanwhile, heart and lung development has entered the second fierce growth term of life. If lung capacity is only 1400 ml at the age of 10, it rises to 2000~2500 ml at the age of 14~15. It indicates that compulsory education stage is not only the critical period of physiological development of children, but also that of “a qualified person” psychologically.

2. Psychologically, compulsory education stage is the critical period of “qualified person” for children.

During the primary school stage, children’s psychology has a qualitative change than that in early childhood. Scientific research shows that 10-year-old children have improved prefrontal cortex of brain development, and the nature to play starts to recede; on the contrary, suppression capacity of brain strengthens and children become more conscious about their behavioral and emotional changes; the language and text responses of the second signal system enhances, the development of thinking ability is in the transition period, and abstraction, classification, comparison and reasoning ability begin to take shape; Thinking agility and flexibility will be improved, and interest will be very extensive. During the stage of junior high school, tremendous changes in physiology result in great changes in psychology of juvenile. During the early youth, they are rather naïve and tend

to keep some psychological characteristics of children. However, they have already had some psychological characteristics of a qualified person and are able to grasp more abstract concepts. They have active thinking and start to have love for the opposite sex. During the late youth, their thinking is highly developed, and they can systematically and logically acquire knowledge, master the more general abstract concepts, have continuously improving understanding of natural phenomena and social phenomena close to that of a qualified person. Their thinking also develops rapidly. During this period, juveniles start to break away from dependence on adults. Their self-consciousness and independence consciousness are improved, and they start to build the ideal self. However, juveniles are pure with insufficient social experience. They are unwilling to communicate with parents, lack the understanding of their own physiological changes, have confusions in contact with the opposite sex, and are easily influenced by the environment. Therefore, they are especially in need of correct guidance and education to help them understand and adapt to their own physiological and psychological changes. Therefore, compulsory education stage is not only the accelerated period of children’s psychological maturity, but also the critical period for them to be “qualified persons” psychologically.

3. Socially, compulsory education stage is the critical period of “qualified person” for children in the society.

Sociality is the essential attribute of human. Physiologically “qualified person” has laid good foundation for socially “qualified person”, and psychologically “qualified person” is an important constituent of socially “qualified person”. With the gradual physiological and psychological “qualification”, children’s knowledge grows ever wider, public relations become more extensive, their understanding of the society becomes deeper, and the sociality improves increasingly. They are not only aware of the fact that they are independent individuals with life, but also that they are independent individuals with emotion, personality and human dignity. They are clear about the role they play in family, school and other groups, as well as their right, obligation and responsibility. During this period, children start to form moral ideals, beliefs, will, behavior autonomy, persistence and independence enhance, and world outlook and life outlook gradually take shape. Therefore, compulsory education stage is not only the mutation period of formation of children’s life outlook, world outlook and knowledge system, but also the critical period of a socially “qualified person”.

In short, the establishment of the objective of “a qualified person” in the compulsory education stage enables children to learn to understand themselves, properly handle their relationship with others and the society during this period of time; they learn from the

nature, society and others the necessary basic knowledge, skills, capabilities and specifications as a person, gradually ~~learn to observe society and consider social issues~~, and enhance adaptability to the society; they learn self-education, form good habits in life and study, value life, develop individual sociality, and gain the qualification of effective participation in social life.

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