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Pursuing Higher-Purpose Education in a Globalized Society

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Abstract:

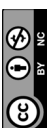
Education serves the role of preserving and passing down to future generations' valuable aspects of traditions and cultures, forming the building blocks for advanced civilizations. The world is culturally diverse, yet bonds can be created through cultural exchanges, and found a global peaceful coexistence. The transmission of a variety of cultures can be inhibited or promoted by governments, yet civil society has an autonomous and important role. The author discusses examples from her personal experience in teaching music in a variety of cultural and socio-economic settings, and the impact of governmental policies on artistic teaching. The author also establishes why education in the humanities, conscience, music and fine arts form the structural underpinnings of an advanced society and culture that is sustainable and respects human rights for all.

1. Introduction

The paper is based on the observations, and studies of the author, Dr. Susan Wang-Selfridge, who holds a Ph. D. in Music from the University of California, Los Angeles and has extensive teaching experience at the college level, k-12 educational system and private studio settings. These experiences include serving multiple non-profit organizations such as an inner city religious organization, a non-denominational international children's chorus and a cultural and self-cultivation group Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy. The presentation shares the author's observations as a music educator, taking a broad view of how social-economic dynamics can affect the members of society in our current educational system. The author also addresses the core value of education and how governmental policies directly impact quality of education, preservation of culture and the pursuit of self-cultivation to achieve higher life goals. From a sociological perspective, the author provides examples of growing trends around the globe of international adoption of conscience education as means to promote world peace, in a sustainable globalized society.

2. An overview of the philosophy of education with regard to culture

Music is the essence of culture, the first music every child hears is the mother's heartbeat. The rhythmic beat is full of love and security, creating an association that lasts a lifetime. The term "culture," can mean different things to different people. It can mean the 'way of life' of groups of people; or the essence of human creativity in the wide spectrum of arts and humanities; or an integrated form of human knowledge, belief, and behavior. It can also be the philosophy of life, moral values, goals, and customs shared by a society. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle have had an everlasting influence on the development of



Western culture, including music, education and society. Pythagoras believed that music was inseparable from numbers and considered music to be the key to both the spiritual and physical universe. He viewed music as a system of pitch and rhythm ruled by the same mathematical laws that operate the entire visible and invisible world. Therefore, it was believed that music possessed moral qualities and could affect character and behavior. From Book Three of Plato's *Republic*, he argued that music has the power to generate beauty and purity in building an ideal State and vice versa. Therefore, Plato promoted the usage of music modes of Dorian and Phrygian as they fostered the virtues of temperance and courage and limited modes of Mixolydian, Lydian, and Ionian, as they were considered to be "soft and convivial" in character. Plato and Aristotle both agreed on a well-rounded education encompassed both of music and "gymnastics," or sports. A balance of culturally and intellectually stimulating music with exercise and physical regulation of gymnastics ensures a healthy lifestyle for both the mind and the body. Plato was clear in his recognition of the great power that music has in the culture of society and the ability to affect one's character. Plato deliberates on the matter of education as an integral and vital part of a broader matter of the well-being of human society. The ultimate purpose of education is to help people know the Idea of the Good, which is to be virtuous. Plato surmised that the only way of political and social salvation for such a state is self-sacrificing discipline, specialized efficiency, and government administered by men whom we have educated for the function and whom we compel to be unselfish.

Predating the philosophical achievements of the classical Greek period (which arose in the 6th century BC and onward), the Zhou Dynasty (1046 to 256 BC) served as a foundational civilization in societal evolution and the longest-lasting dynasty in Chinese history. Lord Zhou (also known as Zhou Gong) was responsible for establishing the Li (virtuous conduct and the rituals to go with it) and Yue (music) system that stabilized the State after his brother overthrew the preceding, Shang Dynasty. Reflecting on the cause of the Shang Dynasty's downfall, Lord Zhou realized that the brutality, lack of humanistic cultivation and poor leadership of Shang's last king eroded people's trust and led to the doom of the State. Therefore, he formulated a complete set of codes based on morality for the people to follow. The purpose of "Li" was to standardize one's behavior and to establish proper manners when engaging in various interpersonal activities (ex. meeting the older generation or a mentor) or to follow proper protocols when conducting rituals at functions such as weddings, funerals, banquets, meeting alliances, and even during wars. A suitable style of music or dance would accompany each function. The function of Li and Yue, were to bring about harmony and peace even among people who had many differences. The Chinese characters for harmony and peace first appeared in Li and Yue documents. To Chinese people, Li and Yue are important educational principles, because their purpose is to promote harmony and peace. These examples exemplify the importance of culture, including music and education in the foundational structures of society and humanity. Furthermore, the principles are particularly relevant to interactions in a globalized multi-cultural world.

As German sociologist Max Weber viewed the concept of culture as a value; the historical process is represented as a superstructure of types of cultures that have their own essence, forms, and rhythm of development. Another contemporary Germanic philosopher Max Scheler considered culture as the orb of ideal (formed by art, religion, philosophy) and real, material (economy, state, family) needs that are contained in the structure of the spirit of man. In short, culture is the sum of all human life experiences. It has been said that culture is the fertile soil that nurtures all great civilizations and the lifeline supporting mankind's existence. Therefore, cultural preservation is a lifelong mission and the key to successfully achieve this task is education. To paraphrase Plato, we must also come to a realization that the true purpose of education is to learn the principles of being conscientious citizens and contributing members of society. Ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles stated, "There is no witness so terrible and no accuser so powerful as conscience which dwells within us." Senior scholar Charles Haynes at the First Amendment Centre in the United States suggested in his article *Schools of Conscience*, "Education's highest aim is to create moral and civic habits of the heart." As Vicki Zakrzewski, director of the Greater Good Science Center expressed, "Whatever the century, we always need more people who listen to and act upon their conscience. But developing a working conscience is no small feat. According to moral education expert Darcia Narvaez, the development of character is *all about conscience*." As expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr "Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction." Philosophers from Lord Zhou to Plato, to Martin Luther King, Jr. were well aware of what they perceived as shortcomings of their respective cultures. They each advocated education in morality to filter the negative artifacts from the positive aspects of a culture, in order

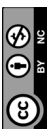


to strengthen their respective cultures. “In a world with a unique economy desired by a global world must be found also a cultural protective way of education that might be able to assure a good informational contact avoiding misunderstandings. This is maybe the most important step in assuring stability in the new millennium. Any culture needs more information because most of its problems found solutions in other cultures. Cultural fortune represents now the biggest gift for the globalization period. This is why it must be stimulated by a global system of education designed to value different cultural solution for the global world.” (Colceag, 2001) Colceag emphasized that the solutions to overcome cultural flaws can be found in other cultures in a globalized world, through education, which in turn will bring economic opportunity. Cultural traditions, education and economic conditions are interwoven, one leading to the other and then reflecting back on the other. The recognition of the notion that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” was mandated in the United Nation’s Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). However, socio-economic structures and government policies create a divergence from birth. This creates various socio-economic environments. That is why Prince Siddhartha Gautama of the Shakya Republic of the Ancient India (c. 5th to 4th century BCE) abandoned his privilege to seek for enlightenment for the sake of liberating the people from the tyranny of the social injustice and the oppression of the caste system and ultimately achieved the Buddhahood, passing on the teachings to obtain the ultimate freedom and liberation for all sentient beings.

3. Observation of the impact of various socio-economic patterns in liberal arts.

While we are all born equal, many societies create socio-economic caste systems that generate artificial barriers to achievement. While I was teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles, I encountered many students from diverse backgrounds. Some freshmen started class, ready to advance to a higher level of the subject matter, while others struggled with the rudimentary concepts of the course material. The primary division between these categories of students was the training opportunities they had received prior entering the university; which more often than not, matched the socio-economic environment that they came from, with the students coming from wealthy communities having access to abundant pre-college opportunities. Another snapshot observation comes from teaching at the music department of an elite private college in the Los Angeles Basin, most of the freshmen students who enrolled in the rudimentary music theory class I taught had prior scholastic music education due to their affluent home communities and had the foundation to breeze through the curriculum. My working experience serving as a music director at an inner city Presbyterian Church also shone some light on the tangible impact of the socio-economic imbalance of the congregation, with most of the members being musically illiterate, that is, unable to read and write music. Music illiteracy is not entirely uncommon for musicians, as music is often a path for talented musicians to escape impoverished backgrounds; however any form of illiteracy makes advancement much more difficult. For example, guitar legend Jimi Hendrix was never able to read or write music. He learned each song by ear, which necessitated the need to collaborate with fellow musicians in person. This arguably is the reason he struggled to find a producer who could help harness his ideas and transform them into completed recordings.

Reflecting on our conventional education systems, most focus on developing students’ general knowledge and basic skills so that they can be ready to enter the workforce and this is why music often receives little emphasis across the educational system. Anthony Mazzocchi, a Grammy nominated music educator and a trombonist pointed out that “Here we are in the 21st century, yet our education system is built on a 19th century model: the idea of academic ability and that the “most useful subjects” that can “get you a job or into college” are at the top of some educational hierarchy. Academic ability — not the capacity for creative thought — still dominates our view of intelligence and therefore our school budget priorities.” As basic of a skill as reading musical notes may seem, it requires socio-economic commitment that places value on music education, viewing music as more than elective arts. After all, music connects us to our original formative experiences and has the ability of cultivating the soul and culture, making it an important part of humanistic education. According to Confucius, the essence of music is “humaneness” (moral integrity). Music is not merely a perfected form in which humaneness is characterised: A man who is not virtuous cannot claim to be a musician nor have anything to do with music.



Investing in fine arts programs has far reaching academic and economic impacts, as students enrolled in fine arts courses score from 11% to 13% higher on the SAT than students not enrolled in fine arts courses and studies have shown that music education has documented positive effects on reading and math. (TMEA, 2013; Deere, 2010) Further, music classes typically have high student-teacher ratios, so when schools cut or do not provide music programs, long-run expenses are actually greater (Benham, 2011). Some nations, such as China have engaged in educational reform, with a focus on cultivating all-around, well-developed citizens who are creative, independent, and more capable of competing in the world economy (Zhao, 2004). There is ample research showing how governmental policies, such as investing in liberal arts educational programs directly impact local and international academic, societal and economic competitiveness.

4. A Case Study: Tai Ji Men's journey in redressing socio-economic injustice

Government policies can have far reaching impacts on the socio-economic and cultural health of the community, nation and the world. As previously discussed, this can be through investments or disinvestments in conventional education. It can be through policies that directly or indirectly impact extra-curricular programs, as is outlined in the case of Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy.

Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy is a non-profit, non-religious, non-political and self-sufficient organization that emphasizes promoting physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing through qigong martial arts practices and self-cultivation. The academy carries forward ancient traditions of the Men-Pai (similar to school) of Tai Ji Men by the grandmaster Dr. Hong Tao-Tze and was established in its current structure in Taiwan in 1966. The academy has adapted itself so contemporaries can learn the cultural history and yin and yang wisdom to navigate living in the ever-changing, complex modern world. For more than two decades, Dr. Hong has led members of Tai Ji Men to travel the world, visiting 101 countries and conducting cultural exchanges. During a cultural exchange in the United Nations in 2018, Ambassador Teburoro Tito from Kiribati honorifically referred to Dr. Hong as a modern day Confucius. These exchanges include music and dance performances, with the intent of bringing the hearts of world citizens together to promote a philosophy that no matter the cultural background, world citizens seek peace and harmony in a chaotic world. During the global goodwill and culture trips, the ceremony of ringing the Bell of Love and Peace seeks to inspire leaders of all fields, including heads of states, UN ambassadors, and Nobel Peace Prize laureates to make commitments to global sustainability and peace. After ringing the bell, many of these leaders have taken concrete actions to avert regional wars or mitigate national conflicts. During the 2000 Sydney Olympic Game, the New South Wales Governor Gordon Samuels lauded, "Tai Ji Men understand this, that our conduct must mirror our words and must match our sentiment... If we desire peace, we must act peace, if we wish the harmony, we must learn how to live in harmony, with one another, we must learn how to live in peace, and the example of the kind before you today are pointers in the direction in which we should all travel."

Over my 15 years of participation with this organization, seeing all the work they have done internationally, I have witnessed how their international peace building efforts through cultural exchanges has been significantly hindered by the Taiwan government's economic policies, all while the organization has received repeated accolades by politicians, including multiple presidents, as well as having been invited by the government ten times to participate in Taiwan's National Day performance. The economic injustice stems from a corrupt taxation agency that awards their employees with bonuses based on taxes collected regardless of the legitimacy of the actual tax bills. In 1997 the Taiwan National Taxation Bureau wrongfully accused Dr. Hong and his wife of tax evasion without any investigation. As a non-profit cultural and self-cultivation organization that promotes conscience, human rights and justice, on principle, Dr. Hong challenged the accusations, taking the taxation bureau to court and secured numerous court orders demanding that the taxation bureau cease the incorrect claims against Tai Ji Men. However, despite the rulings, the taxation bureau reissued new tax bills and the litigation cycle began. Anew. This cycle has been repeating for the past 25 years, redirecting incalculable hours and financial resources from global cultural education. In August of 2020, the taxation bureau ignored the court's ruling that determined Tai Ji Men did not owe taxes, then illegally auctioned the land owned by Dr. Hong. By allowing the corrupt taxation policies imposed to the people, Taiwan government is in direct violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The former U. S. Chief Justice John Marshal said

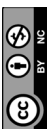


that “The ability to tax involves the ability to destroy.” As professor Fu-lung Lien with the Osnabrück University, uttered in the book *Who Stole Their Youth*, “The State stole twenty-four prime years from Tai Ji Men members. The State’s confiscation of the people’s property in the name of the law is an act of a licensed robber. However, it cannot steal the eternal Tao of Tai Ji in the hearts of the people and it can’t take away Tai Ji’s supreme goodness and righteousness. Despite the State’s efforts, the people have continued to improve themselves. Through endeavors of decoding State crimes, people have awakened their conscience and vow to do good deeds and seek the truth, kindness and beauty. The people mean everything and the masters of the country.” This is an example of how governmental policies can obstruct cultural preservation and violates the principles of conduct (Li) and music (Yue) established by Lord Zhou.

5. Conscience is the key to sustainable development

The United Nations has adopted as a long-run objective, implementing the Sustainable Development Goals which are the “blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.” The United Nations, as a collaborative body between nations, depends on the good faith efforts of nations to solve global challenges. As one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson stated, “The purpose of government is to enable the people of a nation to live in safety and happiness. Government exists for the interests of the governed, not for the governors.” Thomas Jefferson also said, “When a man assumes a public trust, he should consider himself as public property.” It is crucial for governmental officials to set conscientious examples when they exercise the power that was entrusted by the people. When public servants make mistakes, proactively remedying the mistake can restore public trust. One of the Bible’s scriptures illustrated such an account: In Luke 19:1-10, it is said that a tax collector Zacchaeus was rich but dishonest. One day, he learned that Jesus would pass through the City of Jericho. As the news spread through the entire city, much like a modern time rock star fan, Zacchaeus was very eager to see how the iconic virtuous figure looked like. However, with his short stature, he couldn’t see pass the crowd. So, he climbed up a sycamore tree to have a better view of Jesus. To Zacchaeus’ surprise, as he passed the tree, the Lord called, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” As the townsmen grumbled why Jesus would visit such an unsavory individual, overjoyed, Zacchaeus said to the compassionate teacher when they met at his house, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” From this example, we see how a corrupt official can come to terms with his conscience and take concrete actions to amend his unlawful mistakes. An ancient Chinese proverb states, “No man is errorless. The greatest deed a person can achieve is when he bravely confronts his own mistake and rectifies it.” As proclaimed in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (The United Nations, 1948, art. 1). “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms...” (The United Nations, 1948, art. 26.2). During the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, the United Nations adopted a draft resolution and declared April 5th as the International Day of Conscience. The Assembly invited “all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and the other international and regional organizations, as well as the private sector and civil society, to build the culture of peace with love and conscience in accordance with the culture and other appropriate circumstances or customs or their local, national and regional communities, including through quality education and public awareness-raising activities, thereby fostering sustainable development.”

During the second International Day of Conscience, the vice president of the International Criminal Court, Justice Antoine Kesia-Mbe Mindua presented a multi-faceted treatise on conscience, “The Statue of the International Criminal Court (ICC) states that “during this century millions of children, women and men have been victims of unimaginable atrocities that deeply shocked the conscience of humanity...Therefore, conscience is really instrumental for peace, love and brotherhood among nations. The concept of “conscience” is commonly used in its moral sense. It is the inherent ability of every healthy human being to perceive what is right and what is wrong and on the strength of this perception to monitor, evaluate and execute actions... Because conscience is the highest authority and evaluates informs to determine the quality of an action. In



other words, conscience ranks higher than consciousness. Conscience means awareness of awareness or self-awareness which is capable of introspection...Conscience can be achieved by true education mainly within one's family and at school under the guidance of UNESCO and with the contribution of the civil society, State, and international community...In addition, true beliefs, faiths or religions, may also help educating people's conscience." As presented in the explanatory note at the two hundred and ninth session of the UNESCO Executive Board, the purpose and objective of celebrating the International Day of Conscience at UNESCO Headquarters on 5 April each year include: "(a) to raise awareness about the importance of building the culture of peace with love and conscience, in accordance with the customs at the local, national and regional communities; (b) to assert the importance of inclusion of principles peace with love and conscience through quality education, public awareness and activities; (c) to highlight the relation between peace with love and conscience and sustainable development." From a global perspective, where significant focus has been placed on environmental degradation, international bodies, including the United Nations has directed focus from growth in excess to sustainability. In order to achieve this objective, the United Nations has directed efforts to conscience education, with conscience serving as the highest moral authority. This is viewed as the key to achieving sustainable development.

6. Conclusion

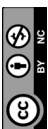
As can be seen through these examples, not only music, but also other artistic cultural traditions create a foundation for cultural growth. Government policy can either facilitate or impair this process. Confucius, praised Zhou Gong for his versatile and virtuous personality as Lord Zhou governed the State with conscience and wisdom. He nurtured the citizenry like his own and "imitated the way of heaven" by implementing a virtue-based code of conduct and music to regulate and cultivate people's morality and behavior. Profoundly influenced by Zhou Gong's contributions in establishing governing policies, Confucius' illustration can be translated as "of the practice of benevolent governance for governmental officials and organizations as a whole is achieved through overcoming the temptation of selfish desire, forgoing self-centered practices, and maintaining harmonious relationships with the citizenry." Philosophers throughout history have advocated the imperative of moral or conscience education, emphasizing that the higher purpose of education is to inspire the humanity to rediscover the fundamental human virtues of love, compassion and honesty as well as to rekindle our innate conscience. "We must not forget the lesson taught at Yad Vashem (World Holocaust Remembrance Center), No matter how highly educated or sophisticated, a nation without a critical mass of citizens of conscience may become indifferent to suffering and fall prey to tyranny and intolerance." (Haynes, 2009) When human conduct is guided by conscience, mankind's aspirations for serenity and peace can be achieved. Therefore, education in the humanities, conscience, music and fine arts form the structural underpinnings of an advanced society and culture that is sustainable and respects human rights for all.

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