



## Interpreting “Differences” on Return from Europe In Perspectives of Education and Culture

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### Abstract

Basing on “Chinese and foreign mutual knowledge”, this paper interprets the differences and gaps between China and some European countries on cultural heritage, environmental protection, public hygiene, personal relationship and freedom of others in perspectives of general education and social culture. It emphasizes that only accelerate educational development and cultural dissemination can we cultivate cultural confidence and cultural consciousness of the nation, and display characteristics of Chinese culture consciously in the trend of cultural globalization and educational internationalization.

**Keywords:** Differences and gaps, Educational and cultural perspectives, Cultural confidence and cultural consciousness

I visited Europe for the academic purpose not long ago. Despite the tight schedule, I got much from this trip. While appreciating the long historical culture, beautiful natural scenery and fascinating exotic atmosphere of European countries, it may help us think about the present educational reform in some perspectives which seems “particular”, if interpret what I have been seen and heard on “Chinese and foreign mutual knowledge” and in perspectives of general education and social culture.

### 1. Emphasis on “differences” displays characteristics better

What will we investigate European academe? Whether the modernization drive as it is or the direction of future as it ought to be, the wealthy material life or the beautiful natural scenery, they are no doubt worth of considering. According to the opinion of the writer, due to historical reasons, most European countries are small and with little population, even certain countries are called “pocket size”. Besides their general characteristics—that Europeans are diligent and brave, full of intelligence, love peace, cherish life, and they created a wealthy and civilized Europe together, their “differences” should be taken more seriously. For example, the artistic leisure of Italians, the flirtatious romantic of Frenchmen, the mechanical conscientious of Germans, the gentle manner of Englishmen and the various acumen of Dutchmen make a sharp and strong impression on people; maybe the merger of these “differences” is their different characteristics, and the further display reveals their characteristics better. As Jiang Ze-ming said, the world is alive with all cultures as all sunshine is of seven colors (Jiang 1997). With the “modernization” of European countries, they made these differences or characteristics widely known consciously or unconsciously in order to make clear their localization and strengthen their national approval. Furthermore, on the basis of “his-his mutual knowledge” and the understanding of the differences, the writer thought, we should pay more attention to distinguish the differences on “his-my mutual knowledge”, that is to say, understand the differences between China and European countries as deeply as possible. As for these differences, each of them has advantages and disadvantages—sometimes, ours are better than theirs, and vice versa. But if analyze the “gaps” mainly, it will help us make clear the direction or point of strength of Chinese reform and development to some extent.

The past 20 years, especially the recently educational reform demonstrated that both universities and primary schools have been pursuing similar objectives, carrying out identical models, referring to resemble evaluation criteria. As to higher education, they focused on “first-class” construction, “scale” expanding, “uniform” teaching, scientific research “grade”; then for the foundational education, they emphasize the construction of “famous school”, the grade of “mechanical equipment”, show off “bilingual” teaching, ballyhoo the ranking of “proportion of students entering schools of a higher grade”. All these, it seems that the characteristics and advantages of different schools are neglected. In my

opinion, education, just like playing a piano, only the ten thumbs play their respective roles would a harmonious, magnificent resplendent gorgeous appear. If defend the same tone and timbre tenaciously, what it will be? Once, an American philosopher told his Chinese students, “the meaning of life” is maximizing the “difference” from others (Li 2007). It demonstrated that differences and characteristics were so important. However, a French sinologist F·Jullien said: “strictly speaking, only in China, there are ‘foreign lands’ different from European civilization” (Zhang 2007). If so, it illustrated that there are some innate characteristics in Chinese education. Hence, schools of different levels and types should place emphasis on differences and characteristics of their own.

## 2. Attach importance to the protection of cultural heritage

European countries, not only attach importance to the protection of material cultural heritage, but also the intangible cultural heritage. The former, like the momentum Basilica of St. Peter's, the sumptuous Santo Maria del Fiore, the fascinating Colosseum Rome's Arena of Death, the miraculous Leaning Tower of Pisa, the famous Notre-Dame de Paris, the majestic Eiffel Tower, the Louvre—an elegant artistic treasury, the Grand-Place Brussels which surrounded by Gothic ancient architectures, Venice and Amsterdam which are fusions of city and water, and other places of interest, which are acclaimed as the acme of perfection, are fascinating. They revealed their national tradition, long history, even spirit simultaneously. Especially in Italy, there is a “historical district” in the modern city Rome, which preserves many historical vestiges since ancient times. Furthermore, nearly nine hundred similar “historical districts” scatter everywhere to protect historical heritage, including foundations of building, destroyed walls, broken pillars, caves and trees from demolishing, removing and transforming. Here, modern architectures of 20<sup>th</sup> century and relics of ancient times co-exist. As for the latter, European countries pay attention to “integration”—co-operation in economy, culture, education and security strengthened continuously. However, their own national culture and customs are regarded as the symbols of identity and softpower of international competition (Joseph·Nye). For example, although English is dominant in Europe, other countries not only “pluralize” it to distinctive English, but also cherish their own language as “identification”. To spread French, France even provides free education for foreigners; again, only Euro is legal in European Union, but each of group members insists on different patterns in the coin design to show their national characteristics.

Review Chinese attitude toward cultural heritage, in the mind, some people hold this wrong idea: “the more cultural heritage, the heavier burden; the more Historical Monuments, the greater responsibility”. In practice, some streets, architectures and roads were reconstructed again and again; even farmhouses were reconstructed together in the same style. In order to pursue economic benefits, some cities and old towns with complete old architectures, fancy personal gardens or simple folk customs were transformed greatly into the nondescript. Then they became neither traditional nor modern. Hence, many well-known bridges, mansions just famous for a short time, since some leaders hoped to achieve remarkable “success”. Furthermore, various kinds of antique cities and towns, once are charming, now changed into “forest of cement”, “modern buildings” or “artificial countryside”. The eastern charm was terribly disturbed, the natural beauty disappeared completely and the nature is far away from human beings. Just as for the protection of intangible cultural heritage, China is a country with a long history and glorious culture, which languages are so colorful, not to mention the great influence of Confucianism abroad. However, it is hard to say that these important intangible cultural heritage were got necessary and sufficient protection. According to some investigations, now, in China, there are only three old men in their eighty's who really speak Manchu as their first language in daily life. Hence, a scholar named Zhao a-ping said, “about ten years” Manchu will die out, at that time, there will be no “living Manchu” (Li 2007). Then other examples, the music pursuing eight harmonious tunes, the tender and sincere poetry, the particular paintings, the beautiful calligraphy, the colorful dialects and proverbs and the traditional Chinese medicine full of humanities and so on, which brim over with harmonious beauty of traditional culture, they played an irreplaceable role in the international culture. But it seems that we lacked much attention on how to protect these heritage and the measures we took were not effective. Recently, for undeserved reputation or personal interests, some scholars even brought discredit on ancestors, “spoof” wantonly. These scholars not only lost their basic morality, but destroyed the “softpower” of our country. Moreover, they confused the criterion of excellent culture, and committed a crime to Chinese culture and international culture (Tang 2007).

Beginning with education to strengthen our country's cultural tradition education is one of the important ways. As for the education of cultural heritage protection, first of all, it should be understood deeply. As the carrier of history, the protection of cultural heritage is the delivery and continuity of national history, hence, protecting them is the duty of every citizen. It is not only based on the co-existence of multi-cultures and the demand for the protection of cultural ecology, but the responsibility for the development and prosperity of culture. To protect cultural heritage, just the attention on one building, one bridge or one antique, one skill is not enough, what's more, tap and remain their unique “cultural gene”; try our best to remain the integrity when manifesting their characteristics, melt several “individuals” which are full of historical features, national features and regional features into a “whole”; in the process of protecting cultural heritage, each of us is beneficiary, hence, we should not only protect one cultural memory, but also nourish these cultural heritage with modern civilization constantly, so that make them get beyond historical space-time, and continue to display the function of delivering civilization. Secondly, in the case that “English-Chinese education is imbalanced”, on

the one hand,we should improve students' English abilities in order to make them anticipate international cultural communication and development with stronger ability;on the other hand,we shouldn't put the cart before the horse,regard the tool as the aim,instead, rebuild up our national confidence,believe firmly that our own language is the most beautiful,then learn and use Chinese well at first(an official off Ministry of Education 2007). Thirdly, we should defend the spiritual wealth of our national culture conscientiously. At the period of emphasizing the reality and pursuing material life,it is difficult to defend those cultural heritage unfrequented in poor and lonesome life. However,the writer thought that the younger generation should at least understand traditional ideal image—the lonely smoke over the desert,the sunset lingering at the river,the moon that shone between the pines,the pine,bamboo and plum while tasting KFC or MacDonald,learning about Rock & Roll or NBA,abiding the Valentine's Day or Christmas Eve,indulging in Korean TV serials or Hollywood block bluster,which is necessary cultural inside information of Chinese in cultural globalization,and also represent keeping watch the national essence.

### 3. Attach importance to the environment protection and hygiene

Europeans—from the heads of government to the common people, place much importance on the environmental protection and public hygiene. For example, in Switzerland, almost every family has cars, but the government insists on “blue sky and white cloud is the most important”. It advocated “using motor vehicles rationally” and spread bicycles, tried its best to protect environment and save energy even 20 years ago. For another example, when the Prime Minister of Germany Merkel visited China not long ago, she hardly ever forgot advocating the great significance of cleaning environment, purifying air, renewing resources,reducing energy consumption for the development of human beings,and stating how to take the responsibility as developed and developing countries(Li 2007). When staying below the blue sky,drinking the running water all over the streets,walking on the twisty paths,looking at the broad and clear rivers excitedly,boating on the lakes cheerfully,even drinking the lake water,we not only had a strong feeling of the clear air,the clean water,the charming lakes,the beautiful mountains,but also the strong sense of environmental protection of Europeans. Mention the control of the Rhine specially: the Rhine flowing through several countries once was polluted seriously. The latest 20 years,after several countries acted in an concerted effort,for example,the preceding stage,to take overwhelming measures to ban activities which harm the environment such as emission of waste water and so on along the river,overwhelming measures that will be taken at later stage is to ban the water pollution by the chemical fertilizer along the river,now,the Rhine is not only vast and mighty,but also displays functions of serving economy and bringing benefits to human beings in full.

Review the worrying situation of Chinese environment and hygiene, not to mention the sandy-dust storms have been wreaking havoc for many years. Just in this year, the water areas of the Taihu Lake, the Chaohu Lake and the Dianchi Lake turned up large-scale blue algae in succession, so that seventy percent domestic rivers and lakes were polluted. There are protozoa, heavy metal and organic matter in water. The degree of water pollution is close to the critical point. Another piece of information shows,China is a country of lacking in water,now,where the drinking water of more than three billion people is unsafe,among them,about 1.9 billion people,the harmful contents in their drinking water exceed the provided standard;in twenty percent important cities,the quality of the water from the water source region,and almost one third of the total water is not up to the provided standard. The water pollution and drinking water became the most concerning problem in people's livelihood(Gao 2007),and the Huai River is almost becoming a river that “wherever there is water,there is pollution;wherever there is river,there is drought”(Liu 2007).Then,as for the usage of chemical fertilizer and agricultural chemicals,at present,each year,more than 47 million tons of chemical fertilizer were used,only about thirty five percent of them worked;and more than 1.4 million tons of agricultural chemicals were used,just about thirty percent of them worked. A scholar named Zhu li-zhi said, the data shows, agriculture pollution was more than one third of the whole pollution. Chemical fertilizer and agricultural chemicals “consume energy in the process of production and transportation, and the usage rate is very low, so they cause environmental pollution twice”(Li 2007). With the rapid development of Chinese GDP and improvement of people's living standard,air was polluted seriously,climate became unusual,rivers were limpid no longer... We have already paid for it;if no warnings about environment and health,human beings “are doomed to misfortune” eventually,which will not just be an alarmist talk of “pessimist of environmental protection”.

How to solve these problems? Education is absolutely necessary. Firstly, pay much attention to the basic theory research of environmental protection and health education. In the 1970's,in face of the continual deterioration of the environment,western scholars began to search for the ideological and cultural causes of it,and they happened to pay close attention to the cultural spirit that is friendly to nature in Chinese traditional culture. For example,Norwegian ecological philosopher A· Naess declared the ecological “social status of mine” that he said is the Chinese “Taoism”;British professor J-Clark even thought the natural idea of Chinese Taoists is affecting the shift of western ecological civilization. Actually,early in the 1930,in the light of environmental deterioration,Lu Xun made a statement in a popular science book seriously:These problems—“desert is moving towards south gradually,nutrition is hard to support,are important and practical to Chinese. If not be solved, all that will become extinct”,“trees cut down,riverbeds dried up,a drop of water will equal to blood in the future”(Lu 1930). The foresight of Mr.Lu carried conviction;in face

of the continual deterioration of environment, Chinese scholars speeded up the relevant researches and transformed them into the contents of popular science and education, maybe it is not too late! Secondly, learn and draw lessons from the experience of western countries, which is setting ENGO universally. These famous environmental protection organizations, such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the World Watch Institute, the Friends of the Earth, the Greenpeace International, the Club of Rome and so on, not only execute the measures of the governments, what's more, advance the nurturing and maturing of citizen's sense of environmental protection greatly, stretch the means of solving environmental crisis, play the role that the government is unable to substitute. We can learn the principle and experience of ENGO systematically at the beginning, then try out the ENGO patterns which fit in with the actual condition of our country, replenish and promote carrying out Chinese environmental measures through social power maximally (Zhang 2007).

#### 4. Place importance on interpersonal relations and respect the freedom of others

Both Europeans and Chinese value interpersonal relations, but if we divide it into two types for further observation, it shows that Chinese place much more importance on longitudinal relations, for example, respecting leaders, superiors, parents, care about children; while Europeans on lateral relations, they coordinate with colleagues and neighbors, and live with each other in harmony. As to the freedom, Europeans place much importance on it, sometimes, it seems somewhat a little excessive, such as the allowance of freedom of sex in some countries; nevertheless, Europeans respect the freedom of other people while they enjoy their own freedom, just as, in public places or in restaurants, being always friendly and gentle, for fear of affecting others behavior, communication or relaxation.

In recent years, with the increasing development of Chinese economy and the improvement of people's living standard, it became frequently for more and more people to go abroad year by year. In European countries, Chinese people can be seen everywhere in the streets and lanes. However, we felt ashamed and worrisome after observed their words and deeds carefully. Just as the *Handbook of Chinese Consular protection and Assistance (2007)* announced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China before long, it reminded that citizens should behave politely, not speak loudly, avoid showing off themselves and quarrelling with others in public places, as well as they have weak sense of time, spit and litter here and there, and speak offensive remarks, and etc (Lin 2007). In addition, taking fruits and food from breakfast buffet without permission drawn attention of servants; jaywalking often got warnings from drivers; entering lounges exclusive to foreigners in some commercial centers casually so that there was special notice "the lounge for Chinese people is ahead". Such acts were always regarded as insults, and hurt the image of Chinese people seriously.

Ultimately, the root of these problems mentioned above is lacking in education of etiquette. The writer thought, "the Ministry of Foreign Affairs teaches people good manners" is quite necessary yet extremely insufficient. Tracing back to the school education, the contents of the education of etiquette were not specific, so it was hard to put them into effect. Seemingly, the practical effect should be strengthened. Then comes to the education of social customs, the traditional virtues of China—"hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil, do no evil" or "to advance or retreat on principle" should be expanded constantly. Then the pre-service education of travel agencies or relevant organizations were always neglected, and emphasis placed on the assertion of the national image was not enough! All that should be changed.

#### 5. Conclusion

The "differences", especially the "gaps" mentioned above, can be interpreted variously. According to the respective of the writer in advance, many virtues of European countries is worth us learning, which mainly attributed to the development of education and dissemination of culture. As to the former, a majority of European countries have a complete system of education and high educational quality. For example, in France, everybody can receive free education, including post-graduate education; and in Switzerland, people always insist on equality and balance in education. There is no difference in grade in all primary and middle schools, both the wealthy and the poor's children receive free education together. Then the latter, there are bookstores everywhere throughout European countries, even in the small supermarket at gas stations. In addition, the price is so cheap that a nice-printed book only equals three to five local bread in selling price. Comparing with the increasing price of books in China, on the surface, it is beyond people's purse, in actually, perhaps it is the neglect of cultural dissemination and public education. Furthermore, according to the statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the per capita books borrowed in Denmark ranged the second in the world, the usage of ADSL per hundred people got the first place in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Liu & He 2007). However, in China, this is the present situation: the maintenance of many local libraries is difficult, and some museums run by non-government organizations or the local people are in a precarious state. The universal application of computers in rural area needs a long time. So the "gaps" are conspicuous.

It goes without saying that accelerate the development of education and the spreading of culture, especially reinforce the education of modern civilization and the spreading of traditional culture are the dual tasks we confronted, which seems contradict but melted. Because cultural confidence and cultural consciousness not only contain modernization on oriented values, but also mean deep cognition and understanding for traditional culture. The soul of the nation is

nurtured by education;the spirit of the country is shaped by culture. Only do like this can we foster the cultural confidence and cultural consciousness of citizens, so that they can display the characteristics of Chinese culture voluntarily in the stream of cultural globalization and educational internationalization.

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