

Chapter 16

From the Teachings of Confucius to Western Influences: How Adult Education is Shaped in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of a study designed to determine whether the teachings of Confucius (liberal and behavioral teaching approaches) or Western teaching approaches (humanistic, progressive, radical and analytic teaching approaches) shaped adult education in Taiwan. Thirty-nine randomly selected adult educators from three premium universities in Taipei responded to a survey about their teaching practices. The same adult educators were also interviewed to cross-validate the quantitative findings. Study results indicated that, while the Taiwanese adult educators employed Western teaching approaches to some extent, they clung dearly to Confucian methods of instruction, a finding that was consistent with reports in the literature of adult education in Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

Adult education in Taiwan is believed to boost human productive capabilities. As such, it plays an important role in educating and training Taiwan's younger and older adults. However, there is a lack of research as to whether adult education

in Taiwan is more influenced by the teachings of Confucius or by Western teaching approaches. Most scholarly research focuses on the teachings of Confucius. To date, there has been no empirical research conducted to determine whether Western teaching approaches or the teachings of Confucius contribute more to adult education in Taiwan. The purpose of the study was to determine whether

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adult education in Taiwan reflected the teachings of Confucius or Western patterns of teaching.

Such a study may aid those involved in helping Taiwanese adult learners learn to adapt to the current status of adult education in Taiwan. Without a clear understanding of how adult education is shaped in Taiwan, the task of helping Taiwanese adult learners may become daunting. Study of such a nature can shed some light on the much-debated issue of the teachings of Confucius versus Western influences.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chiang Kai-shek and his followers were driven from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949 as a result of an eight year-long civil war directly following the surrender of the Japanese invaders. In the aftermath of Japan's withdrawal (September, 1945), Chiang received military and financial aid from the United States, yet his corrupt leadership and army lost the support of Chinese peasants who chose to support Mao Zedong. Mao was successful in enlisting more young farmers as soldiers and establishing more military operation bases in the countryside. Chiang could only use cities as his military operation bases and his territory was getting smaller and smaller. At length, Chiang was ruthlessly overpowered by Mao's People's Liberation Army.

In addition to bringing Chinese people to colonize the island of Taiwan, Chiang brought Confucian culture to Taiwan. However, Chiang's people were not the first to settle in Taiwan. During the Ming dynasty, the Chinese emperor sent his people to live and work in Taiwan. To date, four groups of people live in Taiwan. The first group consists of the natives who have been living on the island from the long past. The second group is the Chinese who have been living there prior to Chiang's people. The third group is the Chinese who came with Chiang in 1949. The fourth group consists of non-Chinese people who

moved to Taiwan for professional and personal reasons. Chiang's people make up the majority of the population in Taiwan, and these people contributed substantially to Taiwan's economic, political and cultural development. Not only did these people bring a Confucian culture to Taiwan, but also they brought Western influences.

It was Chinese tradition to send children to receive a Western education even when Chiang lived in mainland China. Chiang's wife, who persuaded President Truman to send military aid to Chiang, received her education in the United States. As it received more and more Western influences, Taiwan became increasingly open. As a result, in the early 1970s, Taiwan's economic achievements propelled Taiwan's status to that of one of the four Asian "tigers" (The other three being Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea). To this day, outsiders can tell that Taiwan's development is derived from a combination of Confucian and Western influences. The same perception can be said about adult education in Taiwan.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Confucius (551-479 B.C.) saw growing disorder in his lifetime. Therefore, he developed a new outlook, which called for maintaining the status quo in society. His ideas shaped Chinese thought for several millennia. His teaching philosophy could be summed up as "let the teacher be a teacher, the student a student." What this means is that teachers assume the role of transmitting knowledge to students, and that teachers serve as role models. Students are supposed to assume the role of following their teachers. They are supposed to have respect for their teachers and not challenge their teachers as authority figures. Confucius' ideas on teaching can be translated into pedagogical teaching in its modern sense, which is characterized by liberal and behaviorist teaching approaches. Although there are some andragogical elements in Confucius' teaching

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