

MENCIUS' PHILOSOPHY ON HUMAN EDUCATION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EDUCATION OF VIETNAMESE YOUTH TODAY

[A FILOSOFIA DE MENCIUS SOBRE A EDUCAÇÃO DO HOMEM E SUA RELAÇÃO COM A
EDUCAÇÃO DO JOVEM VIETNAMITA NA ATUALIDADE]

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ABSTRACT: The article analyzes Mencius' philosophical thought on human education, focusing on the perspective of goodness and the role of education in the development of a comprehensive personality. Mencius believes that people are born with a good nature, and education is the process of arousing four great virtues: humanity, righteousness, ceremony, and wisdom, in order to build an ideal person and live in harmony with society. The article also relates this idea to the education of Vietnamese youth in the modern context, which is influenced by globalization, digital technology and social challenges. Through the creative application of Mencius thought, the article proposes educational solutions to build a young generation of Vietnamese with ethics, intellect, health and social responsibility, contributing to the sustainable development of the country.

KEYWORDS: Mencius philosophy, human education, goodness, humanity and courtesy, youth education, modern Vietnam, revolutionary ethics, digital technology.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o pensamento filosófico de Mencius sobre a educação do homem, partindo da perspectiva da bondade, assim como o papel da educação no desenvolvimento da personalidade. Segundo Mencius, todas as pessoas nascem boas por natureza, e a educação constitui-se como um processo de despertar quatro grandes virtudes: a humanidade, a retidão, a cerimônia e a sabedoria, a fim de construir a pessoa ideal para viver em harmonia com as outras. Assim, a pesquisa também relaciona esta ideia com a educação da juventude vietnamita no contexto moderno, o qual é influenciado pelo fenômeno da globalização, da tecnologia digital e por desafios sociais diversos. Através da aplicação criativa do pensamento de Mencius, propomos soluções com o fim de construir uma geração jovem vietnamita com ética, inteligência, saúde e responsabilidade social, contribuindo para um desenvolvimento sustentável do país.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filosofia de Mencius; educação humana; bondade; humanidade e cortesia; educação da juventude; Vietnã moderno; ética revolucionária; tecnologia digital

1. INTRODUCTION

Education has long been recognized as the core foundation for the development of human society, playing an essential role in shaping the individual personality and shaping the future of a nation. In the history of Eastern philosophy, Mencius, an outstanding Confucian scholar of ancient

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China in the IV-III centuries BC, left a profound philosophical legacy with a unique perspective on human nature and the mission of education. He affirmed that people are born with a good nature, that is, possessing innate good qualities such as compassion, integrity, courtesy and wisdom, also known as the “four elements”. According to Mencius, education is not a process of external imposition but a journey to nurture and arouse the inherent goodness in each person, helping them develop into individuals with morality, wisdom and the ability to contribute to the community. This thought is deeply humanistic, emphasizing that human beings are not only products of the environment but also have the potential for self-improvement through proper education.

In the current context of Vietnam, youth education is facing great opportunities and challenges, reflecting the transformation of society in the period of industrialization, modernization and international integration. Youth, accounting for about 20% of Vietnam’s population, are considered a pioneering force, carrying youth, enthusiasm and creative potential to contribute to the development of the country. However, they also face many complex problems. The explosion of information technology, especially social networks and the internet, has opened the door to access global knowledge, but at the same time caused consequences such as virtual lifestyles, game addiction, or exposure to harmful information, degrading traditional moral values. The influence of Western culture in the context of globalization brings new thinking, but sometimes fades national identity, causing some young people to distance themselves from traditional Vietnamese cultural values. Economic pressure, with an increasingly competitive labor market, requires young people to be equipped with diverse skills, from professional to soft skills, leading to a tendency to focus on vocational training and ignore moral education. Moreover, the moral degradation of a section of young people, such as selfish lifestyles, lack of social responsibility, or materialism, has placed an urgent need for a comprehensive innovation in education, not only to provide knowledge but also to train personality and community consciousness.

Mencius Thought, with its humanistic values and views on goodness, provides a strong inspiration to build a modern education system, harmoniously combining tradition and innovation (Tran, 2018). His view emphasizes that every young person has good potential, and education must help them realize their self-worth, thereby developing into responsible, loving and dedicated citizens. Vietnam, with a long history of being deeply influenced by Confucianism, can take advantage of Mencius thought as a guideline to orient youth education. The application of this ideology not only helps to solve current challenges, such as moral degradation or the influence of technology, but also contributes to building a young generation that is both brave and imbued with national identity, ready to face the requirements of the times.

This paper aims to elucidate Mencius’ philosophy on human education, focusing on the theoretical and practical aspects of this thought, and directly

relating it to Vietnamese youth education in the modern context. The structure of the article is divided into four main parts: the first part presents in detail Mencius' thought on education, emphasizing the view of goodness and the role of education in perfecting personality; the second part analyzes the practical context of youth education in Vietnam, including outstanding opportunities, challenges and problems in the transition period; the third part proposes specific solutions to apply Mencius thought to youth education, from learning programs to practical activities; The fourth section makes conclusions and recommendations to promote educational innovation. Thereby, the article hopes to contribute to educational reform efforts, towards building a young generation of Vietnamese who not only have knowledge but also possess ethics, bravery and social responsibility, ready to contribute to the sustainable development of the country in the new era.

2. MENCIUS' PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN EDUCATION

2.1. The basis of the view of human nature

Mencius' philosophy is based on the belief that human beings are born with a good nature, a core thought that makes his unique mark in Confucianism (Chan, 2013). Mencius argued that each person has innate good qualities, which he called the "four virtues," including compassion (compassion), shame in the face of evil (righteousness), reverence and courtesy (ritual), and the ability to distinguish right from wrong (wisdom). These qualities are like sprouts in the soul, ready to sprout if nurtured properly, but can also be overshadowed by negative environments. He gave a practical example: when witnessing a child about to fall into a well, anyone will feel anxious and want to help, not for personal gain but because of a natural compassionate instinct. This proves that goodness is inherent in nature, independent of circumstances or interests.

However, Mencius acknowledged that the environment, such as material desires, selfishness or social pressure, can overshadow goodness (Sung, 2021). A person who grew up in deprived circumstances or influenced by negative values may act contrary to his or her good nature. Therefore, education plays a key role in protecting and arousing goodness, helping people live true to their pristine nature. Mencius emphasized that education is not about imposing new values, but about the journey of unlocking existing potential, like watering a seed so that it grows into a tree (Peters, 2022).

Compared to Confucius, who focused on etiquette and social order, Mencius went deeper into the inner nature of human beings. He refuted the view of Tuan Tzu, who argued that human nature is evil and needs education to reform. For Mencius, education is a natural process, helping people return to their good

nature, not forcing or changing their nature. This view is idealistic, emphasizing the role of the will and the soul in the formation of personality. However, it also raises questions about how to apply in complex environments where negative factors can overwhelm goodness. This idea not only has theoretical value but also has practical significance, when education is considered the key to comprehensive human development, from the family to society. It is the belief in goodness that makes the attraction of Mencius philosophy, encouraging people to believe in their ability to improve themselves and build a harmonious community.

2.2. The role of education in perfecting personality

According to Mencius, education is the process of nurturing goodness, helping people develop comprehensively morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically, thereby becoming individuals who live in harmony and contribute to the community (Ruhul et al., 2024). He said that the goal of education is not only to impart knowledge but more importantly to shape personality, help people realize their self-worth and responsibility to society. Education, in Mencius's understanding, is a long-term journey, starting from the first lessons in the family, continuing through school and lasting throughout life, creating a well-rounded person.

Mencius emphasized that education must be aimed at developing the four great virtues: benevolence, righteousness, ceremonial and intellectual. Kindness helps people extend love from the family to the community, such as helping people in need or sharing with fellow humans. Compassion teaches people to live with integrity, know how to distinguish right from wrong and act for the right, and avoid a selfish lifestyle. Courtesy maintains social order, encourages respect and harmony, helps people live a disciplined life and knows how to appreciate community values. Finally, wisdom helps people to have a deep understanding, think creatively, and solve problems rationally, from small things in life to big problems of society.

Moreover, Mencius considered education as a tool for the common good, not only for individuals but also for the whole society (Khan et al., 2022). He advocated the concept of "benevolence", that is, the policy of ruling based on compassion, in which education played a role in raising people's knowledge, improving their lives and building a strong nation. A well-educated society will produce ethical citizens, thereby ensuring stability and sustainable development. A well-educated community will know how to share resources, respect each other, and solve common problems together. Mencius believed that education not only helps individuals to improve, but also is the foundation for building an ideal society where people live for the collective good (Bloom, 2011).

This idea is deeply humanistic, when considering education as a bridge between human nature and society. However, to achieve this goal, education

needs to be carried out systematically, from teaching in the family to school-based learning programs. Mencius emphasized that education must start early, when the human soul is still pure, so that goodness can be nurtured and developed in the right direction. Therefore, his thought is not only a theory but also a guideline for building an ideal person and society.

2.3. Methods and principles of education according to Mencius

Mencius proposed many humanistic and practical educational methods, in order to arouse goodness and develop people comprehensively. He emphasized the principle of combining learning with thinking: “Learning without failing is useless, thinking without learning is dangerous”. This sentence emphasizes that knowledge needs to be reflected and applied in practice, avoiding rote learning or fanciful thinking that is not based on knowledge. This method encourages learners to develop critical thinking, find the truth on their own instead of just receiving one-sided information. When learning about ethics, learners need to think about how to apply it to life, such as helping others or resolving conflicts in a compassionate way.

Secondly, Mencius attached special importance to the role of role models in education (Cottine, 2016). He believes that parents, teachers and influential people in society must be moral models for young people to follow. Their behavior has more power than words, as children often learn through observation and imitation. A teacher who lives a simple and compassionate life will inspire more strongly than theoretical lectures. When a teacher shows respect for students, they encourage students to learn to respect others, thereby forming a habit of living a polite life.

Third, Mencius emphasizes flexible education, suitable for each individual. He opposes rigid teaching, instead encouraging dialogue, questioning, and discussion to provoke thought (Wang, 2025). In debates with students, Mencius often asks questions so that they can find answers on their own, helping to develop confidence and self-learning. This method not only improves the intellect but also trains independent thinking skills, which are essential in facing life's challenges.

Finally, Mencius emphasized comprehensive education, including moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic (Huang, 2014). He likened education to caring for a tree: needing good soil (healthy social environment), irrigation water (rich knowledge), light (noble morals) and careful care (regular practice). A well-rounded educated person will have good health to work, creative thinking to solve problems, and a rich soul to feel beauty. This idea emphasizes that education is not only literacy but also a comprehensive development process, helping people to be ready to face all challenges in life.

2.4. *Limitations of Mencius' Thought on Education*

Although Mencius' thought on education is humane and profound, it still has some limitations when applied to practice, especially in the modern context (Huang, 2014). First, the view of goodness can be too idealistic, not taking into account cases where individuals are heavily affected by a negative environment. A person who grows up in violence, poverty, or is enticed by material values may act contrary to the nature of goodness, and education is unlikely to restore goodness in the short term. Mencius does not seem to have mentioned enough about how to handle these complex cases, making his thinking sometimes unpractical.

Second, Mencius thought bears the imprint of feudal society, focusing on the ancient agricultural context, where values such as etiquette and social order were upheld (Ge, 2020). In the era of industrialization and globalization, this idea needs to be adapted to new requirements, such as technology skills education, creative thinking or international competitiveness. Mencius made little mention of developing practical skills such as financial management, teamwork or the use of technology, which are important factors in today's society.

Third, Mencius thought mainly focuses on moral and character education, with little emphasis on the development of professional skills or technical practice. In the modern context, when the labor market requires young people to have high professional skills, this idea can be considered unrealistic if not supplemented by modern educational methods. A young man educated in Mencius thought may have good morals but lack the skills necessary to compete in the global economy.

Finally, Mencius thought depends heavily on the ideal social environment where family, school, and community all support the cultivation of goodness. In fact, there is not always such an ideal environment, especially in areas of poverty or instability. Therefore, the application of Mencius thought requires flexible adjustment, combined with modern educational methods such as psychology, educational technology and practical programs. However, these limitations did not diminish the humanistic value of Mencius thought, but only required a creative approach to fit the times.

3. RELATE AND APPLY TO THE EDUCATION OF VIETNAMESE YOUTH TODAY

3.1. *Context of modern Vietnamese youth education*

Vietnam is undergoing a drastic transition, moving from an agricultural economy to industrialization and modernization, integrating into the global flow. Youth, accounting for about 20% of the population, are the core force, bringing youth and enthusiasm to promote economic, cultural and social development.

However, the education of Vietnamese youth is facing many major challenges, reflecting the complexity of the times. The explosion of digital technology, especially social networks and the internet, has opened up opportunities for access to global knowledge, but has also created serious problems. Many young people are caught up in a virtual lifestyle, addicted to games or exposed to harmful information, leading to moral degradation such as selfishness, lack of social responsibility or the pursuit of material values. The abuse of social media to show off or follow consumer trends has caused some young people to lose their connection to the community and traditional values.

Economic pressures and the labor market are also a major challenge. Youth face fierce competition, requiring diverse skills and high professional qualifications. This causes many people to focus on apprenticeships or practical skills, neglecting moral and cultural education, leading to an imbalance in personality development. Globalization brings Western values, such as individualism or a liberal lifestyle, sometimes in conflict with Vietnamese traditions, fading national identity in some sections of the youth. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way education, moving from in-person to online learning, highlighting the issue of inequalities in access to education, especially in rural or disadvantaged areas.

In this context, Mencius' thought on goodness and comprehensive education brings great value. His view is that people are born with good capital to help orient young people to return to a good nature, develop their personality and sense of social responsibility. This idea not only helps young people face the challenges of the times, but also encourages them to preserve their national identity, while adapting to the changes of modern society. The application of Mencius thought can be a guideline to build a modern education system, helping Vietnamese youth develop comprehensively morally, intellectually and physically, ready to contribute to the sustainable development of the country.

3.2. Applying Meng Tzu Thought to Youth Education

Mencius Thought, with an emphasis on goodness and comprehensive education, can be applied to the education of Vietnamese youth in many ways, from building ethics to developing practical skills. First, Mencius's view of "basic humanity, goodness" encourages moral education by arousing compassion, responsibility, and integrity among young people. Instead of considering young people as people who need to be molded, education should focus on nurturing the good potential that is available. Volunteer programs such as supporting the poor, participating in environmental protection or contributing to community projects will help young people extend family kindness to society. These activities not only train morality but also help them realize the value of dedication, thereby building a sense of social responsibility.

Second, Mencius's "learn and learn" method is very suitable for modern education, where young people need to develop creative thinking and problem-solving skills. Schools can organize practical projects, such as social entrepreneurship, applied science research, or internships at businesses. These activities help young people apply knowledge to practice, train their intellect and develop soft skills such as teamwork, time management and critical thinking. A social entrepreneurship project not only teaches young people how to do business but also encourages them to solve community problems creatively.

Third, the idea of Mencius's example is especially important in the context that young people are easily influenced by negative role models on social networks. Teachers, parents and influential people in society need to be moral role models, live honestly, compassionately and responsibly. Communication campaigns about exemplary young people, such as young entrepreneurs or outstanding volunteers, will inspire the younger generation to follow, rather than chasing frivolous values.

Fourth, Mencius emphasized comprehensive education, including intellectual, moral, physical and aesthetic. Vietnam's education system should strengthen subjects such as physical education, arts and national culture. Organizing youth sports tournaments, music clubs or courses on traditional culture will help young people develop a balance between soul and body, and strengthen national identity.

Finally, in the digital age, Mencius thought can be integrated into online education. Moral, cultural, or life skills learning apps can be designed to engage young people. An application that teaches compassion through interactive stories or educational games will help them approach Mencius thought in an interesting and effective way, while adapting to modern technological trends.

3.3. Challenges and practical solutions

The application of Mencius thought to the education of Vietnamese youth faces many challenges, but also opens up opportunities to come up with practical solutions. First, Mencius's view of goodness may be too idealistic, not entirely suitable for young people who are heavily influenced by negative environments such as violence, poverty or social pressure. A young man who grew up in difficult circumstances may act contrary to the nature of goodness, and restoring goodness requires time and complex methods. To overcome this, it is necessary to combine Mencius thought with modern educational methods such as positive psychology, psychological counseling or social support programs to help young people overcome difficulties and develop their personalities.

Second, Mencius thought is feudal, formed in the context of ancient agricultural society, so it can be considered backward if not adjusted. In order to conform to the times, it is necessary to modernize educational content, for

example, to integrate humanistic values into civic education or life skills, rather than teaching only traditional theory. Lessons on compassion can be integrated into real-life situations, such as how to behave on social media or resolve conflicts at work.

Thirdly, Vietnam's education system is currently heavy on theory, lacking practical activities. In order to apply Mencius thought, it is necessary to strengthen learning programs through projects, internships or community participation. An environmental protection project not only teaches young people about social responsibility but also helps them apply knowledge to practice, in line with the spirit of "learning and learning" of Mencius.

Fourth, the influence of technology and globalization can fade national identity. Western social media and culture often promote individualism, in contrast to Mencius' collective values. The solution is to use technology to convey Mencius thought, such as developing educational videos, podcasts, or online forums on ethics and culture. A YouTube channel about compassionate stories can attract young people, helping them get closer to Mencius thought.

In order to implement effectively, close coordination between the state, families, schools and society is needed. The state should invest in moral education programs, integrate Mencius thought into textbooks and extracurricular activities. Families need to educate their children from an early age about compassion and responsibility. Schools should innovate teaching methods, encourage creative thinking and practice. Society needs to create a healthy environment, minimize the negative influence of social networks and popular culture, and help young people develop comprehensively.

4. CONCLUSION

Mencius' philosophy of human education, with the foundation of goodness and the four great virtues (humanity, righteousness, ceremony, and wisdom), brings profound human values, helps shape personality and build a harmonious society. In the context of modern Vietnam, this idea can be applied to educate young people, help them develop morally, intellectually, physically, and aesthetically, and face the challenges of the times. The combination of Mencius thought with modern educational methods will contribute to building a young generation of Vietnamese with courage, responsibility and creativity, contributing to the sustainable development of the country. In the future, it is necessary to continue research and creativity to effectively put Mencius thought into educational practice. Policymakers, educators, and communities need to join hands to create a comprehensive education system where young people are not only equipped with knowledge but also trained in character, ready to become the pillars of the country.

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