Humanistic tradition in the modern thought of education: Reconsideration from Rousseau's reception of Petrarch

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Abstract

It is said that the modern education received the tradition of rhetoric from the renaissance humanism, as a method of speaking and writing, or of thinking—as a "formalism". But is it adequate to grasp the modern education's reception of the rhetorical tradition and the renaissance humanism within this framework? I put this question for the reason that Jean-Jacque Rousseau, a representative thinker of the modern educational thought, seemed to have received them as a "way of life."

Under such concern, I would like to examine how Rousseau received the rhetorical tradition and the renaissance humanism into his thought of education, and, through this examination, explore the diversity of the modern educational thought. This study would also open up a new horizon to the modern thought of education.

My study will take two approaches.

First, I will take into consideration that Rousseau is influenced by Francesco Petrarch. Some scholars point out the influence of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* on Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise*. But we can find many other traces of influence of Petrarch, who is received not only as a poet, but also as a humanist, in several Rousseau's texts.

Second, I will reinterpret Rousseau's humanistic educational thought within the framework of "Philosophy as a way of life." This is what French scholar P. Hadot conceives. M. Foucault also was interested in this. Hadot says that for ancients, doing philosophy is not only to understand this world, not only an epistemological act. But what was important is that within this act we change, transform and convert ourselves. Hadot says that doing philosophy is learning life and death. In this sense, he regards philosophy as a way of life or certain types of exercises, spiritual exercises.

Keywords: Humanism, Petrarch, Rousseau, Philosophy as a way of life, solitude, leisure, modern education

Introduction

It is said that the modern education received the tradition of rhetoric from the renaissance humanism, as a method of speaking and writing, as a "formalism". French sociologist E. Durkeim, for example, sketches European history of education as a transformation of formalism, and calls the humanistic education "formalism des belles-lettres (formalism of literature)." The aim of humanistic education, he says, is to appreciate writings of ancient orators and writers, and to imitate their method of speaking and writing. No moral concern existed there, and such formalism spread in educational practice at colleges of Jesuits, especially in its education of composition. The formalism of literature formalized there thoroughly, and became nothing but a model of writing style to be learned. Such a thorough formalism ends up with the rationalism and reductionism of modern era, in particular through Descartes, who was a student of a Jesuit college[1].

But is it adequate to grasp the reception of the rhetorical tradition and the humanism within this framework? E. Garin, an expert scholar on Renaissance, for example, points out that they generated a passive imitation or formalism on one hand, but they also made their own creative quest on the other hand, facing ancient writers as their teachers who urge dialogue with them and improvement through it[2]. Or, for another example, T. Kondo points out that Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374), a father of humanism, tied moralism and rhetoric as inseparable elements. Petrarch found a true humanity within ancient writers and tried to convert the study of ancient literature

[1] Durkeim [1999=1938].

[2] Garin [2002=1957], pp.99-108; Garin [2011=1967], pp.67-85.
Already in the renaissance period, vigorous debates over the significance of "imitation" had taken place, some pointing out the danger of its becoming into formalism or into pedantry, others stressing benefits of "positive imitation."

into the quest of oneself. The aim of such a quest was to become a "good man", and to achieve it, it was necessary not only to know how ancient writers showed their true humanity and virtue, but also to convert oneself to a person who loves and takes care of the virtue. Such a conversion is to be brought about through the power of eloquence ancient writers used, so it is necessary to learn rhetoric as an indispensable media toward virtue[3]. Thus rhetoric and virtue combined in Petrarch.

And now, I would like to name Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778), who is one of the best orator-writer of the modern age, and to whom Petrarch gave so much influence.

It is well-known that Rousseau, in *Emile*, criticized the education of rhetoric and the method of imitation taught at college at that time, as well as the rhetoric as a "manner of politeness" within high society, and therefore he never taught rhetoric to Emile[4]. Besides, according to P. France, Rousseau had it as his policy to live on the truth, and so developed his own rhetoric to orate the truth of his own life, by succeeding the sincere, honest, eager, and naïve rhetoric of ancient orators[5].

Moreover, as stated above, Petrarch influenced Rousseau very much. What is interesting here is the way Rousseau received Petrarch. Rousseau received and succeeded Petrarch, not only as a *poet*, but also as a *humanist*. It seems that Rousseau received the humanistic philosophy of Petrarch, not so much as a logic or a doctrine, but rather as a "way of life." Not a formalistic reception, but a reception at more fundamental dimension of life. In this presentation, I would like to deepen this point and bring to the light the multiplicity of the reception of humanism into the modern education.

1. The revival of Petrarch in the 18th century

Petrarch had been treated as a myth or a legend by his admirers (Petrarquists) for his *Canzoniere* in the 14th century, but began to lose its fame at the beginning of the 16th century. In the last half of the 17th century, he became even to be ridiculed in France, where Italy had lost its glory of the past, and where Italian poems and operas were to be condemned as degrading the taste of people[6].

Such an atmosphere continued in the first half of the 18th century, but then appeared Voltaire, as one of the important receivers of Petrarch. Voltaire valued Petrarch as one of the best poets in the history of European literature, stating that Italian language achieved the highest power of expression and elegance under the pens of Dante and Petrarch. Voltaire even found in works of Petrarch a powerfulness comparable to that of ancient writers, as well as a fresh sensibility suitable to the new age. Thus Voltaire translated and introduced to French readers one poem of Petrarch in *Canzoniere*[7].

Although Voltaire turned later to show disgust against Petrarch[8], the poem Voltaire translated into French continued to receive a good reputation in the last half of the 18th century and in the 19th century. Thus it opened the way, perhaps against the late Voltaire's evaluation, to the revival of Petrarch[9].

In this period bloomed a new genre of literature called "romance," within which formed a sub-genre called "Petrarchan romance." This form of novel consists of three elements: (1) reference to mythological allegories, (2) reliance on Petrarch and his *Canzoniere*, and (3) conception of love in Petrarchan way[10].

And there comes Rousseau's *Julie, or the New Heloise* (1761), which is a typical novel of the Petrarchan romance. Rousseau used to compose romances and duets, based on poems by Petrarch[11]. And now Rousseau writes *Julie*, putting sonnet No. 338 as the epigraph[12], and quoting 8 other sonnets from *Canzoniere*.

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[3] Kondo [1961].
[4] Rousseau [t.IV=1969], p.546; France [1999], pp.989-993.
[5] France [1999], pp.990-996.
[6] Mouret [1973], pp.305-307; Duperray [1997], pp.15-18.
[7] Voltaire [1963=1756], pp.763-765.
[8] Cherpack [1955], pp.101-107; Mouret [1973], pp.312-313; Duperray [1997], pp.184-185.
[9] Mouret [1973], pp.313; Duperray [1997], p.184.
[10] Duperray [1997], pp.109-110.
[11] *ibid.*, pp.185-186.
[12] Rousseau [1993], pp.67.

This epistolary novel by Rousseau resembles remarkably to *Canzoniere* in that they both treat (1) love that never accomplishes in this world, (2) eternal sacrification, by means of one's own death, of what appears as the aspiration toward God, (3) struggle in vain to overcome the anxiety in one's own soul by means of virtue and wisdom, (4) sensibility to the ephemeralness of human beings, and in that they both describe the landscape of soul from such standpoints[13]. *Julie* became a best-seller of the age and thus contributed to the revaluation of Petrarch in the 18th century.

It should be noticed that, up to date, the preceding studies examined the reception of "Petrarch as a poet" only. But, as is well-known, Petrarch himself was not only a poet, but also a philosopher of the humanism[14]. It has been pointed out that (1) Rousseau received Petrarch as a humanistic philosopher and succeeded humanism in general[15], and that (2) Rousseau received Petrarch as a poet as described above. What is needed now is to examine more closely *how* Rousseau received Petrarch. I must confess that it is up to the future research to confirm by documents how many humanistic writers' works and the works of Petrarch on humanism, which he wrote in Latin language, were read by Rousseau. But it seems clear to me that there is at least a correlation between Petrarch and Rousseau, not just in the resemblance of the style of writing, but also in that they both understood the humanistic philosophy as "a way of life", not just in terms of logic. In other words, there must be a deeper, more fundamental relation between Petrarch and Rousseau. I would like to examine this point further for now.

2. Philosophy as a way of life and *The Life of Solitude* by Petrarch

2.1 Philosophy as a way of life

First of all, what is the "Philosophy as a way of life"? This is a concept proposed by P. Hadot, a French scholar on the history of thoughts, to understand philosophy historically. According to Hadot, what "philosophy" meant in the ancient era was not much an education of abstract theories or an interpretation of some texts, but rather a practice which concerns "how to live out this world." Philosophers should be judged not by "what they said," but by "what they did" or "how they lived their own lives." Furthermore, philosophy meant "exercise", too. "To do philosophy" meant an exercise or training of one's life, in which one should grasp the world with depth, evaluate the place of oneself within the world, and "convert to oneself" again and again, and thus transform the very existence of oneself. In such a sense Hadot calls philosophy "a way of life," and, further, calls the philosophy as a way of life "spiritual exercises."[16]

J. Domański, a Polish scholar on the history of thoughts, revaluated the humanistic philosophy from the same point of view, especially that of Petrarch and Erasmus. According to Domański, Petrarch criticizes Aristotelian scholars all over in his works. He did so to blame their attitude that shows interest only in the correct definition and classification of the virtue, and to reject the purely descriptive knowledge on the wisdom. Unlike them, Petrarch loved Latin writers such as Cicero, Seneca and Augustine, for the reason that they admonished the ethic and virtue which had been accomplished in various ways by real, concrete figures, and they were able to drive readers to practice virtue, by affecting readers' intellect and feelings, through the power of vivid description of their lives and encouragement therein—that is, through the power of the rhetoric they used[17].

Domański picked up Petrarch's *The Life of Solitude* as a good example in which he argues his philosophy as the way of living. I mentioned already that there is a correlation between Petrarch and Rousseau, in their understanding of philosophy "as a way of life." And now, to tell the conclusion first, we can see the manifest overlap between their ways of life, the tracks of their

[13] Berselli [1950-1952], pp.155-165; Duperray [1997], pp.110-112; Stackelberg [2001], pp.265-270. cf. Launay [1984].
[14] Domański [1996], p.91.
[15] Garin [2002=1957]; Kondo [1997].
[16] Hadot [1953]; [1955]; [2002=1981].
This concept, by the way, influenced late M. Foucault a lot and provided a base to the reconstruction of his argument on the subjectivity. Foucault [2001].
[17] Domański [1996], pp.91-94.

self-formations, when adding the point of view that stresses the role of "solitude" in their lives. I would like to examine this point further.

2.2 *The Life of Solitude* and Petrarch's self-practice

Petrarch enjoyed solitude four times at a small village near Avignon, Vaucluse, between his travels to Parma, Padva and Venice. *The Life of Solitude* was written during his third solitary stay. This is a text written in the form of letters to Philip de Cabassolles, a bishop of Cavaillon, who is in charge of Vaucluse[18]. There Petrarch admonishes to get acquainted with literature in a leisure and solitary life, away from cities.

In this text he declares he "would not call cathedrarios philosophers," assessing that they lecture philosophy on platform, but are imprudent on their own behaviors. To the contrary, *true philosophers* prove "by their own acts" what they admonish, that is, to love and care for the wisdom[19]. Thus he finds the model for true practice of philosophers in ancients, who, what is noteworthy is, practiced it in the solitary lives[20]. Petrarch gives almost half of the whole volume of the text to describe the solitary lives of figures in the bible, Saints and Christ, as well as ancient philosophers, emperors and soldiers, as the models for us.

The solitude and leisure, he says, is a sweet consolation to true philosophers[21], and a ladder by which he, Petrarch, could heighten his soul[22]. For, it is the solitude and leisure that liberate us from the crowd and the earthy cares, and thus set us in the state of freedom[23]. Such freedom makes it possible to explore into ancient classical literatures, and those literatures make us possible to heighten our spirit and transform us into a better person ("good man")[24].

The writing act of *The Life of Solitude* itself was, indeed, a practice of philosophy. Namely, it was a practice of imaginary dialogues with true philosophers and representation of their practices, all in a free, solitary life, and it is such a practice that drives the self-quest, self-reform and self-formation of Petrarch himself.

3. Self-practice of the solitude by Rousseau

3.1 Love for the solitude

Rousseau's life, too, just like that of Petrarch, was ever on the way toward the solitude. And the solitude was, for Rousseau, too, a sweet consolation and a symbol of the happiness and the freedom.

In *Discourse on the Origins and Foundation of Inequality among men* (1755), Rousseau assumes men living in solitude in the state of nature as an unwavering ideal. The state of nature is said to be "a state which does not exist anymore, or perhaps never existed, and probably never comes to exist forever."[25] People living in that state do not form a group, and even a combination of a man and a woman occurs only as an accident[26]. Such a solitary life is the order the nature gives to the mankind, and one could escape misfortunes and get happy, as far as one complies with this natural order[27]. Thus, for Rousseau, the life in solitude is the ideal way of life for the mankind.

The solitude was a base of his own existence, too. In *The Confessions* (posthumous work 1782), he confesses that he devoted to reading twice in his young age and that formed his "taste for solitude," which turned out to be a strong support to him for the rest of his life[28]. In *The Reveries of a solitary Walker* (posthumous work 1782), he deepens this solitude, saying that he stripped himself off from various "social relationships" and "became totally alone on the whole

[18] Zeitlin, Preface, in Petrarch [1978=1924], pp.15-16.
[19] Petrarch [1978=1924], p.268.
[20] Domański [1996], pp.94-95.
[21] Petrarch [1978=1924], 131-132.
[22] *ibid.*, p.134.
[23] *ibid.*, p.134.
[24] *ibid.*, pp.149-151.
[25] Rousseau [t.III=1964], p.123.
[26] *ibid.*, pp.146-147.
[27] *ibid.*, p.138.
[28] Rousseau [t.I=1959], p.41.

earth." In this confession exists an atmosphere, not of loneliness, but of happiness, which comes along with a feeling of resignation. Rousseau "converted to himself" in his last years, and deepened the self-quest which started in *The Confessions*, making dialogues with himself and with the whole world day after day, all in the solitary life[29].

Having compared in this way, it is obvious that those autobiographical works of Rousseau, in which he orates with eloquent rhetoric his own life and his self-quest and self-reform, overlap so much with *The Life of Solitude* by Petrarch, in which he describes his practice of the solitary life. And, as far as "philosophy as a way of life" is concerned, it could be said that those autobiographical works are the texts which show Rousseau's philosophy and the argument for the formation of the humanity in the most condensed way. It is right to the point to state that the greatest thought of Rousseau on education lies in *The Confessions*[30].

3.2 Self-practice of the solitude: in the case of Emile

Rousseau's "philosophy as the way of life" can also be found, in fact, among his writings on education. But, it is not much in the famous *Emile, or on education* (1762), but rather in other works that have been treated lightly as marginal: typically, in my opinion, in *Emile and Sophie, or the Solitaires* (posthumous work 1781).

In *Emile and Sophie*, Emile tells "how he lived his life" after his education, in the form of letters to his teacher.

In the first letter, he confesses that he has lost what his teacher taught him one after another, and has come straight to the solitude. Parents of his partner Sophie died, and his daughter died, too, after a while. Then Emile and Sophie moved to Paris. But there Sophie got deceived by a third man to commit adultery and became pregnant. Having heard her confession, Emile left her and went wandering in solitude[31]. This unfortunate story of loss is, however, at the same time the story of conversion to Emile himself. He says, "I'm lonely. I have lost everything. I stay myself, however."[32]

In the second letter, he tells about his life after his running away from Sophie. He experienced various occupations, he visited various places, and in the end, he got captured when boarding on a ship and fell under the state of a slave. But the whole story sounds free and happy somehow, showing that Emile enjoys his free and solitary life throughout[33].

It is noteworthy that Emile admits he could self-practice the solitary life always in freedom, owing to the education his teacher gave to him, in whatever occupation or in whatever place, no matter he got sick or he got captured[34]. Here it is shown that Rousseau proposed the self-practice of the solitude in his thought on education, quite different from usual understanding such as "forming the human-being as a citizen who looks toward social reforms." His thought on education deserves to be re-examined thoroughly, taking into consideration his orientation toward the solitude, as shown in this presentation.

Conclusion

Lastly, I would like to summarize the presentation, and suggest several implications of it for the education today in formal and informal settings.

I have shown that (1) the humanism received the ancient philosophy as a self-practice of life, and (2) the modern education received the humanism again as a way of life. So the process of the modernization has much more complicated and multiplied structures than what Durkheim and others suppose. We should face such depth of the modernity and get back with us the wide horizon of the modern education, which includes more than mere Cartesian rationalism and reductionism. We should revise our narrative on the modern education, instead of just condemning it and proposing what seems to be an alternative to it.

I also have pointed out that "the solitude" should play an important role in the education.

[29] *ibid.*, pp.995-1099.
[30] Kato [2012], p.174.
[31] Rousseau [t.IV=1969], pp.881-911.
[32] *ibid.*, p.882.
[33] *ibid.*, pp.912-924.
[34] *ibid.*, pp.912-917.

Nowadays, in Japan and perhaps in other so-called developed countries as well, the skill for communication is given the highest importance among others, pressing children to make friends and connect to as many people as they can, as if saying that the ability to do so should be the criteria to evaluate them. But it must be recalled that to connect to other people and to be in the solitude are two inseparable phases in our life. As Seneca says in *On Tranquility of Mind* (47-62), "the two things must be combined and resorted to alternately—the solitude and the crowd. The one will make us long for men, the other for ourselves, and the one will relieve the other; solitude will cure our aversion to the throng, the throng our weariness of solitude."[35]

Although I could not examine enough in this brief presentation, Rousseau and Petrarch, too, discuss the ideal connection among people, but, what is noteworthy is, they discuss it most vigorously when they consider the solitary life at the same time.

Furthermore, such revaluation of the solitude will relativize "the ethic of work/labor" and "the education for work/labor," which find, and drive children to find, the virtuous life within working. B. Russell says in his essay *In praise of idleness* (1932) that "The wise use of leisure, it must be conceded, is a product of civilization and education."[36] In *The Life of Solitude*, Petrarch quotes Seneca saying that "the leisure without study means death" and shows his consent[37]. Education is of vital necessity to make people possible to live in the solitude and leisure. We must remind that the education is not a mere servant to work and labor, not a means to make people work hard.

The most positive criticism against the modern education lies, therefore, not in proposing alternatives for it, but in revising and elaborating the narrative of it. Revaluation of the solitude in the context of education will be among the important contributions to it.

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[35] Seneca [1979=1932], p.279.
[36] Russell [2004], p.8.
[37] Petrarch [1978=1924], pp.131-132.

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