

SOCIETY EAST AND WEST: RELATIONALITY, RESPONSIBILITY AND THE EDUCATION OF THE HUMANE PERSON

Outline of the paper

- ▣ Introduction – setting the scene
- ▣ What is Civil Society?
- ▣ Relationality as an Attribute of Human Nature in East and West
- ▣ Measurement and Educational Aims
- ▣ Conclusion

Introduction

- ▣ There is a deep yearning in both developing and developed nations for a better life.
- ▣ In the former, life is a constant struggle for the basics to sustain human life.
- ▣ In the latter, a surfeit of material possessions has led to a shallow self-absorption and dissatisfaction with life.

The Good for Human beings

- ▣ Both Aristotle and Mengzi reach the conclusion that the good for human beings is the cultivation of virtue.
- ▣ The virtues are to be pursued in the context of our relationships with others and it is through these that we are fulfilled as human beings and achieve happiness, which is our purpose in life.

Creating the Civil Society

- ▣ Because human beings are social creatures, they need a habitat in which they can flourish.
- ▣ This is provided by three overlapping domains – the State, the market and civil society.
- ▣ Creation of a civil society is crucial for the good of human beings.
- ▣ In the educational context, developing values and dispositions that will foster a civil society are equally as important as attaining useful skills and capacities.

Civil Society, Relationality and Measurement

- ▣ The conception of civil society is fluid, but it is an informal, complex and powerful counterweight to both the State and to the market.
- ▣ A key feature is the importance of civil society are the relationships among people.
- ▣ Values and dispositions are a crucial feature of how we relate to one another, and so of the development of civil society.
- ▣ These are generally not amenable to measurement and so in an educational framework obsessed with measurement, become well nigh invisible.

What is Civil Society?

- ▣ Following on from discussions of global civil society, it is clear that civil society involves organisations and associations which are outside the jurisdiction of states.
- ▣ There is little consensus about global civil society or civil society on which it is parasitic.
- ▣ Conceptions of civil society are many and varied, though not entirely vague.

Chinese Conceptions of Civil Society

- ▣ Civil society is rendered 公民社会, (gongmín shè huì), people's society, and there are two other ways in which the term has been rendered, eg civil society in a legal sense is shì mín shè huì , 市民 社会 and mínjiān shè huì, 民间 社会, which is civil society in the sense of non-government organisations.

Varied Connections

- ▣ Some Chinese NGOs actually have close links with the State – eg Chinese Women's Federation.
- ▣ Similarly, in Pakistan, many NGOs work closely with government.
- ▣ Civil society in some places rejects Western conceptions of democracy and itself operates on autocratic lines.

Distinction between Civil Society and Civic Society

- ▣ . The Chinese distinction between gongmín shè huì, people's society, and shì mín shè huì, a narrower, more legal conception referring to townspeople provides us with an important distinction that enables us to distinguish between civics and civility.
- ▣ Civics is concerned with being a responsible citizen and civility is concerned with being a responsible member of the community.

Civic society as a subset of civil society

- ▣ The notion of civic society as a form of civil society can be understood to be more closely aligned to the demands of citizenship, rather than membership of a community and so it is to be expected that responsibilities and obligations that membership of the latter entail will be different.

Gramsci's use of civil society

- ▣ Gramsci uses the notion of civil society as a means of opposing the status quo and of building a new cultural hegemony.
- ▣ The role of civil society is to oppose the ruling classes.
- ▣ Civil society needs to be won over first, if the State is to be overthrown.
- ▣ True revolution, however, is not imposed by force but through education.

Fluidity of Gramsci's views on civil society

- ▣ Gramsci sees the relationship between the State and civil society as fluid.
- ▣ This is due to a rethinking of his theoretical position but also due to the ideological struggle between forces that result in the emergence of a different relationship between civil society and the State.
- ▣ For example, the free trade movement claims that economic activity belongs to civil society and the State should not interfere by regulating the market.
- ▣ *Laissez faire*, though, is deliberate policy that redistributes wealth to the ruling classes.
- ▣ Here, State and civil society can act as one in regulating the market and ensuring a fair distribution of wealth.

Civil society as a mode of interaction

- ▣ Since there is a degree of fluidity in what constitutes civil society, it can be understood as implying a set of attitudes, including empathy, respect and willingness to compromise.
- ▣ Civil society names the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interest and ideology.
- ▣ Civil society means the building of networks of unions, churches, political parties and movements, cooperatives, neighbourhoods, schools of thought, societies for promoting or preventing this and that.

Civil Society as the counterweight to the State and the market

- ▣ Civil society is represented by various associations that exist between citizens, by NGOs and by the public sphere.
- ▣ They can work with the State.
- ▣ There is little evidence that they can work with the market.
- ▣ Civil society does not require democracy to exist, but may have trouble surviving in a totalitarian regime.
- ▣ Decades of repression can leave their imprint on communities and civil society.
- ▣ To effect change, civil society needs to make use of political activism.
- ▣ The problem is that this has little effect on the market.

Civil society as a guard against authoritarian rule

- ▣ Civil society does not necessarily operate according to democratic principles, even if it opposes an authoritarian regime.
- ▣ This is because there are no democratic processes existing in the State to allow for change through peaceful means.
- ▣ The emergence of public spheres of influence provides some protections against the excesses of the State and of the government.

Three levels of associational life

- ▣ The three levels of associational life which are relatively independent from the State and the economy (market) are:
 - (i) private association;
 - (ii) civic association;
 - (iii) political association.

Examples of Associational life

- ▣ Private associations are such associations as clubs, religious organisations and families.
- ▣ Civic associations aim to serve not only members, but the wider community. Examples are Neighbourhood Watch, local environmental society, community arts centres, Rotary, etc.
- ▣ Political associations, as the name suggests, are special interest groups that seek to influence or change present policy. For example, the Young Liberals, trade unions, business groups and so on.

Civil Society Summary

- ▣ Whatever way we characterise civil society, it is apparent that it has the capacity to be a powerful counterbalance and beacon of hope to the oppressed and the marginalised.
- ▣ It exists in uneasy tension with the State. Uneasy, because it can be a site of resistance against it.
- ▣ Fundamentally, civil society involves relationships – between people, between people and State and between people and the market.

The Importance of Human Relationality

- ▣ Human sociability is identified in both Western and Eastern accounts of what it is to be a human being.
- ▣ Associations which are a feature of civil society cannot be cultivated unless we have learned to relate to one another.
- ▣ This cultivation is an aim of education.

Aquinas on human associations

- ▣ Aquinas notes that the variety of human associations that human beings form, such as families, larger households and states are not larger versions of the same thing, but constitute very different relationships.
- ▣ All of these have an influence on forming the identities and characters of human persons.

Confucian conceptions of human associations

- ▣ Confucian philosophy emphasises that individual identity exists in relationship with the community.
- ▣ Individual identity exists in a hierarchy of relationships which establish the responsibilities and obligations of each person.
- ▣ A Chinese name begins with the family name, then the individual name.
- ▣ Knowing one's place leads to social harmony.
- ▣ Moreover, we cannot develop the virtues without other people.

Charles Taylor and Identity

- ▣ We are shaped, not by our skills and our capacities, but by our origins, our values and how these shape our relationships with others.
- ▣ We cannot, for example, choose to be of a certain ethnicity and that we belong to a certain community.
- ▣ Even the attempt to forge a new identity is influenced by our origins in a particular community.
- ▣ We cannot escape relationality.

What has this got to do with education?

- ▣ The challenge in order to create the just society, the civil society and the just state is to provide the institutions which will enable the formation of persons with a commitment to this task.
- ▣ Traditionally, schools and universities have been tasked with this responsibility.
- ▣ Unfortunately, the emphasis on quantitative measurement in education obscures the importance of what cannot be measured.
- ▣ There are also problems with determining what exactly a measurement in the educational context actually means in those instances where a numerical score is given.

Robert Kennedy on Measurement

- ▣ Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things.Gross National Product does not include the beauty of our poetry or the intelligence of our public debate; measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

The Corruption of Education by the market

- ▣ The focus of governments on measurement in education is partly due to the corrupting influence of the economic sphere into education.
- ▣ Education has become narrowly focussed on what is measureable.
- ▣ Unfortunately is not so easy to determine what is measureable and what the measurement means.

Complexity of Measurement

- ▣ Measurement in the physical sciences, apart from simple examples, is highly theoretical.
- ▣ The Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics further complicates measurement, postulating interaction between observer and what is observed.
- ▣ The interpretation of measurements is much more complex in measuring human beings performing even simple tasks.

Why measure?

- ▣ Governments want to know if they are getting value for money.
- ▣ They want to know if the education is producing a skilled workforce.
- ▣ They want to know what the levels of numeracy and literacy of students are.

What can be measured?

- ▣ Measurement of performance
- ▣ Measurement of achievement
- ▣ These are not the same.
- ▣ Performance is about how well someone can perform a given task.
- ▣ Achievement generally means mastery of a subject and applies to a broader range of activities.

Interpreting measurement

- ▣ There are two elements to be taken into account in measurement – (i) validity and (ii) interpretation.
- ▣ Complex arguments are required to provide accounts of these.
- ▣ This means measurement in education is rather more narrowly applicable than one might expect.
- ▣ Much of what is worthwhile about life, such as the development of persons committed to a just society and the common good, has a marginal place in educational institutions because it is not measureable.

Conclusion

- ▣ Human beings everywhere yearn for justice and for what will fulfil them.
- ▣ The achievement of a civil society in which human beings are committed to justice and to the common good is not measureable, it is nevertheless, an important aim of education.
- ▣ It is a challenge for educators to loosen the grip of the positivist paradigm which valorises as real only what is measureable and take seriously their role in the formation of persons who can take their place in civil society.