

Beneficial Responses to Chinese Education in the Context of High Competition and Social Darwinism

Cheng Wen Huang • Guo Chun Wan • Mei Song Tong*

Department of Electronic Science and Technology, Tongji University, Shanghai 201804, China.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: mstong@tongji.edu.cn.

Accepted 12th December, 2021.

Abstract. We are living in a very competitive century, especially under the conditions of globalization, the young people of today are facing multiple, multi-level, high-intensity pressures and challenges. Since its birth, evolutionary theory has started a revolutionary wave in the biological world, and then it was applied to the social sciences and gradually evolved into social Darwinism. It had a positive and progressive impact on China, however, in the 21st century. Social Darwinism with a new face has become more negative than positive in China. Through some phenomena of education ranks to analyze its limitations and destructiveness, and hope to provide some effective reference for building a harmonious society.

Keywords: Social Darwinism, high competition, spiritual culture.

INTRODUCTION

With the gradual progress of China's reform and opening up and the continuous development of the socialist market economy, people's economic level has been raised and their material life has been greatly improved. However, behind the material prosperity is the general emptiness and confusion of people's mind, many people are highly stressed and under great pressure, and the relationship between people and people, people and society, and people and nature has become distant, isolated, indifferent or even antagonistic.

Charles Robert Darwin, the British biologist and founder of the theory of evolution, published *The Origin of Species* in 1859 and formulated the doctrine of biological evolution, one of the greatest achievements in human history. Darwin overturned the view that plants and animals are unrelated to each other, accidental, divinely created, and unchanging, and for the first time placed biology on a completely scientific basis, establishing the variability and succession of species. Darwin believed that in organic nature, there is a process of "evolution" of "species" or "living beings" and that this process is dominated by "natural selection", that is, the process of natural

selection", that is, under the pressure of "resource scarcity" brought about by the reproduction of species, there is a brutal "competition for survival" between individual species and within the same species.

"Social Darwinism" was proposed by the British sociologist Spencer, who pointed out that the principle of "survival of the fittest" applies not only to nature, but also to human society. In the second half of the 19th century, "Darwinism" began to penetrate from the "natural sphere" to the "socio-political sphere", and the result gradually became "Social Darwinism." Social Darwinism is the application of Darwin's concept of evolution to human society and the explanation of social phenomena and historical processes, which considers human society as constantly. It believes that human society is constantly evolving and applies to "survival of the fittest", "natural selection" and "competition for survival" just like species, and gradually evolves into a worldview and ideology, which has an indelible influence on human society (Leyva, 2009). It has had an indelible impact on human society. Such simplistic treatment does not take any humanistic care of the weak and the "laggards" in the competition, and

Table 1. Housing Price to Income Ratio in Some Chinese Cities

Ranking	Cities	Housing Price to Income Ratio	Ranking	Cities	Housing Price to Income Ratio
1	Shenzhen	48.1	11	Nanjing	18.6
2	Hong Kong	46.3	12	Dongguan	17.5
3	Sanya	38.1	13	Suzhou	17.2
4	Xiamen	31.1	14	Zhuhai	17.1
5	Beijing	30.8	15	Haikou	16.8
6	Shanghai	30.7	16	Ningbo	16.7
7	Fuzhou	23.6	17	Qinhuangdao	16.7
8	Hangzhou	21.4	18	Shijiazhuang	16.3
9	Guangzhou	20.7	19	Xuzhou	16.1
10	Tianjin	19.8	20	Nantong	16.0

turns human social competition into something similar to the “eating each other’s flesh and blood” among animals, full of brutality and bloodshed. It is full of cruelty and bloodshed, disregarding the name of human beings.

The real-life phenomena of performance uniqueness, resource skewing, classification solidification and discrimination, authoritarian normalization, winner haloing, and selfishness of survival are all concrete manifestations of social Darwinist tendencies. Social Darwinism’s omnipotence of competition is extremely detrimental, not only to social justice, but also, more importantly, hinder the formation of social consensus, tear apart society, and is detrimental to the successful construction of the most basic common human values, so it must be given a high degree of vigilance (Xu, 2012).

CHINESE EDUCATION CHAOS IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL DARWINISM

High-priced school district housing

Parents are doing everything they can to provide their children with a better education and are competing for quality teaching resources. China is a large country with a large population, and for historical, geographical and social reasons, the distribution of educational resources in China is extremely uneven. The educational resources in the east and central part of China are significantly higher than those in the west; the educational standards in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are generally higher than those in other places, while remote areas such as Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia and Qinghai are relatively backward; the gap between urban and rural areas is even more alarming, and there is also a gap between non-key schools and key schools in the same city.

The objective reality of uneven and unbalanced distribution of educational resources is a headache for parents, and this situation is intensifying with high-priced school district houses. It further raises overall housing prices and increases social tensions. Table 1 shows the house price to income ratio in selected Chinese cities, the

value of which is the ratio of total house price to household disposable income. Generally speaking, a house price to income ratio between 3 and 6 times is reasonable, and the house price to income ratio in most cities is unreasonable, especially serious in China.

Hot training institutions

“Don’t lose at the starting line” and “child-centered” are in almost every corner of society, based on which various training institutions are springing up all over the place. After school, parents “force” their children to learn all kinds of painting, Olympiads, foreign languages, etc. This is a serious violation of the physical and mental health of children. This is a serious violation of the law of healthy physical and mental growth of children, and to a large extent, it is an inappropriate over-education as an advanced educational concept, and impose their will on children, ignoring the inherent requirements of children’s stage of maturity.

In some countries, the growth of private education and the trend toward privatization of public education may further exacerbate the tendency to utilitarianize the educational system. (Figure 1) In general, the more liberal the educational provision, the more developed private education becomes, and the more pronounced the tendency of education to be profit-oriented and utilitarian may become, at least as we can see from the history of China’s development over the past thirty years or so.

Utilitarianization of public education

Utilitarianism and its transcendence is a common theme in modern societies, both in developed and developing countries, but it manifests itself in different forms and to different degrees in different countries. With the development of the college entrance examination system, the long-standing enthusiasm for education in China was rapidly transformed into a powerful drive for testing and academics. The focused school system established the

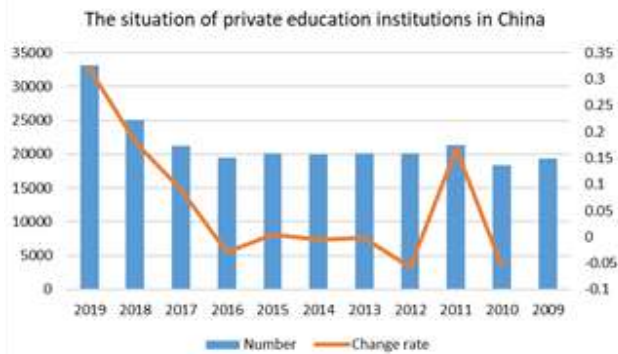


Figure 1. The situation of private education institutions in China.

orientation of test supremacy and promotion rates, the separation of arts and science subjects at the high school level, the setting of focused classes at different levels, and so on. The basic education has been incorporated into the narrow track of further education and put into the atmosphere of fierce examination competition.

As a result, the traditional Chinese narrow utilitarian educational values of “ten years of hard work, no one asks, one success is known to the world” and “everything is inferior, but only the study is high” have been amplified and promoted in the new era, and education is a subsystem of the social system. When education is treated as a tool for economic growth and operated like an economic system, other social and mental inspirational functions of education are easily ignored.

Lack of mental health education

In today’s society, students are under increasing pressure from competition, higher education and future employment. According to the psychological survey of secondary school students conducted by relevant departments, nearly 30% of students have different degrees of psychological problems.

However, due to the utilitarian nature of the educational institutions and the score theory, in most cases, the systematic norms of psychological education are missing, the evaluation system and the supervision is missing, and the educated people do not receive timely and effective self-mediation and adult guidance, so it is inevitable that they will have psychological abnormalities or psychological disorders. The resultant psychological and behavioral abnormalities, and even light-heartedness and criminality often occur, seriously affecting students’ physical and mental health and development, and even jeopardizing the harmony of families and social stability.

In recent years, crime tends to be younger, and after students enter society, psychological problems can also become a deeply buried bomb in the lives of society and individuals, which in reality has caused considerable social

problems.

Objectification of the educated

In our education, we always think of students as immature individuals whose difficulties are responsible for themselves, and therefore everything that students do, is arranged and students only have to accept passively. Under this mindset, students are treated as objects of education, and teachers and parents as educators are often complicit in the testing system, fearing that without strict discipline and suffering, their children will be naughty, unruly, unsuccessful in life, and ultimately unhappy.

Educators often have to rack their brains, to be hard, be soft, and be coercive. This sometimes turns into a kind of slavery: when educators disregard the rights and dignity of the educated as human beings, compulsively demand that the educated learn, live and think according to their own thoughts, opinions and emotions, and compulsively unite different students in their own patterns of thought and behavior, without allowing any resistance from them, or else they will be punished or put in unspeakable fear; or even when educators, in the name of “love,” take over and replaces others in their thinking and decisions. Such an enslaving relationship is a typical “I-it” relationship, which loses the “mutuality” of interaction and becomes a one-way coercion that destroys students’ self-esteem and autonomy, turning them into cold-blooded animals without souls (Ju, 2010).

THE DANGERS OF SOCIAL DARWINISM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE AND EDUCATION OF GOODNESS

Some of the chaos that exists today listed above are different from each other on the surface, but a common logic is hidden behind the deeper analysis: the social Darwinist logic of domination of the strong is becoming an oppressive force and coming to us, and each of us may be held hostage by this logic. It sees human life as a competition for survival among animals, where either you die or I die, from early childhood throughout one’s life. Keynes, the famous British economist, said, “The object of life becomes the constant eating of leaves until the highest trunk that can be reached, and the most probable way of achieving this is to keep alive the giraffes with the longest necks and starve out those with shorter necks.” This idea was disliked by many thinkers and educated people in society, but since the reform and opening up it has spread widely in China and has become a guideline in the minds of many people, and is held as a guideline (Zhou 2017). Utilitarian educational values affect the development of intrinsic qualities of talents. The direct link between study and fame and fortune. This creates the value orientation of “only studying is high” in the whole society, which leads to the pragmatic and utilitarian attitude of studying for

“promotion and wealth”, resulting in a serious lack of scientific spirit of seeking knowledge and truth. Further, the strong get stronger and the weak get weaker, contrary to the attributes of compulsory education. Blindly following social Darwinism and believing in its “competition theory” and “survival of the fittest” results in exaggerating the role of competition and violating social justice, and in the end, parents and children are likely to be kidnapped by this viewpoint, which may even cause social chaos.

The explosion of education and training institutions also reflects a problem that on the surface is the so-called all-round training of students by parents, but in fact social Darwinism has invaded the parents’ philosophy and dominated their minds and behavior. And by subjecting young children to a high training load to forcibly instill their ideas, educate their children from an early age to know that “this is a society of the weak and the strong, and the law of the jungle is the way to survive”.

At the same time, utilitarian educational values are contrary to the purpose of basic education, which is to improve the quality of the nation. The reality of education over a period of time is, to some extent, a perverse institutional arrangement, that is, centering on examinations and aiming at further education, most of all as a result of the loss of the power of checks and balances, so that basic education is artificially endowed with a strong competitive and screening function that it should not have, using layers of examinations to select a small group of “winners”, The majority of students become educational losers, and competition is extended step by step to the field of higher education. Nowadays, many students are not pursuing further studies for the sake of learning knowledge, abandoning their personal interests and spiritual motivation and turning into studying simply to enhance their competitiveness, and over-emphasizing competition has become a scourge that stifles talent and corrodes innovation.

Man is a superior animal, and the main difference between man and the average animal is that man is the whole, and man acting in unison is the common value that man should practice. Social Darwinism, on the other hand, distinguishes humans, like animals, into the strong and the weak, leaving the weak to be eliminated naturally. This is completely contrary to the common human values of caring at the bottom and acting in unison. Social Darwinism severely tears humans into the weak and the strong, incompatible with each other, and the weak are trampled on and abandoned by the strong, without the care they deserve. When society exalts the weak and the strong, the resistance of the weak is inevitable. Thus, the inevitable rift between the strong and the weak deepens, and the lack of trust and consensus between them eventually leads to constant conflicts and contradictions.

BENEFICIAL RESPONSES TO SOCIAL DARWINISM IN EDUCATION

To develop and govern the social sphere according to the

principle of natural selection would be to equate human beings entirely with ordinary animals. Nowadays, this phenomenon has taken root and grown in China, and has been or is being materialized in students’ learning life, shrouded under a haze of “competition”. Children are the future and hope of a country and a nation, so don’t let “social Darwinism” become the “Nidhogg” that corrupts the “tree of the world”, which requires the joint efforts of many parties.

Establishing the concept of “people-oriented” education

In essence, the purpose of education lies in the development of all people and their all-round development, which is not only the ultimate goal of social development, but also the highest ideal of education. The concept of people-oriented education is a value choice that fits the nature of education. The development of each person, especially the equal, harmonious, free and comprehensive development of the educated, should be the fundamental. Education is not a mere cultural transmission, but an activity that awakens people’s hearts, enlightens their wisdom, and reflects the most life care in order to improve the quality of human life. Therefore, education must follow the law of human physical and mental development to ensure that every teacher and Student can achieve self-fulfillment through the process of education.

Increase education investment to provide material guarantee for achieving educational equity

Insufficient education funding is an important reason that hinders the development of education in China. Although the Outline of China’s Education Reform and Development promulgated in 1993 proposed that the ratio of national financial expenditure on education to GDP should reach 4% in 2000, it was only 2.55% in 1998, and the target of 4% was not achieved until 2012, and it was far below the world average of 5.1% (Li, 2018). The serious shortage of investment in education has greatly restricted the development of education and hindered the process of achieving educational equity. There is a “double duality pattern” in the investment in basic education, that is, the duality between urban and rural areas and the duality between key and non-key schools (Figure 2). Many educational institutions, in order to alleviate the economic tension, pull sponsorship, charge high prices, and cooperate to build another private school, which in effect increases the corruption of education and brings bad influence to education.

Establishing a sound education regulation system and optimizing a fair education environment

First, change the dual system of urban and rural areas and

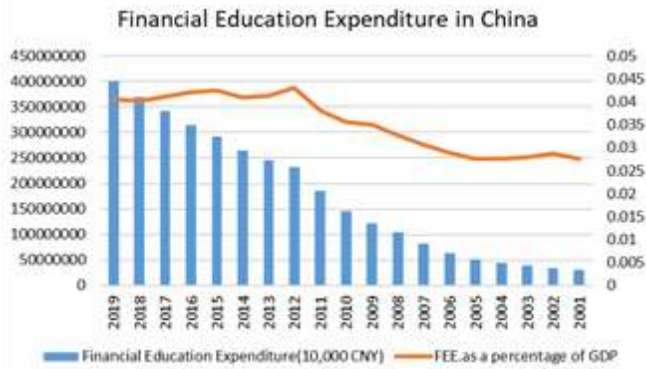


Figure 2. Financial Education Expenditure in China.

establish an integrated education development mechanism for urban and rural areas. Take multiple measures to broaden the channels of education funding and gradually tilt some high-quality education resources to rural areas and remote mountainous areas.

Secondly, it is also necessary to guide people to establish a correct view of talents and careers, so that only talents are used, ability is valued over education, practicality is valued over marks, thus enabling students to make more progress in terms of health condition, personality development, learning interest and specialty development. Establish the education concept of lifelong learning and all-round development. At the same time, we encourage regions to carry out vocational ability education and support college students' innovation and entrepreneurship, so as to realize the effective flow of talent resources.

Finally, reform the talent selection system, especially the college entrance examination system. In order to free high school education from examination-based education, the key is to reform the evaluation system for further education and change the score-based entrance examination admission system.

Construction of mental health education system

In education and teaching, it is necessary to pay attention to the work of mental health education for students at all levels and to build a perfect mental health education system to meet the quality development needs of contemporary students at all ages.

First of all, While paying attention to students' learning of various professional knowledge, schools should also unify the mental health education system, set up independent educational institutions and curriculum systems, and make appropriate adjustments to them according to students' actual characteristics and development needs, so as to achieve the purpose of teaching according to their abilities.

Secondly, a modern psychological education evaluation system needs to be built to clarify the education and teaching process. Dedicated teachers need to test the current state of students' mental healthiness and generate accurate data reports, and for students with special psychological problems, they need to develop targeted teaching programs.

Finally, when carrying out mental health education work, it is important to develop a sound supervision system and use supervision to reduce mental health education problems. It is important to build specialized supervision institutions and employ a team of highly qualified personnel so that they can better participate in supervision activities.

CONCLUSION

The growth and all-round development of human beings cannot be achieved without education. In order to dilute or even eliminate such social Darwinist educational values in the whole society, we must attach importance to the cultivation of intellectual factors such as memory, understanding, generalization and abstraction, as well as non-intellectual factors such as emotion, attitude, will and interest, etc. We attach importance to the transmission of knowledge, as well as the development of personality and the cultivation of creativity. At the same time, we must also strengthen the humanistic attributes and connotations of education so that we can cultivate excellent talents with both moral and talent, and meet the long-term development needs of human society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study was supported by the Education Reform Project and Responsibility Professor of Courses (Group) Program of Tongji University, Shanghai, China (Project Numbers: 4250104071-037-005-001, 4250143304-015 and 0800106055-004).

REFERENCES

- Ju YC (2010). "On the educational ideality of 'human being as the end', "Essays Collection of the 15th Annual Academic Conference of the Committee of Philosophy of Education of the Chinese Society of Education, pp. 94-100.
- Leyva R (2009). "No child left behind: A neoliberal repackaging of social Darwinism." *J. Crit. Educ. Pol. Stud.* 7:1.
- Li XJ (2018). "An analysis of the educational equity problems highlighted by Hengshui model and the path to solve them," *Time Report*, Zhengzhou, China, 12(20):204-205.
- Xu JL (2012). "Social Darwinism in modern China," *J. Mod. Chin. Hist.* 6(2):182-197.
- Zhou LG (2017). "Ruminating on Chinese education chaos in the context of social Darwinism." *Chi Zi*, Beijing, China. 18(20):255-256.