

# ***An Analysis of the Implications of Tao Xingzhi's Educational Thought on Junior High School Chinese Language Classrooms***

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**Abstract:** In contemporary society, various aspects are rapidly progressing, leading to an increasing gap between traditional education and modern development, with their shortcomings becoming increasingly evident. In contrast, the progressive ideas of the great educator Tao Xingzhi, such as “life is education,” have gained new relevance in the current era. The New Curriculum Reform explicitly emphasizes a student-centered teaching philosophy, highlighting the active role of students in the teaching process. These two aspects converge to some extent. Therefore, this paper will analyze the existing shortcomings of traditional education, specifically focusing on junior high school classrooms. Guided by Tao Xingzhi's thought, it seeks to actively explore the optimal integration of educational reform and Tao Xingzhi's educational ideas to address the deficiencies of traditional education and enhance the effectiveness of Chinese language teaching.

**Keywords:** Tao Xingzhi's educational thought, shortcomings of traditional education, junior high school Chinese language, teaching, practice

## **1. Introduction**

The junior high school stage is a critical period for the development of adolescents' self-awareness and the optimization and promotion of their learning motivation. During this stage, students' memory, thinking, and imagination abilities are at their peak development. However, their physical, mental, and intellectual development also face contradictions and opportunities. Junior high school students are still in the early stages of forming their autonomous personalities, with their values only taking shape, and they are susceptible to various influences from their surroundings. Therefore, adaptability is a prominent characteristic of junior high school students, making this stage ideal for nurturing students' learning abilities.

The cultivation of junior high school students' learning abilities involves more than just imparting knowledge and skills; it is equally important to coordinate the comprehensive development of students' knowledge, emotions, and values. The classroom is the primary battleground for the cultivation of junior high school students' learning abilities, and it has its own unique and scientific principles and operational procedures. However, the details of classroom teaching vary depending on the teacher, leading to differences in the effectiveness of the classroom. As a prospective teacher,

after studying the relevant thoughts of Mr. Tao Xingzhi and analyzing materials related to traditional teaching, I have been deeply inspired in the context of junior high school classrooms. Based on this, this paper will conduct an in-depth analysis of Tao Xingzhi's ideas and their practical significance.

## **2. Existing Shortcomings of Traditional Education**

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, our country's higher education has gradually formed an educational model characterized by classroom-centered teaching, textbook-centered learning, teacher-centered instruction, and the transmission of established cultural and scientific knowledge. While this educational philosophy has certain merits in inheriting the achievements of human civilization, it is ill-suited to the demand for innovative talents in the knowledge economy era. Specifically, traditional education in China has the following shortcomings:

### **2.1. Emphasis on the Transmission of Textbook Knowledge and Neglect of the Cultivation of Independent Thinking Abilities**

Traditional Chinese education is influenced by Confucius' "teach but do not innovate" philosophy, which translates into an emphasis on memorization, imitation, and repetitive practice of existing knowledge. Teachers deliver their knowledge like a "bucket of water," using a one-size-fits-all approach. Students are not allowed to express their independent opinions without fully mastering existing knowledge. This education system, centered on the transmission and inheritance of existing knowledge, exhibits several clear characteristics: firstly, it is confined to knowledge and skills accumulated by predecessors; secondly, it cultivates imitation abilities to solve similar problems; thirdly, it has definite and unique standard answers; fourthly, it involves repetitive cognitive operations. [1]

Students educated under this philosophy lack the courage for independent thinking and are hesitant to venture beyond established boundaries. They refrain from thinking about anything that their teachers have not explicitly taught them, inhibiting their creative thinking. This influence restricts students from developing the habit of independent thinking, and they dare not question or express their own opinions. Consequently, the students produced by this educational approach often lack innovative abilities, which is a significant shortcoming of traditional Chinese education.

### **2.2. Emphasis on Assignment of Coursework and Neglect of Stimulating Creativity**

In traditional Chinese education, examinations are the sole means, and advancing to higher levels of education is the sole objective. The heavy pressure of examinations and academic advancement forces schools and teachers to continually reinforce rote learning, exam-focused tactics, and extensive repetitive training to enhance students' test-taking abilities. This leads to students spending a substantial amount of time and energy on memorization, completing assignments, and preparing for exams. Not only does this waste a significant amount of educational resources and impose a heavy burden on students, but it also greatly hinders their interest in new subjects, exploration of unknown fields, and the development of various interests. This is highly detrimental to stimulating and harnessing students' initiative and proactiveness.

In Chinese higher education institutions, the primary task is still centered on imparting existing knowledge. As students progress through the academic hierarchy, they are required to master an increasing amount of knowledge. This undoubtedly adds to the burden of memorization for students. Besides relying on class lectures for knowledge acquisition, students also depend on completing a large number of coursework assignments that lack innovative design. Consequently, students' energy is primarily consumed in mastering existing knowledge, which greatly suppresses their thinking, imagination, and creativity.

### **3. The Practical Principles of Tao Xingzhi's Educational Thought on Life Education**

Tao Xingzhi, during his early years of studying abroad in the United States, was influenced by progressive education luminaries such as John Dewey, Edward Thorndike, and William H. Kilpatrick. His renowned theory of life education emerged from the assimilation and transformation of these educators' ideas. Among these influences, the most significant and prominent were the viewpoints drawn from John Dewey, such as "education is life" and "school is society." However, Tao Xingzhi did not merely mimic these ideas; instead, he developed his unique theory of life education based on thoughtful consideration and practical application. This theory primarily encompasses three aspects: life as education, society as a school, and the integration of teaching. These three aspects have evolved over time and pose distinct demands on educators in today's educational practices, warranting further analysis.

#### **3.1. Life as Education – Learning Language in Life, Manifesting the Practicality of Language**

This forms the core of Tao Xingzhi's theory of life education, emphasizing that education should revolve around life and challenging the traditional notion of education being detached from life and centered around textbooks. It comprises two main connotations: life containing educational significance and life serving as the center of education. [2]

In Mr. Tao Xingzhi's extensive years of educational practice, "life is education" emerged as a significant teaching approach. This was the result of years of theoretical development by Tao Xingzhi through educational practice. Tao Xingzhi established an inseparable connection between life and education through educational practice, considering life as a source and means of education. Education inherently involves imparting the knowledge of how to live one's life, and thus, this knowledge must naturally be derived from life itself. If the reality of life changes, the understanding and content of education must correspondingly adapt. Ideas like "the kind of life one leads shapes the kind of education they receive" and "to receive a certain education, one must lead a certain kind of life" are manifestations of the concept that "life is education." [3]

Applying this concept to junior high school Chinese language teaching involves bridging theory and practice. Learning language in the context of life includes sharing relevant anecdotes during traditional festivals such as the Mid-Autumn Festival and Lantern Festival to enhance memorability. Additionally, applying language knowledge to life, such as understanding the significance of the 24 solar terms in practical terms, fosters a deeper appreciation of their nuances. All these aspects reveal and enhance the practicality of the Chinese language subject.

#### **3.2. Society as School – Investing Effort in Society to Manifest the Humanity of Language**

Tao Xingzhi emphasized the role of school education, breaking away from traditional perspectives on schools and education, and expressing his sincere intention to universalize education for all. This concept has two main implications: viewing society as a school and using society to transform schools.

Life is one of the significant sources of people's understanding of education, and society itself is a place of learning. Therefore, Tao Xingzhi advocates for a focus on social education. In China and even in many Western educational philosophies, schools are seen as isolated entities entirely disconnected from society, with no involvement in teaching beyond the school's boundaries. This narrow perspective on education contradicts the original purpose of education and the development of teaching. To address the shortcomings inherent in school education and to facilitate students' comprehensive development, Tao Xingzhi, as part of his educational reform efforts, encouraged students to not only pay attention to the knowledge taught within school but also to observe society closely, extracting practical knowledge from it. From the perspective of social resources, these

resources can be utilized effectively if students make full use of them. As Tao Xingzhi put it, education not based on social forces is “ineffective education.” The fundamental goal of schools, which aim to cultivate character and knowledge, remains to serve society and the people. Therefore, only by aligning educational content with the reality of social education can we better serve society and the people, which is the ultimate goal of educators.

In the context of actual Chinese language teaching, teachers guide junior high school students to pay attention to societal hot topics and global events, expanding their worldview while providing objective evaluations of relevant events. This helps students develop the right perspectives on life, the world, and values, simultaneously nurturing their humanistic sentiments towards society.

### **3.3. Integration of Teaching and Practice – Emphasizing Comprehensive Language Skills Through Integration**

This aspect of Tao Xingzhi’s educational thought pertains to educational practice and is a concrete manifestation of “life is education” in educational methodology.

The integration of teaching and practice is a teaching approach summarized by Tao Xingzhi through years of teaching experience. It requires teachers not only to teach earnestly but also to ensure that students learn effortlessly. Both teaching methods and learning methods should revolve around the central theme of “doing.” In essence, “doing” represents a teaching methodology. If teaching methodologies are fundamentally flawed, regardless of the noble intentions behind the teaching, they are unlikely to succeed. Therefore, in the teaching process, the role of “doing” as a methodology becomes crucial, and teaching without a sound methodology is superficial. Essentially, the methodology of “doing” aims to stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning because only by igniting their enthusiasm can the knowledge taught by teachers be absorbed.

The Chinese language is a subject with an extensive scope, integrating knowledge from various disciplines while serving as a support for other subjects. In the process of Chinese language teaching, teachers are required to oversee the bigger picture and implement a “mutual learning” approach. This approach places the responsibility on teachers to enhance students’ comprehensive abilities and, based on this foundation, strengthen their own educational and learning capabilities.

## **4. The Educational Significance of Tao Xingzhi’s Ideas for Junior High School Chinese Language Classrooms**

Through an analysis of the shortcomings of existing traditional education and relevant discussions on Tao Xingzhi’s ideas, it is evident that Tao Xingzhi’s educational philosophy has had a profound and progressive influence, gaining new dimensions in the contemporary era. In light of these characteristics, Tao Xingzhi’s ideas make an indelible contribution to the reform of junior high school Chinese language classroom education, holding unique significance. In the modern era of junior high school Chinese language classrooms, teachers should equip themselves with Tao Xingzhi’s educational theories. Starting from the genuine needs of students and by integrating real-life contexts and optimizing teaching methods, they should foster students’ proactive engagement and enhance their abilities for self-directed and lifelong learning.

### **4.1. Empowering Students to Play a Central Role in the Classroom**

Traditional teaching methods are not conducive to student participation in the classroom, the creation of a democratic and harmonious learning environment, the formation of interactive teacher-student relationships, the development of positive learning attitudes, and the effective retention of language knowledge. Teachers should actively involve students in the teaching process, making them active participants in classroom activities, allowing students to experience the value of learning Chinese

through independent exploration and cooperative communication. In the process of innovative learning, students become the primary actors. [4]

In junior high school Chinese language learning, students should acquire knowledge and use it creatively to solve real-world language-related problems. Therefore, teachers should first and foremost fully acknowledge and respect students' innovative roles. Traditional Chinese language courses often require students to complete assignments given by the teacher, with feedback provided in this format. This approach limits independent thinking, hinders students' long-term development, and affects their overall abilities. With the deepening of the new curriculum reform, it is increasingly recognized that teachers should become guides and collaborators in the teaching process, fully empowering students to play a central role in the classroom, stimulating their enthusiasm and proactivity in participating in language activities. In other words, teachers should establish a "student-centered" philosophy, allowing students to take the initiative in their learning.

For example, after completing the teaching task related to "Viewing the Cang Hai" (观沧海), teachers can use homework assignments, structured in layers, to reinforce students' knowledge. Initially, teachers can assign simple translation tasks, such as how to translate the phrase "东临碣石, 以观沧海" (East of Jieshi, to view the vast sea) to deepen students' initial understanding of the poem's content. Subsequently, Chinese language teachers can increase the difficulty by asking students to analyze the genre of this poem or certain poetic techniques employed, deepening students' understanding of the poem. Finally, Chinese language teachers can guide students to analyze the emotions expressed in the poem and use written forms to convey their insights, encouraging students to discuss how the poem inspired and affected them, drawing connections between the author's life and their own. Through this form of assignment design, attention is effectively given to every student in the class, boosting students' confidence in learning and consolidating and extending their understanding of the poem's content.

## 4.2. Designing Game Content in Alignment with Teaching Objectives

In the context of classroom teaching, teachers often adopt new teaching methods to capture students' attention and enhance memory. Traditional teaching methods may not engage junior high school students effectively, so it is appropriate to introduce game-based teaching. However, it should be noted that if game-based teaching is used in the classroom, it must strictly adhere to curriculum standards. Teachers should not focus solely on captivating students' attention but also ensure alignment with the curriculum and teaching objectives. In other words, teachers need to consider the timing of games, whether they meet the requirements of the new curriculum standards, engage in discussions with other teachers, and prioritize the goals and requirements of the games. Both the teaching materials and students have a degree of selectivity in game-based teaching, so teachers should be meticulous in designing and organizing games. [5] Teachers should be flexible in organizing games based on teaching content during the teaching process to ensure that game activities are targeted and effective, thereby realizing the positive impact of games on teaching.

For instance, in the teaching of "Two or Three Things About Mr. Shao Liantang" (回忆鲁迅先生), teachers can use role-play and storytelling to encourage students to explore Mr. Shao Liantang's noble qualities in the classroom. Based on recorded classroom observations, some students, while interpreting Mr. Shao Liantang's lines, grasped the meaning of "还是照样" ("still as before") as an expression of Mr. Shao Liantang's respect, politeness, rigorous approach to learning, humility, and willingness to seek knowledge. This classroom format allows students to express their views on specific issues while optimizing the quality of the class.



### 4.3. Enhancing Multimedia Technology to Set the Context for Lessons

Learning in any subject benefits from associations, yet students often struggle to make full use of their imaginations based solely on teachers' narrations and textual images in textbooks. While Chinese language is rooted in everyday life, how to use familiar scenarios from life for teaching is crucial. In traditional teaching, teachers may only use objects at hand or in the classroom for instruction. However, relying solely on book illustrations makes it difficult to capture students' attention and limits their imaginative space. Thanks to the advancement of educational technology, teachers can use dynamic multimedia presentations, displayed through electronic screens or video, to create a realistic teaching environment. This not only captivates students but also achieves educational objectives.

For example, in the classroom teaching of "Recollections of Mr. Lu Xun" (回忆鲁迅先生), teachers can use multimedia video materials to showcase Mr. Lu Xun's family background, his education, and life experiences. When focusing on his life experiences, teachers can highlight the daily life of the author, Xiao Hong, with Mr. Lu Xun, leading to discussions among students about the purpose of starting the text with Mr. Lu Xun's cheerful laughter and its connection to other characters in the text. Using information technology to facilitate students' exploration of text-related content helps cultivate and enhance their independent thinking, logical reasoning, and problem-solving abilities.

## 5. Reflections and Implications for Teaching

Regarding the question of what kind of students to educate, in Tao Xingzhi's ethical educational thought, there are numerous feasible ideas and concepts. Among them, the educational approach of "life is education" and the goal of cultivating "true, good, and beautiful" individuals provide clear directions for educational reform in our country. Therefore, in the process of overcoming the shortcomings of traditional education and cultivating well-rounded individuals in the new era who can independently learn various knowledge and innovate, teachers play a crucial role. Their role should not be underestimated.

Firstly, it is essential to arouse students' interest in learning and their desire to pursue truth. This marks the beginning of students' learning journey, and having an interest allows them to exhibit subjective initiative. It encourages them to actively engage in learning, either by taking the initiative themselves or by actively following the teacher's guidance, enabling them to acquire richer, comprehensive, and in-depth knowledge. A genuine thirst for truth and knowledge enables students to genuinely think and discover objective truths, rather than passively accepting the teacher's explanations. [6]

Secondly, traditional constraints should be removed, allowing teachers to have greater autonomy in teaching, thus creating a more open and free teaching environment. Only in this way can an outstanding teacher truly maximize their own value and use their lifelong knowledge to educate the younger generation and inspire students.

Thirdly, junior high school Chinese language teachers should focus on implementing Tao Xingzhi's ideas and actively incorporate ecological education into the process of junior high school Chinese language teaching. This approach enhances students' enthusiasm for learning, strengthens their logical thinking abilities, and enables students to meaningfully participate in the process of learning in the Chinese language classroom.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Tao Xingzhi's educational thoughts, refined through historical experiences, continue to shine brightly and maintain a unique style. They connect the past and future of junior high school Chinese language teaching, guiding it towards deeper development and advancement into new territories. By delving deeply into Tao Xingzhi's thoughts, we can enhance the quality of junior high school Chinese language classroom teaching, and the impact of this on China's future development cannot be underestimated.

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