The Feasibility of Education Independence from the Perspective of Xingzhi Tao

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Abstract. Through the analysis of the education independence idea in Tao Xingzhi’s education thoughts, in combination with the historical background of the contemporary society, the paper explored the feasibility of education independence from Tao Xingzhi’s eyes, and found that, on the one hand, education should remain its relative independence, especially the allocations and expenses of education funds should be independent; on the other hand, it is unrealistic and unscientific for the education to be entirely independent because education must be restricted in form and content by a series of factors like politics, economy, culture and society.

Introduction

Tao Xingzhi, a modern intellectual and educator, devoted his life to education and made a pioneering contribution to the modernization of education in China. He not only established the complete education theory system, but also carried out a lot of education practice. He advocated national salvation through education, and education with independent spirit and main value. He also actively supported the education movement for funding independence. His thoughts of national salvation through education and education independence have far-reaching significance for education itself. This paper attempts to explore the feasibility of education independence from the perspective of Tao Xingzhi.

The Historical Development and Connotation of Education Independence

The Historical Development of Education Independence

Education independence was an ideological trend which sprouted before the May 4th movement and thrived in the 1920s in China. It aimed to explore the self -development laws of education and imitate the western mode of “academic freedom, university autonomy”. It also strongly advocated to get rid of the political and religious bonds through education, and then reach an independent running state from the ultimate mental level in which human beings may inherit intelligence, seek development and perfect themselves.

Although the idea of “education independence” was largely embodied in the education independence movement which burst in the 1920s, its proposition had a much longer history. The sense of education independence had emerged gradually when the imperial examination system was abolished and the modern western education mode was brought in, whose original aim was to criticize the imperial examination system, advocate the academic freedom and analyze the self-laws of education and academy. Wang Guowei, a prestigious Chinese scholar, once said “The prosperity of academy relies on its independence”, which reflected his opinion on education independence distinctly. In 1918, Chen Duxiu, one of the animateurs of the New Culture Movement, thought “The biggest reason of the underdevelopment of Chinese academy is that scholars do not realize the sanctity of academy independence by themselves” in an essay named Academy Independence. During this period, many advanced persons in education field gave their statements about “education independence”, however, all of these statements were a little one-sided and general, which did not form a unified and explicit idea.
After the New Culture Movement, while the political situation home and abroad became severe, the warlord government was mired down in wars, ignoring the development of culture and education. Some far-sighted educational personnel felt unsatisfied, but they also acquired the essential space and conditions to form and practice their new educational ideas as well.

*On Education Independence* by Cai Yuanpei and *Proposals for Education Independence* by Li Shicen, both published in the March of 1922, these two motions marked the formation of education independence idea, which emphasized that education should be conducted by the education experts totally and keep its independent status. Based on this core idea, public figures like Cai Yunpei carried out a series of reform practice. During the period from 1927 to 1929, the Republic of China government put the Supreme Academy and Great College Zone System into trial implementation and Cai Yunpei was nominated as director of the Supreme Academy. Accordingly, the College Organization Law of the Republic of China was also published later. These trials strove to establish the jurisprudential foundation of education independence, however, they failed finally due to the realistic limitation and the weakness of the intelligentsia themselves. This failure was a shattering blow to the supporters in favor of education independence from the education field. Then they concentrated their focus on pursuing the independence of educational expenditures.

The Connotation of Education Independence

The education independence idea was generated in an age full of salient contradictions of politics and education. Simultaneously, the conflicts between the new-style education’s development and the realistic restrictions in politics became increasingly intense, thus a battery of protests in education field like the Salary Movement and the June 3rd Movement broke out, showing educators’ demands for the independence of educational expenditures. The idea of education independence also gradually developed from the original claim that educational expenditures should be independent into an omnidirectional systematic viewpoint including the administration independence and economy independence of education as well as the separation of politics and education.

There are four main aspects of the education independence idea. First of all, education should be superior over the parties and keep its independent status. Secondly, education ought to separate from the churches and advocate the absolute freedom of academy. Thirdly, the exclusive use of education expenditures should be guaranteed, which couldn’t be embezzled or intercepted without an authorized permission. Fourthly, it is insisted that the content of education should be independent and against the government’s control. These four aspects are connected mutually and supported by each other, having a great time and reference significance on previous and contemporary China.

The Education Independence in Tao Xingzhi’s Education Ideas

The “Saving the Nation by Education” thoughts of Tao Xingzhi

Tao Xingzhi was one of the loyal supporters of the saving the nation by education theory. “The only goal of my life is to create a democratic country through education rather than the military reform. For the serious drawbacks of the sudden birth of the Republic of China, I fully believe that there will be no existence of a true democratic country if there is no true public education. I will return to homeland and work with other educators to organize an efficient public education system for citizens, which helps them follow the step of American people to develop and keep an ideal democratic country where justice and freedom can come true.” It was the initial expression of his educational thoughts and the original aspiration of his lifetime struggle. On the support of this faith, he set up the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education in 1920, and spark-plugged populace education and rural education, trying to bridge the class relations and improve society.

Tao Xingzhi argued that it should facilitate China’s modernization from education. The main purpose of Chinese traditional education was to bring up bureaucrats, and the latter revolutionary education aimed at cultivating obedient laborers. Bureaucrats were usually used as the tools of
politics while laborers were as the tools of both politics and economy. However, in Tao Xingzhi’s viewpoint, educational modernization should put the modernization of civilians in the first place, which meant to improve the rights and dignity of civilians and serve for their freedom and happiness. That is to say, all of that relied on the modernization of civilians and were for the sake of civilians’ modernization. He believed that only when a country was civilized and strong would modernization be achieved truly. Therefore, Tao Xingzhi called on masses of educators to work with people to create a new independent, autonomous, equal, advanced and joyful China.

**The Implication of Education Independence in Tao Xingzhi’s Education Ideas**

In the theoretical practice of education salvation theory, the relationship between education and politics was inevitably involved. Tao Xingzhi had his own opinion on whether education should attach to the politics or keep its own independence. He thought that education must save the nation but not attach to the politics or be manipulated by it. He valued highly about the reforms made by Prussia government on the education administration when he concluded the compulsory reforms of Prussian education. The Prussian policy contained that the ministry of religion and education was turned into the education ministry which was in charge of the education administration exclusively and the authority of the church department to inspect education was taken back, showing his advocacy of education independence. In the Merits and Demerits of the Civilian Reading Places, he stressed, “When we run the civilian education, we will directly go to the ordinary people, without any political or religious influence...” These words clearly showed his attitude towards the relationship between education and politics. Besides, Tao Xingzhi pointed out that education should avoid political or religious colors, and he also disgusted the politician educators as well since he thought these officers took part in movements, held powers and just spoke bureaucratic tones. He even criticized the party education sharply and intensely in different occasions. Here are his comments, “The education field has been invaded by the bureaucracy. The administration of education has no fixed plan, and the faculty are arranged casually for the private convenience. There are also existing schools divergences in the interior of education field itself where barriers are obvious, kinds of parties exist to compete for promotions, and a lot of strange phenomena come out."

Beyond above all, Tao Xingzhi more than once declared that the education funds should be independent. He published several articles in succession to discuss the grave consequences of peculating education funds, and put forwards practical measures in The Education Funds Should Be Independent Urgently. He initiated to organize the National Education Funds Committee, and usually called on everywhere for the education funds problems. Tao Xingzhi also actively promoted the localized development of education since he realized that Chinese education at that time, regardless of the actual situation in China, copied the western and Japanese patterns or followed the old methods of education conservatively, both of which were not advisable. The aim of education should be to bring up wholesome citizens not slaves or obedient people.

**The Possibility of Education Independence**

**Education Should Have a Relative Independence**

From Tao Xingzhi’s thoughts of Saving the Nation through Education and education independence, education should be independent from the parties in order to achieve the free development of academy while educational funds ought to be appropriated exclusively for the purpose of ensuring funding. Moreover, to accelerate the localized development of education, the education should be combined with the native realities. All of these thoughts apply to the present education, too. As we know, the qualitative nature of education is to train human beings. The adjustment of education to society does not equal to blind obedience to the society, for politicization, commercialization and religionization are the manifestation patterns of the misguided education. If education is attached to some political party totally and the party education is over applied, education will lose its reality and purity some day. Education should put people first, which is absolutely different from the
organization-oriented parties. “A society is made up of the individual molecules. With these sound molecules, there will appear a sound society.” Besides, the investment of education funds should be guaranteed for the fixed use in education. According to the statistical bulletin, in 2016, the national fiscal education fund was about 3139.6 billion yuan, firstly over 3000 billion, and up 7.44% compared with the past year, which accounted 4.22% of the GDP and kept an increase of over 4% for five years. Faced with public’s queries whether the use of education extra fees would be practicable, the National People’s Congress deputy stressed again that the education extra fees must be expended on education for the fixed purpose, not in other fields. From different levels, it highly reflects the state’s emphasis on educational expenditure and the state’s special attitude towards it, that is, the money should be used exclusively for its intended purposes. Furthermore, the problem of education localization and globalization seems more characteristic of the times. Under the background of economic globalization brought by the advances of science technology, the globalization of education is an unavoidable tendency, but regardless of the national reality, the total globalization is also not feasible, because if the civilians only chase foreign cultures, the native cultures will suffer from being merged, changed or even extincted in return. Only in the dialectical view of the relationship between localization and globalization, discarding its dregs, selecting its essence and rejecting the entire westernization or international assimilation, will the education be in an invincible position with cooperative innovation and matching of the native condition.

**Education Cannot be Completely Independent**

Meanwhile, Tao Xingzhi also admitted the positive role of education in politics, and looked forward to social and political reforms through education. He thought that students could take an active part in the political movements, and mentioned in On Education in Nanking that education is the most important career appointed by the state to the government and it is a basic tool for improving a city as well. The new city is based on new education. It’s obvious that, in his eyes, the entire education independence was not scientific or realistic, as education will be affected by the political, economic, cultural and social factors and vice versa. If education was totally independent and there would exist no realistic ideas for teaching and guiding during the education progress, the students might be pure but more likely to be bookworms, or even be weeded out by the society. From the following famous couplet about education, “The sounds of the wind, of the rain, and of reading aloud all come to my ears; the affairs of the family, of the state and of the world are all my concerns”, we may get an idea that since the idea of freedom is preached in education, then what is more needed than the academic freedom is the liberty and independence of thought. If education becomes totally independent, and the education funds are organized, managed and used by its own, how to keep its fairness and efficiency apart from the less public trust? The education will become like a state isolated from outside. As a result, under such tide of present globalization, a nation, adhering to one’s self-styled but not absorbing the strengths of other nations, will gradually fall behind others, and the students might become blockheads.

**Conclusion**

Through the analysis of the education independence idea in Tao Xingzhi’s education thoughts, in combination with the historical background of the contemporary society, it is not difficult to conclude that, on the one hand, education should remain its relative independence, especially the allocations and expenses of education funds should be independent; on the other hand, it is unrealistic and unscientific for the education to be entirely independent because education must be restricted in form and content by a series of factors like politics, economy, culture and society.

At the same time, it can be seen that Tao Xingzhi did not regard himself as an educator merely, but he considered himself to be a social reformer as well as a designer and propellant of the modernization progress of China. He argued that China’s education thought should break through the limitations of narrow education, and serve for China’s modernization progress from an angle of “great education”. His firm spirit of serving country and people, never changing his first mind, and dedicating to the education, is worthy of being followed and praised by the contemporary educators.
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