

Introduction

XU DI, HUNTER McEWAN, AND YANG LIUXIN

Xueji (学記 *On Teaching and Learning*) is a relatively brief essay on teaching and learning—a statement of an ancient Confucian philosophy of education that is summarized in 1,228 Chinese characters. It was canonized as a fascicle in *Liji* (礼記 *On Ritual*), a text that was included as one of the *Five Classics* together with *Chunqiu* (春秋 *Spring and Autumn Annals*), *Shijing* (詩經 *Book of Songs*), *Shujing* (書經 *Book of Documents*), and *Yijing* (易經 *Book of Changes*) that are associated with Confucius himself in the tradition and formed the basic curriculum of Confucian education. The inclusion of *Xueji* in *Liji* was because it documents and explains the ritual protocols of the Imperial Academy (太学 *taixue*), an institution that dates back to earliest times but that became increasingly critical in the Han dynasty for the education of a bureaucracy that was needed to rule the empire. It is, moreover, one of the earliest scholarly essays in ancient China to systematically discuss the system of teaching and learning, the philosophy, principles, methods, roles of teachers and students, and actual educational methods practiced during the Han dynasty. The author of *Xueji* is often considered unknown. Scholars have long debated its authorship. Some consider it to be written by a disciple of Confucius; others believe it to have been penned by a student of Mencius (孟子) whose name was Le Zhengke (樂正克). But in spite of the uncertainty of its authorship, *Xueji* remains an authoritative statement of classical Chinese pedagogy and a foundational educational text—one that invites comparisons to educational writings of classical Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Thus, it is the aim of the contributors to this volume to bring this work to the attention of contemporary scholars and students in the field of education in the global context.

The project of translating *Xueji* began in the fall of 2007, when Yang Liuxin (楊柳新), an associate professor in the Institute of Social Economy and Culture at Peking University, came to the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa as a visiting scholar. Yang's visit was funded by the China International Exchange Program from the Chinese Ministry of Education. While the main focus of his research was to study moral education in America, Yang also sought opportunities to introduce the classics and essence of Chinese educational thought to his American colleagues and students. After some initial scholarly conversations and interactions with his American colleagues, Yang attended a class on the philosophy of education taught by Hunter McEwan, who was at that time chair of the Department of Educational Foundations. McEwan's class included some readings from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Republic*. This led to further discussions on the origins of Western educational thought vis-à-vis the origins of Chinese educational ideas and the similarities and differences between the two traditions.

Yang introduced *Xueji* as an exemplary Confucian text—one that provided an early statement of Chinese educational thought—that he felt would be useful in marking some of the fundamental differences between the two traditions. Though productive, these early discussions involved some misunderstandings due to the language barrier, but soon Yang and McEwan were joined by a third member of the group, Xu Di, who has taught in American higher educational institutions for over twenty years. Thus, the three of us formed a team with weekly regular meetings to discuss and translate the essay. These intellectual conversations were rich, lively, and engaging, and the philosophical discussions that followed focused on both the Eastern and Western philosophies of education. A first draft of a translation of *Xueji* was completed in 2008. As we progressed with the work of translation, the group gained a greater understanding of the value of *Xueji*, not only in providing a contrast to Western educational thought but also in revealing certain ideas that we felt were important to bring to the attention of modern educators. For example, a great deal of our discussions focused on the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning as it is represented in *Xueji*—an idea that seems very much at odds with the more technical notions of teaching and learning advocated in reform measures and adopted in educational practices in China and the West.

The collaboration and expansive scholarly discussions we held on *Xueji*, on Confucian ideas, and Western educational philosophies and practices continued after the translation of *Xueji*. In the summer of 2008, Yang, McEwan, and Xu presented their work at a symposium on *Xueji* held at the International Network of Philosophers of Education Conference in Kyoto, Japan. The following year, 2009, we presented earlier versions of our contributions to this volume at the Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawai'i. Our papers brought *Xueji* to

the attention of a number of contemporary scholars and educational practitioners who expressed their interest in learning more about the text and a desire to more fully understand the relevance of this ancient essay in the context of the many practical challenges of education today.

As we shared these ideas with our colleagues and fellow scholars, Roger Ames, a renowned international scholar of Chinese philosophy, an experienced translator, and an editor of numerous Chinese scholarly works, read the translation with interest and edited our version. Thus, the final translation included in this book reflects the collaborative efforts of four of us over a period of five years.

The circle of the scholars grew larger with the participation of Chen Lai (陳来) from Tsinghua University and Yang Jing (楊菁), a graduate student at Peking University, Gay Reed of the Department of Educational Foundations at the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa as well as Mary Chang, a doctoral student at the University of Hawai'i. These works collectively offer, from a variety of perspectives, accounts of the value of Confucian educational ideas to a contemporary readership and extend the conversation begun by Yang, McEwan, and Xu in new and interesting ways.

Though each contributor brings his or her own perspective to the reading of *Xueji*, three aspects of this classical work are of note.

First, the concept *xue* (學), which we have translated as teaching and learning, has changed profoundly since *Xueji* was written. *Xue*, or learning, in contemporary schooling is no longer the exclusive privilege of the ruling class. In both America and China, the idea of learning has become influenced by “popular education.” The goals, content, curriculum, methods, participants, and procedures as well as the outcomes differ markedly from the formal educational procedures described in *Xueji*.

Second, the idea of learning has been transformed by the possibilities inherent in modern technology and communication methods. The original Chinese idea of learning possessed strong local and cultural characteristics, with simple and varied expressions that arose from experience and a profound sense of the moral importance of education to the development of society. In contrast, the modern idea of teaching and learning is shaped by the requirements for specialization in a world that favors the preparation of experts in such varying fields as the sciences, technology, politics, law, economy, management, medicine, and education. As a result, the conception of teaching and learning has become more defined in terms of technical efficiency rather than in terms of relationships—more valued for what it yields in terms of productivity than in terms of human relationships and morality.

The Western educational model has made tremendous contributions to human development and modernization. It has promoted global expansion and the application of knowledge in many fields of science and technology, such as nuclear power, satellite technology, weather forecasting, agriculture, medicine,

industry, trade, and finance. As a result, the world has become smaller and more diverse. The material benefits of modern society are many, but so are the costs. Compartmentalization and specialization in education have led to a narrowing of perspective. Individuals pursue their own interests, financial gain, and careers to the neglect of more expansive social aims.

In this context, we invite a reexamination of some of the fundamental ideas of teaching and learning as they connect with the moral purposes of education. *Xueji* returns us to a time when teaching and learning were seen as essential aspects of the same moral task—an education that is directed to human growth and moral improvement. In the words of *Xueji*:

Thus it is only in learning that we realize our inadequacies, and it is only in teaching that we realize our limitations. It is only in realizing our inadequacies that we are able to become self-critical, and only in realizing our limitations that we are able to improve ourselves. Teaching and learning complement each other. This is what the “Command to Yue” 兗命 (*yueming*) means when it says: “Teaching and learning are two halves of a whole.”

This conception of teaching and learning is in many ways very modern in outlook and provides a useful contrast to the modern types of cause-effect teaching and learning that we find so prevalent in today’s schools and colleges. John Dewey, for example, discusses teaching and learning in similar terms as a conjoint activity in which the teacher and learner are engaged in common educational tasks.¹ Dewey is critical of ideas of schooling that separate learning and teaching from morals: “All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral. . . . Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest.”²

Third, there is a widespread view that ancient Chinese educational theories, philosophies, principles, and practices are antiquated, outmoded, and hardly applicable to the requirements of modern society. Another related view is that Chinese teaching and learning methodologies place higher value on conformity over individual expression and rote memorization over thinking for oneself. Unfortunately, many Chinese educators and scholars are of the same mind and often advance Western values in order to criticize and negate traditional Chinese values.

Since the 1980s, China has been striving to catch up with the developed world through a series of reforms in its economy, in the fields of science and technology and in education. Although Chinese education has maintained its focus on political study and Chinese language, in reality the entire system in its structure, content, methodology, and implementation has become very much Westernized, commercialized, and product oriented. Modern Chinese educators

cite Western classics in their scholarly works and teaching. Plato, Aristotle, Piaget, and others are favored to the neglect of Chinese thinkers and educators such as Lao Zi (老子, approximately 600–470 BC), Confucius (孔子, 551–479 BC), Mo Zi (墨子, 468–376 BC), Han Fei Zi (韓非子, 280–233 BC), Xun Zi (荀子, 312–230 BC), and Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200).

Thus, a reengagement with classical Chinese educational thought can be seen as an effort to reconnect modern China with its roots and also as a way to inform others of a tradition of thought that connects education with its moral purpose. As Ames argues in his essay in this volume, the root metaphor is central to our understanding of Chinese pedagogy. In the words of *Xueji*:

Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) have said that the highest virtue is not manifested through any official position or authority, that the greatest *dao* in the world is not a matter of mastering any particular skill or occupation, that real trust and credibility among people transcends any particular agreement, and that the great rhythm of nature is not limited to any particular season. Scrutiny into these four phenomena will provide insight into both teaching and learning. When the three great kings¹³ held their ceremonies in veneration of water, they paid their respects first to the rivers and then to the ocean. The rivers are the source of water and the ocean is where it collects. This is what is meant by devotion to the root of things. (21)

We present this English translation of *Xueji* in the spirit of Confucian philosophy as a study of roots—that it is a good thing to learn about the origins of concepts, how they arose and how they have changed. Thus, *Xueji* provides the reader with an original account of the nature of teaching and learning along with a justification for such a study.

As a joint effort of educational philosophers and scholars from America and China, this translation and the supporting essays seek to introduce *Xueji* to a broader readership. Our aim has been to examine *Xueji* from both Eastern and Western perspectives and to enlarge upon its theoretical and practical implications.

This volume offers the most recent English translation of *Xueji* in company with the original Chinese version and eight chapters that examine *Xueji* from different perspectives. In chapter 1, Roger Ames examines the concept of *xue* and argues that its origins lie within an understanding of human relationships and a vision of morality based on the roles that constitute us as persons—as family members and as members of particular communities. In chapter 2, Xu Di examines the principles of teaching and learning in the context of Western myths about Chinese education, with the aim of promoting a

better understanding of *Xueji* and its implications for education in the world today. Hunter McEwan, in chapter 3, compares and contrasts ideas in *Xueji* with Plato's educational thought—particularly in regard to differences in the approach to teaching virtue, the relationship between teacher and pupil, and the nature of the curriculum. In chapter 4, Chen Lai of Tsinghua University discusses Chinese traditional approaches to learning and the characteristic ideals of love of learning, learning the Dao, and learning to be virtuous (or becoming a sage). In chapter 5, Yang Liuxin and his graduate student Yang Jing identify the ideas and values expressed in *Xueji* in the larger Confucian tradition of thought. They highlight the teacher's role as it is advocated and exemplified by Confucius and draw attention to the emphasis that his ideas place on benevolence, on the moral importance of example, and on the aim of producing a virtuous society. Qin Wei Hong (秦維紅) of Peking University focuses on the concept of *xue* (learning) in *Xueji* and in the works of Confucius in chapter 6. She examines the concept's similarities with and difference to the conception of learning in modern China. In chapter 7, Mary Chang, a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i, thoughtfully examines the moral and character education proposed in *Xueji* and applies it to science education and teaching in contemporary America and beyond. Gay Garland Reed, in chapter 8, creatively links *Xueji* and the idea of the exemplary person or *Junzi* (君子) to U.S. president Barack Obama.

Together with the English translation of *Xueji*, this collection of eight educational and philosophical essays examines the roots of educational thought in classical Chinese philosophy, outlines similarities and differences with related ideas that are rooted in classical Greek thought, and explores implications for educators today.

At the same time, the essays raise a number of questions: Should we distinguish teaching from learning, and vice versa? What roles do teaching and learning play in a moral society? What is the proper relationship between teacher and learner? Why does the idea of the exemplary person or *junzi* have such a profound appeal and relevance to us today, and yet why is this idea so elusive?

NOTES

1. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 167.
2. *Ibid.*, 320.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. In *The Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*, vol. 9, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, 4–402. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008.