

Talks at UNESCO Asia NGO Network Conference on
What Should Be Done for Education in the Next Ten Years for a Sustainable Future
Given by Venerable Master Chin Kung
Okayama International Center, Okayama, Japan
10th June 2003

Presented by
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Chairman, members of the committee and honored guests,

I am honored to be invited to share my view at UNESCO Asia NGO Network Conference on the topic of *What Should Be Done for Education in the Next Ten Years for a Sustainable Future*. I strongly feel that this is the most solemn topic for the 21st Century.

When we look at the turmoil of the world today, and the chaos experienced by our society, many are probing for an answer in the hope to seek for solutions. Many people have asked me the same questions. I think this is a question concerning education. In the *Book of Rites*, the Confucius Scripture, it was written that “Education is essential in building a country for a regime and its people.”

What created these problems? These problems are caused by the failure in our educational policies on all levels, especially when we lack the teachings of the ancient saints and sages today. China was impacted greatly by Western culture, lost her self-confidence, doubted the teachings of the ancient saints and sages and became distant to the teachings of Confucius, Mencius and Buddha Shakyamuni. Due to the advancements in scientific technology, the West now doubts the validity of religious education. Fewer people believed in the words of Bible. There was even declaration that God is dead. These beliefs are the root causes for all our natural and man-made disasters.

The ancient Chinese saints like Yao and Shun taught people the following five principles as the ultimate goal of an education: 1. Parents should love and care for their children, children should have love and devotion to their parents. 2. The ruler should be kind to their subjects. The subjects should be loyal to the ruler. 3. Husbands and wives should love one another. 4. Siblings should live in harmony. 5. Friends should be trustworthy to one other. They have also taught people to discipline themselves, to be loyal and credible in their spoken words, and to be sincere and discreet in their behaviors. When dealing with daily matters, people were taught to question their own actions to make sure what they did were done with kindheartedness and justification, not for what they could profit from it; They were taught to endeavor to the best of

their ability to make everything fair and reasonable, and not to be concerned with their own contribution. When it came to interactions with others, they did not do to others what they did not want others to do to them. When they encountered obstacles and could not get the results they wanted, they reflected on themselves to search for the reasons why they had failed. Later on Confucius and Mencius followed their teachings and made them the basic principles of education and the guiding policies for China over the past four thousand years.

The Confucians say that “the true nature of human is good”. The philosophy of education made it clear from the beginning that the true nature of human is good and kind. The development of unkindness is caused by the contamination of bad habits in life. Therefore, the saints and sages highly valued the work of education. Only proper education can prevent the bad and the evil from ever developing, thus, protect and even enhance the original kind nature of people. Education can change people from being evil to being good, turn hostility into friendship, resolve conflicts to turn bitterness into brotherliness, and transform ordinary people to saints. All the ancient Chinese saints and sages understood this principle. This is the reason why it was said that “education is essential in building a country for a regime and its people.” It simply stated that in order to build a country or a regime and to properly guide and teach its people, education is the most important factor of all.

There are four important types of education. The education system is complete only when all types are there: the first one is the family education, the second one is the school education, the third is the social education, and the fourth is the religious education. Of these four types, the family education is the main foundation, and the religious education is what makes an education complete and perfect. When all four types of education are set into motion, the world will be at peace, our society will be stable and people will be happy. If we neglect any one of them, our world would undoubtedly become chaotic.

Let us look at how our societies are formed today. From a basic family unit to a country, then to the whole world, most of the teachings available are for the purpose of making profits. The families no longer care about moral principles. Many couples are either busy in getting divorces or busy in making money. They neglect to educate their children and be their role models; therefore, the children today do not listen to their parents. The current school education only concentrates on the teachings of competitive knowledge in the fields of science, technology, and economics. It has neglected the teachings of moral principles and subjects on humanities; therefore, the students do not listen to their teachers. The social education today is severely contaminated. Just look at the daily newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, and internet, majority of them teaches people how to kill, steal, lusting and lying. They neglect the teachings on the principle of cause and effect. The only concern that people have is their own interests. There are little kindness, gratitude or faithfulness among human relationship. As for the religious education, it has become a formality. It only concentrates on the religious rituals and ceremonies. People do read the scriptures but they do not understand their true meaning. Without the actual knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, how could one practice in its true spirit? Therefore, we no longer have religious education. Today all four

types of education have degenerated. How can this world stay out of turmoil? For those who truly want to save this world from the pending disasters, there is no other way than to re-implement these four types of education as soon as possible.

Family is the fundamental structure of society. “When every family lives in harmony, everything will prosper.” When the families are in harmony, how can the world not be at peace, the society not in stability? The harmony and happiness within a family can only be achieved when the relationships within a family are harmonious and each parent fulfills his or her duties. They will act together to prevent any wrong doings from happening, stop all deviated behaviors, and cultivate good deeds. Parents of olden days understood this principle; therefore, in front of their children, the parents were bound by the proper etiquettes. They would not leave any bad impressions on their children’s minds. The parents respected the teachers and parents acted respectfully towards the teachers in front of their children. When the children saw how respectful their parents were to their teachers, it helped the children have confidence in their teachers and thereby accepted their teachings. This is called a family education. The teachers, on the other hand, acted as the role models for the students and taught the students to be dutiful at home. From this we can understand the reasons why the children and the students do not listen nowadays. Who is responsible for this? Mencius said: “It is the parents’ fault when children are raised but not taught. When teachers teach without being strict with their students, teachers are lazy.” This happens when both the parents and the teachers are not exemplary in their behaviors and do not fulfill their duties well.

Now let us look at the religious education. All religions were originally multicultural social education. All the religious scriptures place emphasis on the family education. For example, it was repeatedly said in the Old Testament of the Bible that “God loves all people.” In the Koran of Islam, it said that “Allah is indeed merciful to all people in this world.” Again, it said that “you ought to love and be devoted to your parents, to live in harmony with your relatives and kinsfolk, and to speak only kind words to people.” The Buddhists say that “loving-kindness and compassion are the base of all relationships, and they are also our driving force to accommodate all people and to make sure they can be benefited.” Therefore, the goal of all religious teachings in this world is about unconditional loving-kindness and compassion. They teach people to respect one another, to live in harmony, and to treat people equally without differentiating their nationalities or races. Therefore, all religions are education about peace and selfless compassion. They teach people to love one another and to love all living beings. All the religious scriptures are broad-minded. The Buddhists say that “the mind encompasses all.” If we are only concerned about ourselves and not the others, this is not the God’s will, nor is it the purpose or the goal of religious teachings. That is only the will and the wish of a certain individual or a group of people.

Therefore, if the religious followers do not delve deeper into the meaning of their scriptures and practice them accordingly, then their religions become superstitious. The religion itself is not a superstition. The nature of its education is beneficial to all. It can truly save the people and helps to turn their lives around.

The scriptures of the saints and the sages tell us that in a society, no matter what profession we are in, we are performing following duties: a ruler, a parent, or a teacher.” Anyone who wishes to achieve high moral standard, or to succeed in a career within this lifetime cannot live outside this principle.

Here “a ruler” refers to a person in a leadership position. The leader guides in the front, people follow him from behind. He will lead the people onto the right path so the people following him will not go astray. Therefore, the leader must have wisdom, virtues, moral conducts, and knows how to accommodate people properly. “A parent” means the giving of kindness and care. We should love and care for the others in the same way that we love and care for our own children. If you are the boss in a company, you should care for all your workers as you care for your children. Then why wouldn’t the workers remain loyal to you? “A teacher” is a person in the position to teach and to guide people. Teachers should become role models for all, to always love and protect the people they teach as if they are their students. None of us can escape from performing these three duties. To fulfill these three duties, we must rely on and live by the virtues and the moral principles taught by the ancient saints and sages. Only then every family will be happy, our societies will be stable and our world will be at peace.

We know that the teachings of all the ancient saints and sages of every country and all the sacred religious teachings are recorded in the scriptures. They contain such abundance in knowledge. All we need to do is to follow the teachings of the scriptures then we can restore the four types of education. Therefore, I hope that all of us can understand the importance of education on the topics of virtues, moral conducts and principles, especially on restoring the sacred teachings of the saints and the sages. How would we achieve it? I suggest that UNESCO establishes a University of World Religions for the 21st Century. Each religion establishes a school within. Let the religious education push the four types of our education forward to make it work and last. Only then will the world of the 21st Century see a beam of light, and our world would be saved.

I am most fortunate to have this opportunity to offer my humble opinions on this topic. Any comment will be greatly appreciated. Lastly, I wish you all good health, happiness, and best of fortunes! Thank you all!

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