

Self-Formation for the Underprivileged

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Abstract

Although the interpretations of self-formation may not be exactly the same in different cultures, self-formation has been an essential purpose for Higher Education (HE) in both of the Chinese and western cultures. In the western culture, HE emphasizes self-forming (Sen, 1985; Sen, 1992; Sen, 2000; Foucault, 2005; Foucault, 2010; Foucault, 2011); whereas, in the traditional Chinese culture, Confucian self-cultivation is stressed (Zhao & Deng, 2017; Biesta, 2002; Biesta, 2012). This article will first explain the meaning of self-forming and self-cultivation in HE, followed by introducing an initiative to help the talents of the underprivileged in mainland China, Macau, and Hong Kong to achieve self-formation.

Introduction

Based on Kolvenbach (1986), the purposes of Jesuit Education are embedded in three of the characteristics of Jesuit education.

- Jesuit education promotes dialogue between faith and culture.
- Jesuit education includes a religious dimension that permeates the entire education.
- Jesuit education assists in the total formation of each individual within the human community.

In the same vein, Jesuit HE aims to groom its students with the whole-person development in the hope that students can change the whole world to be a better place for people to domicile (AJCU, 2020). For instance, the aim of HE at one of the famous Asian Jesuit universities, Sogang University, is to teach individuals the essence of the life vocation and the adoration of the Mighty God (Kim, 2008). Sogang University advocates humanity, whole-person development, and the truth (Sogang University, 2020). Similarly, Sophia University, a prestigious private Jesuit university in Japan, also champions the whole-person development, the values of Catholicism, and the truth (Sophia University, 2020). In other words, echoing the traditions of the Jesuits, both Sogang University and Sophia University treasure Jesuit traditions, Catholicism as well as self-formation (Sogang University, 2020).

Self-formation has an indispensable role to play in both the western and eastern cultures. Marginson (2017) stressed the significance of self-formation as the aim of HE across various

cultures through the whole of the HE history. The essential concepts of self-formation comprise Bildung tradition (Biesta, 2012), Confucian self-cultivation (Zhao & Deng, 2016; Sun, 2008), and self-forming freedom (Sen, 2000), socially-nested self-formation (Ashwin and McVitty, 2015) and pragmatism (Konrad, 2012; Kivela et al., 2012; Kivela, 2012; Kontio, 2012).

Self-forming freedom as a purpose of HE

Sen (2000) suggests that the individual's determination is of utmost importance in self-formation, and the individual is the "change agent," which can control one's well-being and capabilities. There are three essential facets of freedom. The first facet is called "control freedom," which explains the individual is free from constraint. The second facet is called "freedom as power," which describes the individual's capacity to take action. The last aspect is called "agency freedom," which tells one's will to act (Sen, 2000). Also, Foucault pinpoints (2010) an individual's reflexivity is the mediator of the Higher Education Institute (HEI) and the change agent. HE can increase the capacity of the individual for reflexivity. After studying at an HEI, individuals have more confidence to trust others and manage themselves. Throughout the transformational self-formation process, there is a real struggle to drive oneself by oneself (Ball, 2017). The result of the transformational process is an individual can transform to be a different person that the individual was not (Ball, 2017). Another issue is the individual is free from the state's decision but by one's decision. Self-formation is similar to the French word "autoformation" in adult education in France. Still, the latter adds the critical value of emancipation, which explains self-formation is not a one-off educational process but a continual, life-long process, and everyone has the right to undertake autoformation throughout one's life (Eneau, 2017).

Self-cultivation is a purpose of HE

Self-cultivation has been adopted in both the Chinese culture (Zhao & Deng, 2017) as well as the Western culture (Biesta, 2002; Biesta, 2012). According to Zhao and Biesta (2011), traditional Confucian self-cultivation is a life-long process, resulting in self-perfection. Besides, self-cultivation is also the pre-requisite for performing and bearing social obligations (Zhao & Deng, 2017). As clearly depicted in the Confucian textbook *The Great Learning*, there are three objectives (三綱) and eight steps (八條目) to cultivate oneself. Three goals include "manifesting one's bright virtue, loving the people, stopping in perfect goodness (*The Great Learning*, trans. Muller, 1992)." (在明明德、在親民、在止於至善。) Eight steps are to investigate things, extend one's knowledge, make one's intention sincere, correct one's mind, cultivate one's personal life, regulate one's family, govern one's state, and settle the world at

peace and harmony (The Great Learning, trans. Muller, 1992). (格物、致知、誠意、正心、修身、齊家、治國、平天下。)

To put self-formation into practice, the author suggests The University of Saint Joseph setting up a “Self-formation Center for the Underprivileged,” and the details are explained in the next section.

Initiative for Self-formation for the underprivileged

Strategic Plan: In collaboration with The Caritas Institute of Higher Education, The University of Saint Joseph can set up a “Self-formation Center for the Underprivileged.”

Aim: We assist talents from the underprivileged of the society to become leaders, who are empathetic and passionate about building a better future for the community as well as protecting our natural environment and its resources.

Benefits of the initiative

1. The center can significantly assist students from low-income families to climb the social ladder and get into the most outstanding universities in the world through our online education or preparation programs.
2. By using the online platform, now it is the golden opportunity to help promote the equality of education to the most impoverished areas in mainland China, Macau, and Hong Kong.
3. Broadening students’ social network and capacity through our exchange programs, mentorship programs, and gap year work-experience programs to facilitate self-formation.
4. Reciprocity and sustainability: There is an obligation for all selected talents. After training in our center for a year and graduated from the training program, they have to promise to come back to work as a mentor to help teach the mentee. This program will ensure the sustainability of the program. Mostly, we will use volunteers to promote the program. There will be professional training for the mentors.

Strategies of the initiative

1. Target lower band secondary schools: Caritas schools are the prospective target schools for the initiative as these schools’ priority is to serve the 3 “Ls” students, i.e., the least, the last, and the lost.
2. Invite donors for donations to set up and maintain the learning platform.
3. Provide students with gap year work experience in another country, particularly getting involved in protecting the natural environment and its resources.

4. Provide students with virtual tours to different universities. Students will be instructed by real tour guides to learn to protect the natural environment and its resources of the respective university.
5. Provide exchange opportunities for every student.
6. Invite elite universities to join the mentorship program.

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