

The Dilemma, Causes, and Strategies of Gratitude Education in the New Era

Fangtian Guo

*School of Marxism, Nanjing Normal University of Special Education, Nanjing, China
85917619@qq.com*

Abstract: *Gratitude is both an emotion and a behavior, serving as a measure of the overall societal values and ethics, as well as a cornerstone for advancing civilization. Since the reform and opening-up policy in China, there has been rapid development in both material and spiritual aspects of society, leading to a significant improvement in people's living standards. However, an essential component of spiritual development, namely gratitude education, has not progressed synchronously. This has, to a certain extent, hindered the ongoing development of socialist spiritual civilization and has the potential to give rise to various societal and familial issues. Therefore, in light of the current challenges faced by gratitude education, specific strategies are needed to enhance the quality of gratitude education in China. This will ultimately strengthen individuals' sense of gratitude and their corresponding actions.*

Keywords: *spiritual civilization, gratitude, gratitude education, moral development*

1. Introduction

With the gradual deepening of the socialist spiritual civilization construction in the new era, gratitude education has become a focal point of concern for the entire society. This is an indispensable foundational endeavor in the development of spiritual civilization. In order to effectively promote gratitude education throughout society, it is necessary to clearly identify the challenges and reasons for strengthening gratitude education in China at present and, based on this, implement effective measures.

2. The Current Predicament of Gratitude Education in China

In the context of globalization and internet integration, as China's reform and opening-up continue to deepen, the market-oriented socialist economy with Chinese characteristics has witnessed unprecedented prosperity and development. China's economic and social landscape has undergone significant changes, with opportunities and challenges coexisting. Gratitude education also faces some new issues and characteristics.

2.1 The trends of information technology-driven networking and globalization have led to a noticeable infiltration of Western values

Under the influence of networking and globalization, as the country's openness to the outside world continues to expand, the influx of Western multicultural ideologies stemming from this opening has exerted a significant impact on Chinese cultural values. In the global context, gratitude education in schools can incorporate excellent gratitude cultures from abroad. However, more importantly, Western cultural values, such as materialism, hedonism, and the pursuit of quick gains, profoundly influence a wide range of young students and the general population.

2.2 The transition from traditional society to modern society has triggered conflicts in people's value systems

The rapid societal changes have led to clashes in value systems. Currently, society exhibits cultural and value diversification, a prevalence of utilitarianism, and a blurring of moral judgment standards, among other alienation phenomena in the social environment. These factors are impacting people's current value orientations, moral qualities, and behavior patterns, resulting in moral deviations and the abandonment of gratitude awareness. This is reflected in three specific aspects: Firstly, the core values

of gratitude culture in China, such as "loyalty" and "filial piety," have been negated by historical nihilism. Moreover, factors like individualism, hedonism, materialism, and consumerism in contemporary society have significantly influenced people's thoughts, leading some to develop utilitarian attitudes. Consequently, their values become blurred, weakening the culture of gratitude. Secondly, with the gradual establishment of a rule-of-law society, the shift from beneficiaries to rights-holders has diminished the gratitude sentiments and reciprocating behavior of those who have received kindness. Some children nowadays approach their parents' nurturing responsibilities and teachers' educational responsibilities from a legal perspective. Consequently, the gratitude for parental care and teacher guidance transforms into a contractual relationship. This negatively impacts the ethical values of children, leading to a lack of moral indebtedness and gratitude, thereby weakening their sense of moral responsibility. Thirdly, the tolerance of private domain ethics weakens the incentivizing function of societal evaluation. With the gradual development of modern society, a clear distinction has emerged between the public and private domains. The source of gratitude education, filial piety, has gradually become privatized. As long as actions do not violate the law, people generally do not address them in public settings, often considering them as private matters and adopting a tolerant, non-interventionist attitude. Filial piety has gradually been marginalized in the current societal evaluation system, diminishing the incentivizing function of societal evaluation. Therefore, whether adolescents possess filial piety is becoming inconsequential in the emotional world of some modern individuals.

2.3 The in-depth development of the market economy has brought about a complex environment of interest differentiation and integration

Because in some cases or some places of the disparity between the rich and poor, unfair, heart produce a "relative deprivation", happiness index decline, some people even accept the help and even for granted, indifference, by the psychology, they think, now is "once deprived", "should get", cannot produce gratitude, increase the difficulty of the gratitude education.

3. Analysis of the Causes of the Dilemma in Gratitude Education

The reasons for the emergence of the dilemma of Thanksgiving education are very complex. On the macro social level, there are mainly the following two points:

3.1 Limited Gratitude Awareness

Gratitude is an emotion that arises in human interactions and connections. It stems from the beneficiary's acknowledgment of assistance received from a benefactor. It's important to note that gratitude isn't confined solely to the beneficiary recognizing the help received; it is an emotion that can be non-directional. For instance, when individuals encounter breathtaking natural landscapes, they naturally experience an internal, subjective sense of gratitude. A complete process of gratitude typically includes recognizing, remembering, expressing thanks, and reciprocating kindness. Extensive research over the years has revealed that various factors, such as one's living environment, experiences, and field of study, can lead to differences in gratitude awareness. In the context of China, it has been observed that over the past two decades, gratitude awareness has been relatively weak. This is especially pronounced among individuals born in the 1980s and 1990s. These two generations experienced significant improvements in living conditions compared to those born in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, the younger generations, particularly those born in the 1980s and 1990s, tend to prioritize their own interests, often embodying what is commonly referred to as "self-centered altruism" on social media. Their focus is more on self, with limited concern for the welfare of others, and there is a noticeable absence of human empathy in these generations[1]. In such circumstances, gratitude education faces developmental challenges, and the thinning of gratitude awareness can, to some extent, affect the quality of societal ethics, potentially leading to a decline in social values.

3.2 Lack of Gratitude Education

Karl Marx once said: "The essence of man is not an abstract entity inherent in the individual, but in its reality, it is the sum of all social relations." Gratitude education cannot solely rely on parents, schools, and society; it should permeate every corner and level of social life. Therefore, the absence of gratitude education ultimately stems from the lack of societal emphasis on gratitude education. Firstly, from a historical perspective, moral values need to be nurtured postnatally. As the saying goes, "parents are a

child's first teachers," highlighting the crucial role of family education. Parents should constantly guide students' sense of gratitude. With the rapid economic growth, parents not only need to earn a living but also address their children's educational concerns. Under the dual pressure, many parents choose to abandon their role in educating their children and instead focus on their academic performance, ensuring their material needs are met. Consequently, communication between parents and children diminishes, and this materialistic and monetary-dependent parent-child relationship gradually replaces the space for gratitude education. Secondly, looking at the current state of family education in China, the "authoritarian" style of parenting still dominates. Some parents resort to giving orders to their children, and for mischievous or disobedient kids, they adhere to the traditional principle of "spare the rod and spoil the child," resorting to punishment without considering its psychological impact on the child. This inadvertently becomes a stumbling block to fostering a sense of gratitude in children. The form of family education is one of the significant reasons for the absence of gratitude education. Only when parents improve their own qualities and change the pattern of family education can they nurture their children's sense of gratitude and support gratitude education. Thirdly, from a societal perspective, the absence of gratitude education is primarily reflected in the participation of mainstream social values. For instance, the common occurrence of "staged accidents" in our daily lives has disheartened many well-intentioned individuals, making people increasingly indifferent to events in society. This not only diminishes the overall moral consciousness but also further weakens people's understanding of gratitude education. Fourthly, from the school's standpoint, although China is implementing "quality education," its essence remains "exam-oriented education." The pressure of examinations, academic advancement, and the like compel schools to focus all their efforts on improving students' exam scores. Gratitude education is rarely explored, and when it is, it often stays at the level of gratitude ideas, knowledge, and concepts, lacking substance and sometimes differing from real-life situations. Prolonged neglect of gratitude education not only fails to enhance students' sense of gratitude but also makes them more rebellious and causes their gratitude awareness to wane[2].

4. Strategies for Gratitude Education in the New Era

In response to the existing issues and reasons for gratitude education in China, we need practical and effective methods and means to continually enhance the quality of gratitude education.

4.1 Hierarchical Education Approach

"At the beginning of the nature of the good", in our traditional view, people natural nature is good, but this view is difficult to prove that people were born grateful, studies have shown that 2 years old children can know what behavior can help others, the children showed a strong willingness to help others, and about five years old children in principle already have the ability to understand gratitude, can realize that the grace is intended to help yourself. Children between the ages of 5 and 12 can realize that the beneficiary feels good about being helped and helping the benefactor, but they do not value the benefactor. When children feel that the beneficiary should help the benefactor, they help benefactor motive explanation is inconsistent, most 5 to 6 years old children focus on the influence of the benefactor, over 7 and 7 years old children usually given explanation is that by helping the benefactor and avoid others to his negative evaluation, only in 11 to 12 years old children will appear from the independent moral obligation and return benefactor behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to implement a tiered approach to gratitude education. Different gratitude education methods should be provided according to the age of the children[3]. In other words, during the process of gratitude education, educators should not overlook the differences among their students. They need to employ personalized teaching methods based on the psychological and abilities of each learner. In gratitude education, it is essential to understand both the commonalities and individual characteristics of each learner. For young children who have not yet fully grasped the concept of gratitude, educators can use storytelling to help them understand the importance of gratitude. For adolescents who have a clearer understanding of gratitude principles, educators can provide deeper insights through explanations and social practices. Gratitude education for adults can utilize a variety of methods and approaches. In summary, the key to gratitude education is to first understand the specific characteristics of each group of learners in terms of their gratitude awareness and then analyze and educate accordingly[4]. This targeted approach helps address the issues associated with traditional moral education and enhances the specificity and effectiveness of gratitude education.

4.2 Emotional Cultivation Method

Gratitude education is a form of emotional education, and it should not be equated with knowledge-based education. Furthermore, the inherent nature and character traits of each individual do not conform to general knowledge-based principles; they are uncontrollable and unchangeable. Therefore, gratitude education requires a thorough understanding of the essence of emotions and the selection of teaching methods that are suitable for the individual's emotional characteristics. This is where the method of emotional edification comes into play. The method of emotional edification aims to create a context for gratitude education that allows the learner to experience a "sentimental response" to the subject matter. Utilizing this approach progressively nurtures the learner's emotions, making gratitude education a subtle and silent teaching model. In this process, the learner is influenced and moved by emotions, which enhances their ability to empathize. Through this ability, they can emotionally engage, inspire, and convey emotions, ultimately achieving the educational goal of "educating through emotions." Currently, there are three main types of emotional edification: gratitude personality edification, gratitude situational edification, and gratitude art edification. Gratitude personality edification can be influenced by the personality of educators or specific individuals who have benefited from or provided kindness in a gratitude context. Gratitude situational edification involves educators creating or utilizing existing gratitude contexts to influence and inspire learners. These contexts can be real instances of gratitude that have occurred in social life, presented through text, images, or videos as news events, or they can be real instances of gratitude that have occurred in the learner's own surroundings. Gratitude art edification involves using various forms of art, such as literature, drama, film, television, music, dance, painting, video, and photography, to infect and stimulate learners in an educational context. Artworks with gratitude as their theme enhance the expressive and impactful power of gratitude emotions through elements such as sound, melody, characters, language, plot, scenes, and atmosphere[5]. This immersion in emotions through sound, imagery, and scenes allows learners to undergo a baptism of gratitude emotions and resonate with them on a spiritual level.

4.3 Establishing a Long-Term Mechanism

Gratitude is not only a virtue but also a spiritual state of being. The emotion of gratitude serves as the wellspring and driving force behind the development of social civilization.

This indicates that in the new era, for China to achieve better development, people must cultivate feelings of gratitude and enhance the practical effectiveness of gratitude education. This education should align with the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, there is a need to establish a long-term mechanism for gratitude education, explore the motivational mechanisms within this mechanism, and better stimulate learners' emotional cognition, expression, and reciprocation of gratitude. Gratitude emotions possess stability and represent a significant spiritual force. Once formed, they can effectively motivate individuals to actively engage in gratitude activities, improve their capacity and efficiency in such activities, and ultimately facilitate the achievement of set goals. Moral emotions such as sympathy, care, benevolence, and deep love are powerful drivers for individuals to experience gratitude and serve as emotional factors propelling individuals to achieve gratitude-related goals. Resilient gratitude will can integrate an individual's gratitude needs, motives, emotional content, beliefs, and requirements into a single purpose and spiritual strength. When individuals encounter difficulties and obstacles in their gratitude activities, a strong sense of gratitude will enable them to resist temptations and interference, persistently overcome various challenges and barriers. Therefore, establishing a long-term educational mechanism is the foundational work for improving the quality of gratitude education.

5. Conclusion

Gratitude character is an important symbol of perfect virtue. Gratitude education in the new era is an important part of the cultivation and practice of socialist core values. However, due to the infiltration of multiple western values and the conflict of people's values caused by the information network, the complex environment of interest differentiation and integration brought by the in-depth development of the market economy, and the absence of gratitude education to a certain extent, gratitude education has met new challenges. Therefore, in the continuous strengthening of socialist moral education and moral construction today, it is necessary to attract the attention of the whole society to gratitude education, and use psychological guidance, emotional edification, practical cultivation and other means of different ages to promote the continuous in-depth development of gratitude education, and thus promote the cultivation and practice of socialist core values.

References

- [1] Jiang Chang. *"Towards Elegant Existence - A Study on Social Value Choices in 21st Century China,"* Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2004 edition.
- [2] Liu Jianjun. *"Exploring a Unique Perspective on Ideological and Political Education,"* Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2016 edition.
- [3] Liu Licao et al. *"Theory and Practice Research on Gratitude Education for Adolescents,"* Beijing: Science Press, 2014 edition.
- [4] Sun Yingguang. *"Explorations in Moral Education within the Comprehensive Perspective of Marxism,"* Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 2015 edition.
- [5] Shen Zhuanghai. *"A Study on the Effectiveness of Ideological and Political Education,"* Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2008 edition.