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Literary Education: Christian Values and Confucian Concepts in Upbringing of Students

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to reveal fundamental Christian values and Confucian concepts in the texts of the writers, to investigate using of these values and concepts in literary teaching and learning process and their contribution to moral upbringing of today's students. Methodology includes axiological approach. The authors examine literary works of Chinese American writer Amy Tan (USA) and Chinese writer Yu Hua (PRC) that are included in higher education courses in USA and Russia and present special interest for education. Literary education creates conditions for the implementation of Christian values and Confucian concepts that form moral potential of students. The study concludes that humanistic potential of a student's personality expands by means of appropriation of basic spiritual values.

Keywords: Literary education; axiological approach; christian values; confucian concepts.

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1. Introduction

Education is the main channel of introducing students to the universal human values. Higher education is a fundamental basis for the formation of younger generation's real ideas about the values that express social, legal and moral norms of society. U.S. scholar T.C. Chambers argues a special social role of the university in the formation of students' values, "today, an increasing emphasis is being placed on infusing the values of social and civic engagements throughout the core functions of colleges and universities" (Kezar, Chambers & Burkhardt, 2015). Teaching, learning, and upbringing process has a "value-oriented" function (Kiryakova, 2011) and leads students to the philosophical reflection of social reality.

Literary education at university uses the best examples of world classic and modern literature, that contain moral guidelines. Modern Russian educationalists support the idea that the content of education is the main tool for upbringing, "teaching and learning process in Russian universities is the main field for upbringing influence, which is carried out through semantic characteristics of courses" (Plemenjuk, 2008). Literary works as the object of study are "world of values" (Konovalova, 2009), including the eternal universal, the concrete historical, ethnic, and individual values that provide upbringing influence on the moral character of students. Undoubtedly in literature, according to U.S. philosopher A. Aoudjit, moral values are becoming more evident and clear, "literature can, indeed, make ethics concrete and therefore more interesting and more relevant" (Aoudjit, 2012).

The purpose of the study is to reveal fundamental Christian values and Confucian concepts in the texts of the writers, to investigate the use of these values and concepts in literary teaching and learning process and their contribution to moral upbringing of today's students. The study takes as an object literary works of Chinese American writer Amy Tan (USA) and the Chinese writer Yu Hua (PRC) – contemporary authors whose works are of academic interest and are included in higher education courses in the United States, Russian Federation, and People's Republic of China. There is a score of dissertations, theses, monographs, papers published in Russia, the US and China drawing on the works of these authors. The first PhD thesis in Amy Tan's works in Russia is written by S.G. Korovina, named "Amy Tan's works of 1980-1990 in the context of Asian American literary tradition" (2002), originated in the scholar school of professor Tatiana Voronchenko (Transbaikal State University). Works by Amy Tan and Yu Hua are an essential component of the educational process; they are included in textbooks and teaching guides, and their names are in modern literary encyclopedias and reference books. Amy Tan's works present in a wide range of U.S. and Russian educational programs: The New York State Common Core ELA & Literacy curriculum, "Cross-Cultural Readings of The Short Story" (Hampshire College), "The English Department Writing Program" (University of Michigan), "Literature Without Borders: Fiction in the Context of Globalization" (Moscow State University), "World Literary History" (Kazan Federal University); "World Literature of 20th-21st centuries" (MA program, Transbaikal state University), "Modern World Literature" (Far Eastern Federal University).

The works of Yu Hua are studied as well at various levels of education from undergraduate to post-graduate courses of literary history and modern Chinese literature in Russian universities (Moscow State University, Moscow City Teacher Training University, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Saint Petersburg State University, Far Eastern Federal University, Amur State University).

There are fundamental Christian values laid in the works of Amy Tan and Yu Hua: "God is Love", compassion, self-sacrifice in the name of love, hope. U.S. religious studies scholar Steven Prothero writes, that Christianity came to China through the missionaries and used the local language and customs to adapt its values: "It has taken on local beliefs and practices – from Confucianism in East Asia to spirit possession in Africa" (Prothero 2010, p. 67). S. Prothero emphasizes special spiritual ties between the two countries, "The United States and China are partners in an intimate dance ...of Christian and Confucian values" (Prothero , 2010).

Confucian moral and ethical code still occupies an important place in the spiritual life of modern Chinese people as a cementing foundation of interpersonal relationships. There are a number of disciplines in Chinese universities drawing on humanitarian values of Confucianism, aimed to form the spiritual character of students and associated “with the basic values and stereotypes of behavior, characteristic of the ideal personality, which is a model created by national Chinese doctrine” (Jin 2009, p. 346). Recognizing “ethical-centrism” and “social and moral engagement” as the cornerstone of Confucian doctrine, Jin Xinxin also recalls its main tenets that make up the basis of the “new moral personality”: sincerity *cheng*; ritual *li* and its embodiment in respect *jing*, compliance *rang* and harmony *he*; humanity *ren*; loyalty *zhong*; complaisance *xiao*; debt *yi* (Jin, 2009). Humanistic orientation of Confucian education is that “...education, which for Confucius was more about building character than about acquiring knowledge” (Prothero, 2010). Confucian concepts are an important spiritual component of Chinese American writer Amy Tan and Chinese writer Yu Hua’s literary texts, so they have a prominent upbringing meaning in the teaching and learning process.

2. Methodology

The axiological approach is considered to be the leading methodological approach in education science, as it allows to determine the essence of values which are examined and perceived by the students during the teaching and learning process and define moral character of the person. Russian scholars (Kagan, Slastyonin, Chizhakova, & Nikandrov) consider axiology in the context of education science, so we follow their methodology in research. Axiological approach allows us to consider upbringing as part of teaching and learning process and as a social and pedagogical phenomenon, with its main goal of fostering awareness of fundamental human values (Slastyonin & Chizhakova 2005). In this study, the approach aims to identify the mechanisms of appropriation of values by students during teaching and learning process in the course of literary education.

The axiological approach to literary education is now developing, while scholars argue the value of literary texts for the harmonious development of personality, “artistic creativity can be seen as the direct language of values” (Kagan, 2006). The axiological approach to the formation of the content of teaching and learning process – the selection of literary texts for literary education courses – creates conditions for the emotional experience for the students that results in perception of moral values. This study of awareness and appropriation of basic Christian and Confucian values by the students for their personal development is based as well on the methodology proposed by U.S. scholar N. Rosenstand (2012): understanding of difficult concepts in moral philosophy and moral values through literary text analysis; U.S. researchers L. Vaughn and L. Pojman (2010): using literary works to enliven and make concrete the ethical theory; U.S. scholars P. Singer and R. Singer (2005): using literary sources to add richness to discussions of real-life moral questions, dilemmas, and values as well.

3. Christian Values and Confucian Concepts in Amy Tan and Yu Hua’s literary works

The study examines Amy Tan and Yu Hua’s works that are included in literary education courses the world over and are used in teaching students to identify basic Christian and Confucian values. Revealing and appropriation of values are very important in the upbringing work at university as it forms the moral character of the individual.

The works of Chinese American writer Amy Tan contain mentions of the Christian missionaries in China. Amy Tan’s father was a priest. In her collection of essays “The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life” (2003) Amy Tan reports that before emigrating to the United States her father studied in a missionary school in Hong Kong: “The Christian influence ran so deep and strong in the Tan family that all twelve children became evangelists of one sort or another” (Tan, 2003). In Tan’s novel “The Kitchen God’s Wife” (1992) the image of Chinese American Baptist preacher Jimmy Louie combines all worth-while human qualities: delicacy, tenderness, benevolence, goodness, capacity for compassion,

decency. The prototype of Jimmy Louie is the writer's father – a Baptist preacher. Amy Tan stresses that Jimmy Louie and his wife are the leaders of the Baptist community and an example of human decency for all the residents of Chinatown. In the Amy Tan's novel "The Bonesetter's Daughter" (2001) the chapter "Destiny" is devoted to LuLing's living in a shelter opened for girls-orphans by American missionaries in the former Buddhist monastery (Tan, 2001).

Tan's novel "The Hundred Secret Senses" (1995) is of great interest in identifying Christian values in the process of literary education. The narrative is replete with historical and ethnographic realities of China in mid-nineteenth century. The basic Christian value, "God is love", is interpreted by Tan's heroine Kwan as The Hundred Secret Senses. Thanks to these "feelings" the spiritual, mental communication with loved ones who have gone to another world is possible, "...the world is not a place but the vastness of the soul. And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless, endless, all that moves us toward knowing what is true ... And believing in ghosts – that's believing that love never dies. If people we love die, then they are lost only to our ordinary senses. If we remember, we can find them anytime with our hundred secret senses" (Tan , 1995). The Hundred Secret Senses are a "language of love. Not just honey-sweetheart kind of love. Any kind love, mother-baby, auntie-niece, friend-friend, sister-sister, stranger-stranger" (Tan, 1995).

Yu Hua in the novel "The Seventh Day" (2015) addresses the theme of Christian values that is emphasized by the epigraph, "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made" (Bible: Genesis 2: 2). Despite the surreal plot, the novel raises the eternal questions of love and self-sacrifice in the name of love. The adoptive father of the protagonist devotes his life to upbringing of Yang Fei, he considers him his true son. The novel tells us another story of the tragic and sacrificial love of Wu Chao, who "must have sold a kidney so that Mouse Girl could get a proper burial" (Yu, 2015). Terminally ill Wu Chao sacrifices his life for the sake of his beloved. Christian commandment "love your neighbor" has a new vision in the scene of farewell to Mouse Girl: in purification ritual from the vanities of the world.

Self-reflection and comprehension of the moral issues relating to the Christian and Confucian values, based on students' individual experiences, are of great importance during the teaching and learning process at university. The literary education workshops by S.G. Korovina in the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (Moscow) provide students with the talk about the sloth, a deadly sin in Christianity, akin to indifference to God, to oneself, to other people. Professor Tatiana Voronchenko organizes similar workshops at Transbaikal State University (Chita, Transbaikal Region). The study of the Chinese culture here is also caused by the boundary position of Transbaikal region – the Russia-China border. The man who fell into despair has no chance of redemption, this mental state deprives a person of their desire to repent and correct themselves. According to the students, the opposition of sloth is hope of redemption, repentance and turning to God. All the Amy Tan's novels have the leitmotif of hope, which appears in the finals of her works. S.G. Korovina discussed this leitmotif before (Korovina 2008). The death of Song Gang in the Yu Hua's novel "Brothers" (2009) became a turning point for his brother Baldy Li, giving him hope for better life. The main theme of the Yu Hua's novel "The Seventh Day" (2015) is the search of the protagonist's father first on the earth among the living, and then among the dead. The reunion of father and son after the death on "the land of the unburied" symbolizes the hope that they have found each other for good, "after a long parting, my father and I had run into each other again. Although we now had no body warmth and no breath, we were together once more. ... I simply said, "Dad, I'll often come visit you." I felt a smile appear on his skeletal face" (Yu, 2015).

Confucian concepts are important in teaching and learning process at university, as they are directed on the formation of positive thinking of students in all aspects of life. The idea of S. Prothero that "for Chinese people Confucianism is not only ethic philosophy, but 'way of life'" (Prothero, 2010) confirms it. In this regard, there is a need to pay special attention to the students' appropriation of Confucian values during the literary education course.

The principles “Do well and have well”, “evil for evil”, preached by Confucius (*xing shan de shan, xing e de e*), despite its ancient origin, is still relevant in today’s China. So, Yu Hua consistently refers to the interpretation of this dichotomy in his fiction and nonfiction works. There is a fundamental difference between Confucianism and Christianity: Christianity refused principle “evil for evil”, it is replaced by “nonresistance to evil” principle (Makhankov,2004).

Yu Hua’s (2004) protagonist Xu Sanguan repeatedly exclaims, “You get what you deserve” (Yu, 2004), stressing the sacred meaning of the utterance by reference to God, Lord of Heaven (Lao Tian Ye), which may be the Christian god too, “Xu Sanguan concluded, “So people ought to try their best to do good and stay away from doing bad. If you do something bad and do not change your ways, you’ll end up like He Xiaoyong and be punished by Old Man Heaven. And let me tell you, when Old Man Heaven punishes somebody, he shows no mercy” (Yu, 2004); “People like me, who always do good, well, Old Man Heaven remembers us, and every once in a while he’ll throw something nice our way” (Yu, 2004).

Confucians emphasized the group values, considering that they are the most important means of upbringing the ideal personality. At that “family was not just a basic social group, but a prototype of relations in other social organizations... Society is like family, they have alike features of a single, whole organism” (Jin , 2009). According to the norms of “filial piety” (*xiao*) a hierarchy of kinship and relationship of teacher and student are constructed, “The Chinese respects teacher as well as parents, ancestors, family. Authority of a teacher is admitted absolutely” (Jin, 2009), “...education, which for Confucius was more about building character than about acquiring knowledge” (Prothero, 2010).

Words concerning upbringing of the young generation in the spirit of honoring the family traditions, voiced in 1935 in the book of the famous writer-emigrant Lin Yutang “My People and My Country” (2013), is still relevant, “The western man is like a maiden who has only herself to look after, and who consequently manages to look neat and tidy, while the Chinese man is like the daughter-in-law of a big family who has a thousand and one household obligation to attend to. It therefor breeds in us soberness at an ally age. It keeps our young in their places” (Lin ,2013 ; Loc, 2811). The writer says that the family as a “basis of state” gives the younger generation right patterns of behavior, “teaches our children the first lessons in social obligations between man and man, the necessity of mutual adjustment, self-control, courtesy, a sense of duty, which is very defined, a sense of obligation and gratitude toward parents, and respect for elders. It very nearly takes the place of religion by giving man a sense of social survival and family continuity, thus satisfying man’s craving for immortality, and through the ancestral worship it makes the sense of immortality very vivid” (Lin, 2013 ; Loc. 2811). Thus, a sense of responsibility instilled to young people “breeds a sense of family honor, for which it is so easy to find parallels in the West” (Lin 2013; Loc. 2811).

The protagonists of Yu Hua’s novels (Song Gang, “Brothers”, 2009, Yang Fei, “The Seventh Day”, 2015) are the examples of self-sacrifice for the family’s sake. The family is the greatest value for the Chinese, who were born in America as well, “So are the Asian Americans of ‘model minority’ fame who excel in school and workplace alike at least in part because of a reverence, bordering on faith itself, for Confucian values such as learning, hard work, and family” (Prothero , 2010). The Chinese American protagonist of the Tan’s novel “The Kitchen God’s Wife” (1992) Pearl has been married to an American for fifteen years, has two children, but still feels responsibility to the mother and family.

According to Confucianism, there is no self-identification of a person without appreciation of responsibilities and obligation to other people in a family, “‘Man’ defines his ‘self’ in relation to others and to the Way, which unites them. Thus is constructed the web of reciprocal obligations or moral relations in which man finds himself, defines himself. Apart from these he can have no identity. And yet these relations alone, it is equally important to recognize, do not define a man totally. His interior self exists at the center of this web and there enjoys its own freedom” (Littrup, 2013). In the Amy Tan’s novel “The Bonesetter’s Daughter” the author forcefully emphasizes a need to preserve the Chinese family values. The position of protagonist Ruth is that the family is the only link between the

past and the future, that “In spite of uneasy moments, reunions were important, a ritual to preserve what was left of the family” (Tan, 2001), symbolizes the continuity of generations and the preservation of traditional family values.

The Chinese concept of “face” – *lian* and *mianzi* – is connected with the norms of relationships between people. The author of the study “The Chinese: peculiarities of national psychology” N.A. Speshnev (2011) gives a detailed analysis of this phenomenon in the language and the specific behavior patterns. For the Chinese, “loss of face” (*diu lian*) can mean not only moral, but also physical death. Thus, the Chinese grandmother in the Tan’s novel “The Joy Luck Club” (1990) teaches her granddaughter: “When you lose your face, An-mei, ... it is like dropping your necklace down a well. The only way you can get it back is to fall in after it” (Tan, 1990). In “The Bonesetter’s Daughter” the elders in the family are fighting for “saving face”, because deviations of the norm of one person can lead to a “loss of face” for the people of the whole country.

According to the study of literary texts in terms of the axiological approach, the works of Amy Tan and Yu Hua incorporate basic Christian values and spiritual experience of Confucianism, that makes them relevant material to describe, understand and appropriate moral values during literary education university courses around the world.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study results allow us to determine the following basic Christian and Confucian values in the works of Amy Tan and Yu Hua, that are used in the literature teaching methodic in upbringing of a harmonious personality of the student:

- “God is love”;
- Compassion;
- Self-sacrifice in the name of love;
- Hope;
- Good for the good;
- Honoring family traditions;
- Respect for the “face” of the nation.

By describing and transmitting basic values, literary education creates conditions for the formation in the course of studies of conditions for the implementation and development of spiritual and moral potential of students. During lectures and workshops on the world literature the students not only read and analyze the works of authors in terms of content, structure, ideological and stylistic features, but try to answer the questions about the essence of life, human existence, national and self-identity through the author’s prism. Therefore, the most effective forms of teaching and learning are:

- Discussion (allows to exchange information, identify conflicts, reevaluate the information received, respect for the other point of view, the joint search for constructive solutions to any disputes);
- Colloquium (interview with a teacher, reveals the ability to analyze, synthesize information);
- Essay (a form of creative activity, showing the personal attitude and experience of a student).

To expand the limits of learning time for students and deepen the thinking process students are proposed to research a writer’s creativity according to the teacher’s plan. The results are completed in writing (essays, coursework and a thesis project). For example, there are several final qualifying works

supervised by the authors of this article devoted to Amy Tan and Yu Hua's works: "Mainstream or Ethnic Identity (on Amy Tan's "The Bonesetter's Daughter"); "Music in the Yu Hua's novels", etc.

Teaching values as a means of finding the truth is an integral part of harmonious personality. The problem of appropriation of Christian values and spiritual principles of Confucianism is one of the important tasks of literary education, which can be solved by means of extrapolation of the literary text to a reality. The study emphasizes that the literary education helps organize teaching and learning process, based on the axiological approach to the material. Teaching students the ability to understand and accept moral values – basic Christian values and Confucian concepts – means the humanistic orientation of the educational and upbringing process in the university, reflects a perspective social role of higher education and confirms the value of literary education in the modern world.

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