

*Do not those who are vulgarly called wise prove to be collectors for the great thieves?
And do not those who are called sages prove to be but guardians in the interest of the great thieves?
-Zhuangzi, Cutting Open Satchels: Chapter 1-
-Translated by James Legge-*

Truly, Is Higher Education a Necessary Good or Evil? From the Perspective of Happiness Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether higher education is a necessary good or evil from the perspective of happiness education. To review the paper systematically, four research questions are addressed. First, what is the purpose of higher education? Second, is higher education a necessary good? Third, is higher education a necessary evil? Last, what is an ideal aim of future higher education? To defend the research questions, the author uses a descriptive content analysis method, with a cross cultural approach. To argue these questions clearly and limitedly, this paper is defined as follows: higher education is limited to contemporary Korean higher education; and happiness education is reviewed from the perspectives of western and eastern classical standpoints, particularly, the classical Greek philosophers and the classical Confucian thinkers. Based on the research results of this study, the author suggests that Korean higher education for future generations should strengthen healthy moral education and philanthropical cosmopolitanism education, with utilitarian education.

For future study, it is recommended that this study should be empirically undertaken to explore the moral values and utility values of higher education in Korean society with quantitative or qualitative research methodology. Finally, the researcher hopes that this position paper will provide basic theories and valuable resources regarding happiness or moral education for the educational practitioners and theorists of the world.

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*Key words: higher education, happiness, Confucianism, classical Greek philosophy, Korean higher education, happiness education, educational philosophy, cross cultural study, moral education

The purpose of this paper is to discuss whether higher education is a necessary good or evil from the perspective of happiness education. To review the paper systematically, four research questions are addressed. First, what is the purpose of higher education? Second, is higher education a necessary good? Third, is higher education a necessary evil? Last, what is an ideal aim of future higher education? To defend the research questions, the author uses a descriptive content analysis method, with a cross cultural approach. To argue these questions clearly and limitedly, this paper is defined as follows: higher education is limited to contemporary Korean higher education; happiness education is reviewed from the perspectives of western and eastern classical standpoints, particularly, the classical Greek philosophers and the classical Confucian thinkers.

The significance of this paper is to useful resources and basic theories about the aims of future higher education for the educational practitioners and theorists of the world, suggesting the research results of this study.

What is the purpose of higher education?

Higher education as elite education has traditionally performed major purpose and functions for pursuing the preservation, transmittance, and advance of knowledge through studying science as well as for forstoring leaders and professionals (Millet, 1962; Lee, 2012). In the western world, higher education has mainly emphasized pragmatism, idealism, hedonism, and materialism. On the contrary, in the eastern world, particularly Korea, elite or higher education has generally stressed moralism, intuitionism, and social successism. However, in modern times, higher education has additionally taken on the function to product human and intelligent capital not only for enlarging functions of teaching, research, and social services, but for promoting individual life quality or success, social welfare, and national competitiveness (Lee, 2008; Lee, 2012).

In a few previous studies of the author, the author reviewed the significant purpose and function of higher education from three viewpoints teleological, ontological, and utilitarian (Lee, 2008; Lee, 2012; Lee, 2017a). In a teleological standpoint, the purpose of higher education is to cultivate the individual, to achieve the ultimate goodness, and to attain happiness (Lee, 2012). From an ontological viewpoint, as the author mentioned on the above, the functional purpose of higher education is not only the preservation,

transmission, and advancement of knowledge, but also teaching universal knowledge to educate human power or resources having professional knowledge and scientific skill for promoting individual life quality and for establishing a welfare society (Lee, 2012; 2017a). From a utilitarian standpoint, the purpose of higher education is to obtain physical or material utility such as money, socio-political power and interest, fame, health, and success (Lee, 2008; 2012; 2017a).

In contemporary Korean society, higher education has been instrumentalized for achieving one's social success as a ladder to upgrade social status or to maintain politico-economic power and interest. That is, the main purpose of higher education in Korea is to attain one's social success econo-politically. Under the present Korean society being spread of social successism, is higher education able to contribute to the establishment of common good and social harmony in Korea? The author intends to discuss this question in the next sections, with the following research question: whether higher education is a necessary good or evil?

Is higher education a necessary good?

Indeed, is higher education a necessary good? If this question were entirely true, higher education would be performed its purpose and function properly. In the cross-cultural aspects of classical education philosophy, there are similarities between the East and the West regarding this question. From a classical Confucian viewpoint, as the *Great Learning (Da Xue)* shows 'what the *Great Learning* teaches is to illustrate illustrious virtue, to renovate the people, and to rest in the highest *goodness*' (trans. Legge, <http://ctext.org/daxue> Retrieved on July 3, 2017). Zengzi (505-436 BC) as one of the great thinkers in ancient China states that the purpose of the *Da Xue* is to bright virtue, to cultivate the self, and the achieve the ultimate goodness. In addition, Zhu Xi (AD 1130-1200) as one of great Neo-Confucian scholars in classical China regards the *Great Learning* as the way of self cultivation and governance to be studied by all people (Gardner, 1998).

Like the above classical Confucian viewpoints, the purpose of education in the standpoints of ancient Greek philosophers is to make humans in perfection as well as to achieve a happy life for building a harmonious society and an ideal nation (Lee, 2008; 2017c). Plato in *the Republic* insists that a person becomes good and noble when his or

her behavior conformed to the universal and timeless concepts of truth, goodness, beauty, and justice through *paideia* (education) (Lee, 2008; 2017c; Jowett, 1991a). In addition, Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* asserts that the highest end of virtuous life as *eudaimonia* (happiness) can be achieved by *paideia* (education) (Lee, 2008; 2017c; Jowett, 1991b; Ross, 1988).

As reviewed in the above, the common purpose of education is to cultivate oneself, to build a virtuous society, and to achieve the ultimate goodness or happiness. In addition, to establish a harmonious society and a righteous nation is also an important educational purpose. In this vein, the common purpose of higher education in the East and the West is the same as the ones of education in terms of positive functions. That is, the general purpose of higher education is to achieve self-actualization, a harmonious society, and a righteous nation for enhancing individual life quality or success, social welfare or happiness, and national competitiveness or power through studying knowledge and technology as well as forstoring leaders and professionals.

If the general purpose of higher education is quite easily achieved without any problems and barriers, we can say higher education is a necessary good in the aspect of positive function. However, if higher education negatively performs general purpose and function, we can say higher education is a necessary evil. In the next section, this research hypothesis will be discussed from the perspective of Korean higher education.

Is higher education a necessary evil?

In contemporary Korea, higher education has negatively performed educational purpose and function in terms of individual cultivation, social harmony, and national righteousness. Retrospecting on modern political history in South Korea, it is not too much to say that numerous Korean politicians who attained higher academic credentials, including presidents, Cabinet members, and members of national assembly as well as higher ranking public officials or bureaucrats, have preferentially performed their duties and roles for private interests and privileges.

In addition, a large number of the *Jaebeol* cliques or the plutocrats who finished higher education courses in a contemporary Korean society have generally pursued their own advantage and wealth. Furthermore, they sometimes have closely tied with politicians to increase or to solidify their interests and power. In these veins, the majority

of Korean politicians and plutocrats have pursued not only egoistic prosperity rather than mutual prosperity, but also family's rights and interests rather than societal harmony and Common Good. Therefore, in the aspects of social harmony and individual cultivation, we can say that such Korean politicians and plutocrats who completed university education may be a necessary evil for the general people. The reason is that they have given heavily suffering damage to the great number of the common people who are lower educated and who are not rich because of abusing or misusing their political or economic power.

For instance, Geun-hye Park as an impeached former Korean president, who is on trial for a string of massive politico-economic corruption charges, including the trial of Samsung heir apparent (The Korea Herald, www.koreaherald.com, Retrieved on July 19, 2017). One of higher officials, former presidential secretary for civil affairs, is at the center of the Park's scandal, and "is being investigated without detention over a string of charges including dereliction of duty in connection with the scandal"(The Korea Herald, www.koreaherald.com, Retrieved on July 17, 2017). The first case is the former President of South Korea, the second Vice Chairman of Samsung Electronics, and the third a higher official under the Park Administration. All three persons who completed higher education, with obtaining excellent or good educational credentials, were or are representative persons in South Korea politically, economically, and public officially.

Of course, in a case of Samsung Electronics' Vice Chairman, it is possible to be various pros and cons opinions. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that politico-economic ties are social evils which have brought various social ills and irregularities in contemporary Korean society. Furthermore, government-business collusion in South Korea has brought not only the accumulation of wealth by illegal means and ways, but econo-political corruption and social disharmony through all over the country. What we call, both persons of political and capital power having higher educational backgrounds have a broadly significant effect upon the common people, with abusing their political and economic power. Especially, when the political bureaucrats who belong to the power elite conspire with conglomerateurs, politico-economic irregularities and corruption are diffused throughout the country. Being under the politico-economic corruption, not only the gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider and wider, but also the societal disharmony between the higher educated people and the lower educated people go from bad to worse. In addition, some professionals and entrepreneurs, such as lawyers, medical and dental doctors, and real estate businessmen, not only frequently overuse their

professional knowledge or capacity for their own profits and interests, but also sometimes do harm or sufferings to the common people directly or indirectly.

Considering the above instances and cases, that is, if the politico-economically or professionally powerful persons who have excellent educational credentials bring various social ills and irregularities, or sufferings, we can say higher education as a means of harmful 'social success' is a necessary evil for the common people.

What is an ideal aim of future higher education?

If higher education is able to be either a necessary good or evil according to persons or situations, what is an ideal aim of future higher education? According to a classical Confucian viewpoint, especially as the author of the *Great Learning (Da Xue)*, the researcher insists that the ideal aim of future education is 'to illustrate illustrious virtue, to renovate the people, and to rest in the highest *goodness*'. First of all, to illustrate illustrious virtue is related to teach and practice healthy moral norms and ethical values such as philanthropy, charity, gratitude, integrity, human rights, humanity, Common Good, mutual prosperity, cosmopolitanism to balance between the knowledge of traditional higher education and the emerging technology of the new Industrial Revolution Age (Lee, 2017b). Second, to renovate the people is concerned with the constant cultivation of the new emerging megatrends technologies and skills as well as the persistent actualization of pragmatic or utilitarian knowledge and skill. Third, to rest in the highest goodness is related to happiness. As Plato, a great classical Greek philosopher, asserts in the Republic, an individual becomes good and noble when one's behavior through *paideia* (education) (Jowett, 1991a; Lee, 2008; Lee, 2017c). Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, *eudaimonia* (happiness) is the highest end of ultimate goodness or virtuous life (Ross, trans., 1988).

Considering the above eastern and western great thinkers' viewpoints, the ideal aim of future higher education is to establish a happy life, a harmonious society, and an ideally righteous nation. In particular, in order to achieve individual happiness, to maintain a socio-economically harmonious society, and to sustain a socio-politically peaceful and righteous country, higher education should strengthen healthy moral education and philanthropical cosmopolitanism education, with utilitarian education.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to discuss whether higher education is a necessary good or evil from the perspective of happiness education. To review the study systematically, four research questions are addressed. First, what is the purpose of higher education? Second, is higher education a necessary good? Third, is higher education a necessary evil? Last, what is an ideal aim of future higher education? To defend the research questions, the author uses a descriptive content analysis method, with a cross cultural approach. To argue these questions clearly and limitedly, this study is defined as follows: higher education is limited to contemporary Korean higher education; happiness education is reviewed from the perspectives of western and eastern classical standpoints, particularly, the classical Greek philosophers and the classical Confucian thinkers.

The significance of this study is to valuable resources and basic theories about the aims of future higher education for the educational practitioners and theorists of the world, suggesting the research results of this study.

The research findings of this study are as follows:

First, the researcher discussed the significant purpose and function of higher education from three viewpoints teleological, ontological, and utilitarian. In a teleological viewpoint, the purpose of higher education is to cultivate the individual, to achieve the ultimate goodness, and to attain happiness (Lee, 2012). From an ontological standpoint, as the author mentioned on the above, the functional purpose of higher education is not only the preservation, transmission, and advancement of knowledge, but also teaching universal knowledge to educate human power or resources having professional knowledge and scientific skill for promoting individual life quality and for establishing a welfare society (Lee, 2012; 2017a). From a utilitarian viewpoint, the purpose of higher education is to obtain physical or material utility such as money, socio-political power and interest, fame, health, and success (Lee, 2008; 2012; 2017a).

Second, the general purpose of higher education is to achieve self-actualization, a harmonious society, and a righteous nation for enhancing individual life quality or success, social welfare or happiness, and national competitiveness or power through studying knowledge and technology as well as forstoring leaders and professionals. If the general purpose of higher education is quite easily achieved without any problems and barriers, we can say higher education is a necessary good in the aspect of positive

function.

Third, in the aspects of social harmony and individual cultivation, we can say that such corrupt Korean politicians and plutocrats who completed higher education may be a necessary evil. The reason is that they have given heavily suffering damage to the great number of the common people who are lower educated and who are not rich because of abusing their political or economic power. If the politico-economically or professionally powerful persons who have excellent educational credentials bring various social ills and irregularities, or sufferings, we can say higher education as a means of harmful 'social success' is a necessary evil for the common people.

Last, the ideal aim of future higher education is to establish a happy life, a harmonious society, and an ideally righteous nation. In particular, in order to achieve individual happiness, to maintain a socio-economically harmonious society, and to sustain a socio-politically peaceful and righteous country, higher education should strengthen moral education and cosmopolitanism education, with utilitarian education.

Conclusively, based on this research findings, the author suggests that Korean higher education for future generations should highlight virtuously moral education and philanthropical cosmopolitanism education, with pragmatically utilitarian education.

For future study, it is recommended that this study should be empirically undertaken to explore the moral values and utility values of higher education in Korean society with quantitative or qualitative research methodology. Finally, the researcher hopes that this position paper will provide basic theories and valuable resources regarding happiness or moral education for the educational practitioners and theorists of the world.

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I would like to dedicate this academic position paper to my dear Korean people.

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