

Beijing Forum 2019

Liberal Education through College: World's Experience and Asian Experience (III)

On the afternoon of November 2, 2019, the third session of the panel “Eastern/Western Culture and College Culture” was held at Room M11, Stanford Center, Peking University. The conference was hosted by Professor Li Meng, Dean of Yuanpei College, Peking University.

The first speech was given by Gan Yang, Dean of Xinya College, Tsinghua University. His topic was “Residential Colleges and the Modern University”. After introducing some basic information about Xinya College, Gan Yang posed a question of what was the proper proportion of liberal arts education and professional education. He pointed out that the contradiction of students needing to amass a large amount of knowledge in a limited amount time was hard to solve. He went on to emphasize Xinya’s motto, which is “combine learning and practicing together”. He suggested that colleges consider shaping students’ values as the first priority, students’ competence as the second, and put knowledge in the last place.

Associate professor Fan Guangxin, from Nankai University, delivered the second speech, which focused on modern Chinese translations of the word “university”. He pointed out that modern Chinese translations of the word “university” had changed greatly. In the late Qing Dynasty, “university” was translated as taixue (太学) or daxue yuan (大学院), the name of traditional Chinese secondary schools. It reflected Chinese people’s hope of improving traditional Chinese taixue by comparing Eastern and Western college culture and learning from the West. However, the defeat in Sino-Japanese war in 1895 destroyed Chinese people’s confidence in the traditional Chinese taixue. As a result, Chinese people began to learn from Japan and use daxuexiao (大学校) as the translation for “university”. After 1912, the translation changed to daxue (大学), for the reason that daxue had Chinese tradition, while daxuexiao was completely Japanese.

Tsuyoshi ISHII, a professor from the University of Tokyo, gave a speech titled “New Humanities from East Asia: East Asian Academy for New Liberal Arts and Our Hope”. First, he agreed with Fan Guangxin that it was difficult to translate the words “university” and “college” correctly and properly. The University of Tokyo use yiwen (艺文), a word from 汉书 (The History of Han Dynasty), an ancient Chinese book, to translate new liberal arts. He then explained the

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badge of yiwen, which was to welcome all people to study here equally and embrace the world. Tsuyoshi ISHII also mentioned a new program in East-Asia studies under a partnership between the University of Tokyo and PKU, especially self-engaging area studies. He urged to observe the world from the perspective of East Asia instead of Japan alone. Thus, yiwen provides translingual research and education, including Japanese, Chinese and English. In addition, he encouraged the revitalization of academy amity and considering academic communication as a method of making friends.

The fourth speaker was Professor Naoyuki UMEMORI, from Waseda University. He delivered a speech titled “The Importance of Liberal Arts Education for the Future of East Asia: A Japanese Perspective”. Based on the history of communication between China and Japan, he suggested that Waseda University could be a cross-roads of East Asia, and wondered if we could promote more new East Asia programs that were different from the past. He expressed his belief that the Japanese civilization belonged neither to the West or East but lay between them. Thus, he thought Japan could play a unique role in promoting the communication between East and West. Additionally, he admitted that pop culture influenced young people in East Asia and expressed his belief that pop culture would cultivate a sense of community among those young people.

The last speaker was Baoyan CHENG, an associate professor from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Her speech was titled “Cultivating Citizens with Confucian Cosmopolitanism: Implementing the Liberal Arts Education Model in Asia”. First, she pointed out that Asian’s liberal arts education progress could be divided into three periods, which were establishing liberal arts courses, providing small-scale classes and analyzing the outcome of the education. She found that China tried to innovate students’ enthusiasm and initiative via liberal arts education, for the reason that traditional Chinese teaching method was teacher centered. She agreed with Gan Yang that liberal arts education should not only offer knowledge to students, but also cultivate their competence. Additionally, she pointed that we should cultivate cosmopolitanism through liberal arts education, which can be of vital importance when anti-globalization thoughts are on the rise.