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The Confucian Factor and Good Fortune in the National College Entrance Examination in China

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Abstract:

Background

Confucianism is highly optimistic about human nature. It teaches that ordinary human beings can become awe-inspiring sages and worthies (Confucius himself lived a rather ordinary life). It believes that human beings are teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor. In ancient China Confucian education was based on hard work, compliance with state laws, and merit. A large number of students who took the Imperial examination at that time were from lower-class families. These observations are still true about the National College Entrance Examination. Confucius regarded Heaven (T'ien) as a positive and personal force in the universe; he was not, as some have supposed, an agnostic or a skeptic.

Prayer - Prayer is sometimes an activity of last resort. It offers peace, tranquility, and the satisfaction that our problems could be solved with the full force of some mighty power. Prayer is sometimes said with the help of rituals. Ritual is a ceremony performed according to instructions from a religion, culture, or group. When it is involved in prayer, ritual may be presumed to facilitate better or faster results. Ritual provides seriousness and elegance to the act of prayer. Good fortune is equivalent to a sense of well-being and happiness. To reach that state one must have an intention to attract it, work hard to achieve it, and seek out and use resources to ensure success. In addition, one must have hope, anticipate positive results, and expect an alignment of external forces leading to fulfilled expectations. Chinese students and their parents pray every year in Confucius Temples for success in the examinations.

National College Entrance Examination. The NCEE is a high stakes examination. It is important to pass this grueling test in order to attend a good college or university, gain social mobility, and achieve a successful career path later in life. Students dread it, and their parents stress over its outcome. The exam is a descendant of the keju, China's centuries-old civil service exam, which gave birth to tales of men going mad while studying for the grueling, days-long test. Only 60% make it into university on the basis of their gao kao score. According to People's Daily Online, an estimated 40% of students do not make it into any university at all, much less a prestigious school, because their test scores are too low. CollegeStats.Org indicate that the examination influences the economy, social and career development. The group is put ahead of the individual, during exam time, and the entire country cooperates. Flights are rerouted so they don't fly over testing areas, and funeral processions are redirected. Construction sites near schools are closed, and police roadblocks are set up in the nearby streets. No car honking is permitted. Even the Olympic torch did not take precedent over the gao kao.

Purpose. The purpose of this paper is to discuss interconnections between Confucius, Good Fortune, and the National College Entrance Examination in China. There are important ethical principles in Confucianism. However, Confucianism does not prescribe any specific rituals or practices. These are filled by the practices of Chinese religion, Taoism, Buddhism, or other religions which Confucians follow.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework. These different strands are discussed within a framework of social development theory which suggests among other things, that individuals have the power to channel their hopes and aspirations for upward mobility through relevant and suitable initiatives situated in their external social world.

Method. Narrative analysis is used to describe how or why an outcome occurred. Narrative analysis is a study that analyzes narrative materials, which can range from 'naturally occurring' narratives to oral life stories collected for research purposes to written narratives found in the private, public or political realms.

Data Sources. The author examined and analyzed selected sources on Confucius, Confucianism, Good Fortune, and the National College Entrance Examination in China. The collected data included books, Journal articles, Chinese newspapers, anecdotal accounts by students preparing for the examinations, and insights gained from a Fulbright Hays seminar in China.

Significance. This topic is significant to the field of comparative and international education because the NCEE is an important event in Chinese society. The examination helps to identify students who will be among China's future academic, economic, and political leaders.