

## Education's Turn to Life World Under Globalization

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### Abstract

Education's return to life world is the consensus of current educational circle, but problems like how to achieve it against the background of globalization need further exploration. Husserl's theory of life world points out that education's return to life world reflects the modernity dilemma in education, that is, the system's erosion on the life world makes the purpose and means of education at the wrong end; education's return to life world is actually the decolonization of the colonized life world.

**Key words:** Globalization; Education; Life world; Return

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### INTRODUCTION

Education is of great significance in the competition of a nation's soft power. The current educational circle has reached the agreement on education's return to life world. But what is the meaning of life world? How does the education get away from the life world? How to achieve

education's return to life world against the background of globalization? All these problems need to be sorted out.

### 1. MEANING OF LIFE WORLD AND ITS EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The concept of life world is first brought up by Husserl, the founder of phenomenology movement. In his last work "The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology", Husserl, through criticism of the scientism, reveals the crisis of the scientific world, and finds the "life world" theory which is ahead of science and ahead of theories.

What is the life world? Husserl gives no clear definition, but from the specific context in which the concept is used, it can be understood as follows: first of all, the life world can be understood as the world around us which we experience directly and is the domain of man's existence. Husserl thinks that the life world is a world in which we live, which exists before our "amazement" and before all scientific thoughts, and which is given in advance. As a non-differentiated world, people's need of cognition, emotion, meaning and so on can coexist in this world at the same time, and it is an "emotional" and perceptual world which can be directly experienced by us. Second, the life world is a world ahead of theory and science. The life world is pre-existing, but its existence is not self-evident. It just needs research as a unique and popular topic. Third, the life world is our living place. Life world is the foundation of all the ways of thinking and all the ways of living; it expresses people's understanding and attention of themselves, and materializes the pursuit of meaning of man's existence and life, that is, the life world is trying to "explain the knowledge domain including the daily life practice and

world experience, before predicate areas and the former category, and the forgotten field of foundation meaning” (Habermas, 2001, p.73).

In modern times, with the development of natural science, the ideology of scientism spreads in an unchecked manner. Under the influence of natural scientific world outlook, the world is divided into the natural world and the humans outside of this world. Burt believes that Newton’s authority becomes the backing of a cosmology which takes human as unrelated onlookers of a vast system of mathematics. The world full of sound, color, and aroma and full of happiness, joy, love and beauty once people believed that they lived in, is now only existing in a small corner of the biological brain. But the really important world is a cold, hard, and silent dead world, a world subject to mechanical regularity, a world of movement available in mathematical calculation (Dampier, 1997, Vol. 1, p.249). Under the influence of this natural scientific world outlook of Newton, not only everything in the world but human are also regarded as the existence of matter, and therefore are at the mercy of nature. In unilateral rationalism thought, the scientific world is a world separated from human and their real life. And because of the separation of science and man’s existence, the scientific world has become a world of no purpose, lack of meaning and value and has sank deep into crisis. Husserl thinks that “in the later half of 19th century, modern people had the whole world dominated by empirical science and confused by the prosperity produced by empirical science. This kind of unique phenomenon means that modern people casually wiped out those true questions crucial to human. People can see only facts, for science can see only facts. In our unfortunate times, and facing the fateful and fundamental change, empirical science in principle makes exclusion of a question in need of immediate answers: “Is our life with meaning?” (Husserl, 1988, p.6). The cause of crisis of science itself and the root of split between science and the value and meaning of human existence is the science origin forgotten by science. Therefore, Husserl was committed to exploring the basis of science, and found the “life world” which exists ahead.

The return from modern scientific world outlook to the life world is not only the trend of modern Western philosophy, but people’s reflection of the problems and crisis in education in the context of the globalization, and people’s trying to correct these problems through criticism on instrumental rationality which has been the core and main body for a long time and which only puts one-sided emphasis on the objectivity and systematicness of knowledge and ignores the significance of cultivating the humanistic spirit and values. In this sense, returning to life world is the return to people’s real life and the return of the people in real life.

## 2. CRISIS OF THE MEANING OF LIFE WORLD AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization is an important knowledge context of our times, and is also the realistic background of our lives. As a new word, globalization first appeared in the 1980s on Western newspapers, books and media, and then was frequently referenced and applied by many non-Western countries. It mainly refers to the worldwide economic, political or cultural interdependence and high correlation. But in a sense, the essence of globalization is to develop economy as the main shaft of the globalization, which is embodied in commodity exchange through an open market. What it creates is a commodity market based on consumption. In such a consumption-oriented market, economic value is in a dominant position. Behind this one-sided pursuit of economic value is a deep logic which is to believe that “common wealth will bring about widespread and complete justice society” (Liu, 2008, Vol. 2, pp.2-3). In fact, justice and happiness are not the inevitable result of wealth. Generally prosperous society cannot adequately solve human’s problems, which has already been proved by “crisis of the era” in the West (Liu, 2008, Vol. 2, pp.7-8).

After an analysis over the statistics of suicide, homicide and alcohol poisoning from some of the most important countries in Europe and North America, Fromm finds that “the most democratic, peaceful and prosperous European countries, as well as the world’s most powerful of the United States, are with the most obvious symptoms of mental imbalance. The goal of social and economic development in the Western world is comfortable material life and relatively equal distribution of wealth, but countries closest to this goal show signs of mental imbalance the most severe! (Fromm, 2007, p.17). During the pathological diagnosis of this mental disorders of Western society, people who hold different philosophical views and political opinions come to the diagnosis with striking similarity which is that the emergence of the mental illness in contemporary Western society is because of “the rule of material over people”, because individual pursuit is a kind of life goal with no value standard and economic interests become the whole of life. The only way to solve this crisis is to change the moral value, “to give the economic activity itself a proper position, which means that it is the servant of the society, rather than the owner of the society. The heavy burden our civilization bearing is more than the mere unreasonable distribution of industrial products, or the tyranny in management, or the impediment out of the discrimination over industrial productions, as many people believe. In fact, the core problem of modern civilization lies in the fact that industry itself has reached the point that it overrides all the human interests, which can not be matched by any other interests, or even the most basic living material

supply. Just as a hypochondriac cares only about his own digestion, or entering the tomb before the start of life, industrialized societies are in the frenzy of getting rich by all means and ignore the worthy goals (Fromm, 2007, p.184). Strauss also recognizes that “we have already mired in a crisis, which is almost self-evident. Day by day, the newspapers are reporting one crisis after another. These small daily crises surely can be seen as the parts or elements of one major crisis, the crisis of our times” (Liu, 2008, Vol.2, p.3). The emergence of the crisis proves that the belief held by modern thought that social development depends wholly on specific political or economic systems, rather than moral cultivation is in still question.

And because the economic value is in a dominant position, people’s pursuit of education is more driven by interests, and the fundamental value and meaning of life has been ignored, which results in the focus on scientific knowledge and ignore of life education. Liang Qichao once pointed out in his “Yinbingshi Collection” that, “for a man with no spiritual life, the more knowledge he acquires, more painful he will feel, and more powerful he will be to do bad things”, so “first and foremost, learning is to feed the spirit”. But because of the influence of scientism, education is increasingly separating from the life world, and reduced to be the tool for the transmission of knowledge. Especially against the background of globalization, the disadvantage of education separating from the life world is increasingly highlighted, which makes the return of education to life world all the more important.

### 3. EDUCATION’S RETURN TO LIFE WORLD

As early as the 1970’s, people have already realized the status and role of life world in education, and the UNESCO published a series of reports and documents calling for education’s return to life world, such as “Learn to Survive” (1972) and “Learning: the Treasure within” (1996), in which the social status of education was established, and also made the point that education should make the return from instrumental rationality to life world, which holds the belief that school education should change from its instrumental rationality value to focus on the students’ survival and development, and concern people’s ideal and reality value, in order to realize the unity of intrinsic value and extrinsic value of education. “Modern education should take the life of people as the fundamental standpoint, take the improvement of the relation between human and the world as the fundamental direction, and build the education theory system in which the humanity and utilitarian are integrated and is returning to life world” (Zhang, 2002).

So how does it take to realize education’s return to life world? First of all, it must all start from people’s real life and the people in real life. “Human’s existence

is never pure existence; it always involves meaning, and the dimension of meaning is inherent for human, just as the dimension of space is inherent for stars and stones... people can create meaning, and they can also destroy it; but they cannot live without meaning” (*Marx and Engels anthology (Vol. 1)*, 1995, p.220). What the scientific world outlook refers to is the “object” world which is a meaningless and “value neutral” world. This “value neutrality” ignores the root of what makes person a person, and the kind of person it shapes is “of knowledge for knowledge”. Because the misplacement of knowledge and people’s lives, students forget the truth that knowledge should be at service of people’s life and life is better than knowledge in the process of acquiring objective knowledge. Knowledge in their view is superior to people and becomes the first important thing. “Rules over other things are ruled; things producing things become the product of its product.” But people’s real life world is not only including the material, but also the spirit; not only the fact, but also the value. It is a complete world full of meaning of life and existence value. education from the reality of the world out of style, is to focus on to know the objective world at the same time, the understanding of the objective facts and phenomena belong to the meaning and value of people, realize the education from the shape “knowledge” for knowledge to shape real life “in life” for the life of people.

Second, we must understand education as a kind of real life process. The purpose of traditional education is the pursuit of objective knowledge. And because it is separated from the real life of the people, the knowledge it imparts is regarded only as the summarization and refine of the history experience of human society, is constructed logically according to the scientific knowledge, and often is considered to be constant and universal. And, in fact, education activity is not outside of people’s real life activities; as part of the people’s real life, only when it realizes the unity with the people’s real life, education’s true meaning and value can be achieved. UNESCO points out in the book “Learn to Survive” that if education gets far from the real life experience of the people, and relies only on theory and memory, it will make the students in a state of boring, which will seriously affects the healthy development of students’ body and mind, and makes the student’s personality split into two separate worlds: “in one world in which children are like puppets from reality and engaged in study; in another world, they obtain self-satisfaction through some kind of violation of education activities” (UNESCO International Education Committee, 1996, pp.12-13).

Then, we need to pay attention to the generativity of knowledge. American education scientist Soltis pointed out that “the concept of knowledge and the concept of education cannot be separated from each other; thus, our answers to many questions about knowledge and

understanding will have major impact on the thinking and actions of educators” (Soltis, 1993). Traditional teaching believes that knowledge is objective and unchanging eternally. But in fact, “truths are not given or preset, are not invariably replications in human consciousness... truths neither can be achieved, nor can be obtained once and for all.” “Truth itself is happening; it is under development and realizing itself” (Kosik, 1989, p.9). Because a person’s understanding activity is conducted on the basis of production practice, human’s knowledge and consciousness has duality, which means it is not only a kind of “reflection”, but a kind of “projection”; it does not only “record”, but also “construct and plot” at the same time. That is to say, people should not only reflect the true nature of things, but form the concept to transform and change things, and be realized through practice. Practical activities are the process of realizing the truth, the process of transforming people themselves through transforming the world. Education’s return to life world is to recognize the creation relationship between knowledge and practice, and pay close attention to the context situation of knowledge, which means that knowledge is within specific situation and range, that it exists in concrete, situational and sensible activities, is out of specific culture, and its nature is under the influence of the cultural traditions and cultural patterns. It resides in and it is with local characteristics. “Any definition of knowledge is not expressed by its own statement but by the whole system. There is no knowledge, cognitive subject or cognitive behavior that can be separated from certain context. The context of knowledge is built on the “universality” of modern knowledge. The construction of the context of knowledge makes the “native knowledge” or “local knowledge” reborn (Zhou & Zhao, 2004).

Finally, attentions should be paid to the subject status of students in education activities. Brazilian educator Paul Fletcher says, the relationship between teachers and students under the scientific world outlook is a form of relationship between subject and object, and the teachers are the subjects while the students are objects. In this process, students’ initiative is erased and become storage of knowledge. And education’s return to life world is to exert students’ initiative and creativity in the process of education, and set up a benignant interactive teaching method between teachers and students, because knowledge is not outside of an subject, when we talk about knowledge what we refer to is always a specific person or his knowledge; and this kind of personal knowledge is built upon the basis of the existing experience.

## CONCLUSION

At present, people are increasingly aware that education of the life world is the education that completes a man, and great progress has been made on education’s return to life world. Those researches have broadened our horizon and provided thoughtful ways for the effectiveness of the education’s return to the life world. How to combine the current globalization of the age to further analyze the theory and reality basis of education’s return to life world, and how to build on the humanistic value, change the concept of knowledge, play the subjectivity of the students to learn, and promote all-round development of the students by insisting on the core role of the life world, need a long-term process. But education should adapt to the social development, and it is beyond doubt that education must return to life world, because the life world is both the starting point and the final purpose of education.

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