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The Representation, Attribution and Solutions to the "Banality of Evil" in Education from the Perspective of Psychopolitics

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Abstract. The "banality of evil" proposed by Hannah Arendt refers to the evil that eliminates one's own thinking, unconditionally obeys orders, and abandons the right of personal judgment. This evil is spreading in the educational field, manifested in the triple representations of "thoughtlessness", "depersonalization" and "standardization". To deeply analyze its generation logic from the perspective of social formation, this paper introduces Byung-Chul Han's "psychopolitics" as a new theoretical framework to reveal the deep-seated mechanism behind it, and attempts to put forward the breakthrough paths of awakening "tiredness", pursuing "the Other" and returning to "listening". It aims to transcend the reproduction of the "banality of evil" in the educational field and ultimately point to an educational possibility that enables people to truly become human beings.

Keywords: "banality of evil", education, Byung-Chul Han, psychopolitics

1. Introduction

The "banality of evil" was first put forward by Hannah Arendt, a famous American political philosopher. Through the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi war criminal, she found that the perpetrators of evil were not heinous, but habitually thoughtless. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt argued that Eichmann's evil deeds essentially stemmed from abandoning thinking, and this state of "thoughtlessness" precisely made him one of the worst criminals of that era, whose disasters were far more terrible than all the inherent evil instincts of human beings combined [1]. Arendt called this phenomenon the "banality of evil", with "thoughtlessness" as its essential feature.

This evil is quietly spreading in the educational field, manifested as the collective thoughtlessness of teachers, students and parents towards education. Most existing studies on the "banality of evil" in education are conducted from the internal perspective of the education system, and have not examined it in the macro social form that shapes education. Byung-Chul Han, a new generation of German critical thinker, keeps pace with the development of the times and proposes the theory of "psychopolitics". This theory criticizes Foucault's "biopolitics" and holds that in the contemporary achievement society, the core of power has shifted from external discipline of the body to internal manipulation of the spirit. This view provides a novel and powerful theoretical perspective for understanding the "banality of evil" in contemporary education.

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2. Basic representations of the "banality of evil" in education

The educational field can be understood as a space jointly constructed by educators, educatees and other educational participants [2]. The collective "thoughtless behavior" in the educational field leads individuals into a state of "depersonalization", and then a tendency of "standardized production" emerges. The three together constitute the basic representations of the "banality of evil" in education.

2.1. "Thoughtlessness" behavior

The "banality of evil" in the educational field is first manifested as "thoughtless" behavior. Teachers' "thoughtlessness" is reflected in the dereliction of responsibility in teaching activities. Teachers are educational subjects with initiative and proactivity, and people with strong subjective consciousness and reflective consciousness. However, at present, fewer and fewer people can often question the purpose of their own behaviors and think about the methods of their thinking process. The widespread mental inertia among teachers precisely reflects the dangerous sign of dim rationality [3]. Many teachers simplify their roles into "parts" without responsibility, lacking personal professional judgment and moral thinking.

Students' "thoughtlessness" is mainly manifested in the homogenization of thinking. Against the background of fostering virtue and morality, students should be people with all-round development in thinking, creativity and other aspects. However, under the influence of result-oriented exam-oriented education, learning is alienated into a heavy task related to future survival. Zhang Le pointed out that one of the dilemmas of modern education is that it has degenerated from the autonomous activity of "becoming a person" to the enslaving activity of "making a living" [4]. "Small-town exam takers" are the epitome of this dilemma.

Parents' "thoughtlessness" is concentrated in the "outsourcing" of educational responsibility and the indifference to their children's life experience. In education, parents should play the role of guides and spiritual caregivers. But now the logic of many parents is "I only responsible for earning money". As a result, family conversations are only about scores and rankings, without touching the children's truest inner thoughts and emotions. This gesture of completely "outsourcing" education is a kind of "parental banality of evil", which will eventually fall into the helpless situation of education.

2.2. "Depersonalization" state

The result of collective "thoughtless" behavior in education is the disappearance of "people" in education. For students, the state of "depersonalization" is directly reflected in the hollowing out of self-worth. When education is simplified into a long competition around scores, rankings and further education, its ontological value collapses accordingly. A study by Professor Xu Kaiwen of Peking University revealed that a considerable proportion of outstanding students feel that "life is meaningless, and they just live according to other people's logic". This is not only a psychological distress, but also an existential crisis. The alienation of education cuts off the internal connection between learning and individual life meaning, creating spiritually barren "excellent sheep".

For teachers, the state of "depersonalization" means the separation of professional role from the essence of educating people. Under the orientation of achievementism, the fundamental purpose of education, "fostering virtue and morality", is ignored. Their sense of accomplishment at work no longer comes from shaping students' personalities in the educational process, but is narrowly reduced to quantifiable indicators such as the average score of the class. This makes many teachers experience intense job burnout in the daily "busy routine". In the long run, this model not only consumes teachers' enthusiasm, but also makes the educational process lose the most fundamental humanistic warmth.

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2.3. Tendency of "standardized" production

The "thoughtless behavior" and "depersonalization state" of education eventually lead to the realistic manifestation of the "standardized production tendency" of educational products. In the modern education system of the East Asian cultural circle, this is first intuitively reflected in students' unconditional compliance with a series of unreasonable rules, including strict adherence to unified hairstyles, schedules and even learning methods. Any behavior deviating from the standard may be regarded as a "problem". East Asian education has a profound characteristic of "conformism", whose core is to find and comply with the preset and authoritative standard answers. This tendency of "standardization" has formed a high degree of social consensus in various East Asian countries: in South Korea, it is manifested as the survival rule of "four on and five off"; in Japan, it is condensed into the collective cognition of "exam hell" and "one exam determines life"; in China, it has evolved into the national anxiety of "winning at the starting line" and the cruel reality of "thousands of troops crossing a single-log bridge".

Such requirements not only bind students, but also tie teachers and parents, making them both the recipients of the oppressive system and its accomplices in helplessness. Under the score-oriented evaluation system, teachers are prone to fall into the "part mentality", and many teachers regard themselves as "technicians" for improving grades [5]; meanwhile, driven by anxiety, parents participate in the educational "arms race" such as after-school training and school district housing. In this way, the three parties in the educational field are trapped in a systematic cycle, constantly reproducing "standardized" products.

3. Generation logic of the "banality of evil" in education from the perspective of psychopolitics

Byung-Chul Han's theory of "psychopolitics" originates from his criticism and development of Foucault's "biopolitics". He points out that the power technology of the 21st century has completely shifted from the negative prohibition of the disciplinary society to the positive drive of the achievement society. This theory provides a contemporary theoretical lens for us to analyze the "banality of evil" in education.

3.1. Thinking domestication under "positive violence"

"Positive violence" is the core concept of psychopolitics in judging the achievement society. It does not refer to the traditional oppressive violence from the outside, but a new means of control under positive discourse. This violence is realized through unlimited positive discourses such as "can", "may" and "you should be better". As a result, individuals take the initiative to internalize the requirements of the social system in the process of pursuing higher goals, and fall into self-attack and internal friction because they cannot meet the ideal standard of continuous self-proliferation. Because of its hidden characteristics, this violence is more penetrating and destructive, and directly shapes our emotions and behavioral patterns from the inside.

When this "positive violence" penetrates into the educational field, encouraging words such as "you can do it" become pressure, and behaviors such as not participating in excessive competition are stigmatized as "unenterprising" or "failure". As a result, teachers no longer question the essential meaning of educating people, but only focus on performance indicators; students no longer puzzle over the personal value of learning, but only focus on exam scores; parents no longer take care of their children's mental health, but only anxiety about competitive advantages. Driven by the strong belief of "being responsible for themselves", they voluntarily give up the right of critical thinking and focus on the performance goals specified by the social system.

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3.2. "Self-exploitation" under the "illusion of freedom"

The "illusion of freedom" refers to the illusion that individuals think they have free choices in the digital age. Under this illusion, structural problems such as uneven distribution of resources will be downplayed. In the achievement society, exploitation has the unnoticeable self-referentiality. The achievement subject only obeys himself, no one forces or suppresses him anymore, and it is himself who implements the violence and exploitation [6]. The subject and object of exploitation are integrated here, and it is easy to fall into the dilemma of being an enemy of oneself.

In educational practice, students are encouraged to explore their potential, but the paths to these goals are highly single and simplified to winning in standardized exams, which gives rise to a general "involution" mentality. However, when the value of learning is completely defined by external rankings, the phenomenon of "hollow heart disease" with inner emptiness and confused goals may appear. At the same time, teachers are also in a similar state of "self-exploitation". In the dual context of professional autonomy and performance assessment, their pressure not only comes from the evaluation of the external system, but also from the endless "optimization" requirements for themselves, thus making them fall into the "part mentality".

3.3. "Disappearance of the other" under performance standards

"The Other" in Byung-Chul Han's theory mainly emphasizes a kind of heterogeneity. The achievement society places value under comparable performance standards. When numbers become the measure of everything, the "Other" dimensions such as unique ways of thinking lose visibility because they are not comparable. The establishment of the self precisely depends on the encounter with "the Other". When the surrounding environment is full of homogeneous competitors, individuals lose the differential coordinates to reflect on themselves and construct a unique self, thus falling into a state of self-blur.

In pursuit of management efficiency and visualized fairness, the education system often relies on standardized exams, unified curricula and quantitative evaluation indicators. However, qualities that require long-term immersion and are difficult to quantify, such as critical thinking, aesthetic ability and emotional value, are easily marginalized. Over time, students' diverse talents and interests may be suppressed, eventually leading to weak self-identity. This is the deep logic of "hollow heart disease" in which some students still feel inner emptiness even if they have excellent academic performance.

4. Solutions to the "banality of evil" in education

Hannah Arendt's reflection on the "banality of evil" and Byung-Chul Han's examination of the "achievement society" converge here, opening up a possible path to fight against the "banality of evil" in education from three aspects: awakening "tiredness", pursuing "the Other" and returning to "listening".

4.1. Awakening "tiredness": allowing necessary pauses

Byung-Chul Han believes that the "society of tiredness" characterized by leisure is expected to become a solution to the achievement society, which can resist the hollowing out of society, and its core emphasizes the pursuit of free time, space and soul [7]. Therefore, educational practice must take the initiative to introduce institutional "tiredness" and give individuals real space for free thinking.

First, set leisure time for teachers and students in school time planning. In the fixed weekly "independent exploration period", suspend conventional courses and evaluations, and encourage students to carry out reading or free discussions without specific goals. Second, regularly organize

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teacher-student workshops around specific topics. When new educational concepts such as "AI teaching" enter the campus, workshops can be used to guide students to examine them from multiple perspectives and cultivate creative thinking and innovative abilities. Finally, the pause teaching method can be integrated into conventional classroom teaching. Teachers take the initiative to reserve thinking time after explaining concepts, encourage students to express their own understanding, turn pauses from special designs into daily learning habits, promote students to shift from recipients to meaning constructors, and reshape their understanding of learning from multiple perspectives.

4.2. Pursuing "the other": seeing different values

Many problems of the achievement society stem from the "disappearance of the Other", and people are "brainwashed by self-imagination" [8]. In education, "the Other" means respecting diversity and differences. Pursuing "the Other" can help students recognize the richness of the world, transcend the single competitive logic, and establish a more sound self-cognition and social understanding.

First, education must attach importance to cooperative learning. Design interdisciplinary project-based learning, requiring groups to integrate different information sources to form achievements, so that students can understand the experiences of the Other and thus better understand themselves. Second, education should strengthen emotional education. Emotional support is the key element to awaken students' internal motivation for learning. Teachers should take the initiative to create an atmosphere, encourage students to sincerely express their emotions, and build a healthy teacher-student relationship. Finally, the curriculum should focus on the integration with the social classroom. Introduce real community problems, organize students to go deep into different types of fields, conduct dialogue and cooperation with different real "Others", and effectively break cognitive barriers.

4.3. Returning to "listening": rebuilding the bridge of understanding

"Listening" is an active and open gesture towards the Other, and an ethical practice to resist the violence of identity and rebuild real communication. Byung-Chul Han predicts that a "listener profession" that dedicates hearing to others and participates in alleviating others' pain will emerge in the future.

Paulo Freire mentioned that education should be a process of dialogue, and a relationship of mutual listening and understanding should be established between teachers and students [9]. First, teachers should create an open classroom environment, respect students' critical and innovative thinking, and make students feel listened to and valued. Second, teachers should build a two-way interactive classroom environment and promote interaction through group discussions, role-playing and case analysis. Finally, teachers should guide students to pay attention to the complexity of the social environment, let them listen to the voices of different cultures and viewpoints, so that they can have their own discrimination and thinking ability when facing diverse information.

5. Conclusion

The research on the "banality of evil" in education is not directed at pure philosophical speculation, but a profound response to the era proposition of implementing the fundamental task of fostering virtue and morality and achieving high-quality development in China's education. The practical paths such as awakening "tiredness", pursuing "the Other" and returning to "listening" are precisely to return to the authenticity of education in the specific educational process and serve the national strategy of strengthening the country through education. Therefore, transcending the "banality of evil" is essentially a necessary value return in the field of education, which aims to make schools truly a fertile ground for nurturing thought, settling the soul and enlightening wisdom. Only in this way can

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education firmly carry the lofty mission of "educating people for the Party and talents for the country", and cultivate the new generation of the times with both outstanding intelligence, sound personality and firm responsibility for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This is both the practical concern of the research and the unshirkable responsibility of education for the future.

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