Research Progress on John Locke's Thoughts of Educational Philosophy

Xiaoli Hou¹, a, Xuyao Zhao¹, b.

¹School of Marxism Studies, Xi'an University of Science and Technology, Xi'an 710054, China;
²School of Economics Management, Xi'an Shiyou University, Xi'an 710065, China.

a244462379@qq.com, byourneed@163.com

Abstract
For a long time, Locke's educational philosophy has been shadowed by his political philosophies and philosophical epistemology. Until the 20th century, western scholars began to turn their attention to his educational philosophy, in which contains the secrets of his political freedom from ideal into reality. Since then, many well-known educators found wisely in succession the internal relation between Locke’s major education works: Some Thoughts Concerning Education, Of the Conduct of the Understanding and his philosophical masterpiece An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. This discovery provides an important foundation for the further study and facilitates him as a qualified education philosopher pioneer. This paper means to the advances in John Locke's Educational Philosophy in the 21st Century.

Keywords
Human nature, Reason, Freedom, Philosophy of education.

1. Introduction
With the continuous publication of the manuscripts of Locke by Lovelace and Oxford University, Locke’s thoughts are presented in a complete form to the world, especially the continuous publication of Locke’s educational works, which makes people surprised to find that Locke is qualified for “the father of modern education” compared to Rousseau. Oxford University Press is in the process of producing a new edition of all of Locke’s works. This will supersede The Works of John Locke of which the 1823 edition is probably the most standard. The new Clarendon editions began with Peter Nidetch’s edition of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in 1975. The Oxford Clarendon editions contain much of the material of the Lovelace collection, purchased and donated to Oxford by Paul Mellon. This treasure trove of Locke’s works and letters, which includes early drafts of the Essay and much other material, comes down from Peter King, Locke’s nephew, who inherited Locke’s papers. Access to these papers has given scholars in the twentieth century a much better view of Locke’s philosophical development and provided a window into the details of his activities which is truly remarkable. Hence the new edition of Locke’s works will very likely be definitive. Recently, there are three resources concerning Locke’s ideas of liberty, The John Locke Lectures is the most important one, The John Locke Lectures are among the world’s most distinguished lecture series in philosophy. This list of past lecturers shows that most of the greatest philosophers of the last half century have been Locke Lecturers. The series began in 1950, funded from the generous bequest of Henry Wilde. The Faculty acknowledges the generous support of these lectures by Oxford University Press and All Souls College; The second one is John Locke Foundation (JLF) which is founded in 1990 to work "for truth, for freedom, and for the future of North Carolina. Amy Oliver Cooke is its current president. The John William Pope Center for Higher Education...
Policy was in its initial stages a project of the John Locke Foundation. The third one is John Locke Bibliography, a comprehensive listing of publications by and about John Locke.

2. Current Research Status Abroad

John Locke was one of the greatest educators in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century. His educational books, such as the education theory for child: Some Thoughts Concerning Education and Conduct of the Understanding for adult education form a nice bridge between An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and his political works. Some Thoughts Concerning Education was first published in 1693 collected together advice that Locke had been giving his friend Edward Clarke about the education of Clarke’s child. In preparing the revision for the fourth edition of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Locke began writing “The Conduct of the Understanding”, which was published by Peter King in his posthumous edition of some of Locke’s works in 1706. As Locke was composing these works, some of the material from the Conduct eventually made its way into the Thoughts.

Much of Locke’s work is characterized by opposition to authoritarianism, this is apparent both on the level of the individual person and on the level of institutions such as government and church. His education theory bears the responsibility of teaching how to use reason to search after truth rather than simply accept the opinion of authorities or be subject to superstition. Just as Ruth Grant and Nathan Tarcov write in the introduction to their edition of these works: The idea of liberty, so crucial to all of Locke’s writings on politics and education, is traced in the Essay to reflection on the power of the mind over one’s own actions, especially the power to suspend actions in the pursuit of the satisfaction of one’s own desires until after a full consideration of their objects [1] 51-52. The Essay thus shows how the independence of mind pursued in the Conduct is possible. [2] xvi Grant and Tarcov write that the Thoughts and the Conduct “complement each other well: The Thoughts focuses on the education of children by their parents, whereas the Conduct addresses the self-education of adults” [2] vii. His educational theories insist on the inculcating such virtues as justice as respect for the rights of others, civility, liberali, humanity, self-denial, industry, thrift, courage, truthfulness, and a willingness to question prejudice, authority and the biases of one’s own self-interest very likely represents the qualities needed for citizens in a liberal society [2] xiii.

Locke’s writing on education, particularly Some Thoughts Concerning Education, and his works on political philosophy laid the groundwork for much of modern liberalism. He argues that a liberal society requires an education which is wide-ranging, encourages critical thinking and promotes civility. His Thoughts represents the culmination of a century of what has been called “the discovery of the child”. In the Middle Ages the child was regarded as only a simple plaything, as a simple animal, or a miniature adult who dressed, played and was supposed to act like his elders...Their ages were unimportant and therefore seldom known. Their education was undifferentiated, either by age, ability or intended occupation. [3] 63-64 In advocating a kind of education that made people who think for themselves, Locke was preparing people to effectively make decisions in their own lives—to engage in individual self-government—and to participate in the government of their country. The Conduct reveals the connections Locke sees between reason, freedom and morality. Reason is required for good self-government because reason insofar as it is free from partiality, intolerance and passion and able to question authority leads to fair judgment and action. We thus have a responsibility to cultivate reason in order to avoid the moral failings of passion, partiality and so forth[2]xii. This is, in Tarcov’s phrase, Locke’s education for liberty.

For a long time, in the opinion of scholars, Locke’s educational thoughts were just an obscure footnote in the history of educational thoughts, borrowing from Flanagan’s point of view, “Locke’s prestige depends almost entirely on his philosophical work, in contrast, Some
Thoughts Concerning Education appears to be somewhat insignificant. If Locke does not have any other works, Some Thoughts Concerning Education cannot be remembered by people today. Perhaps it is just a footnote in the history of educational thought. Some Thoughts Concerning Education was written by the author of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and Two Treatises of Government, and it was taken seriously by people, perhaps more seriously than the value of the book itself."[4] 85 However, with time flies, those who are passionate about Locke’s political freedom thoughts found that “the kind of freedom and democratic political system that Locke explained can lead the glorious revolution in Britain and is regarded as the highest concept in the American Declaration of Independence. It cannot take root and germinate, blossom and bear fruit all the time when transplanted to any other place.”[5]21 So, people can’t help thinking: Where is the true foundation of the freedom politics advocated by Locke? At the same time, those scholars who are keen on Locke’s philosophical thinking have also fallen into self-contradiction: Why does pragmatic and cautious Locke propose an empty or even self-contradictory philosophical system? Is the “standardizing our consent and easing our beliefs” pursued by An Essay Concerning Human Understanding just a theory that does not need to be put into practice? The questioning of these questions led scholars to shift their research focus to Locke’s educational theory. With the continuous deepening of research on Locke’s educational thought in the middle and late 20th century, it was found that Locke’s educational philosophy contained all the secrets of his freedom politics from ideal to reality. Since then, scholars began to change their previous interest in Locke’s Two Treatises of Government and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and turned their attention to Locke’s educational works. A large number of excellent educators such as James Axtell, John Yolton, Jeans Yolton, JW Adamson, Peter Gay, Lee Ward, Samuel Zinaich, Luigi Bradizza, etc wisely discovered the internal connection between Locke’s educational books Some Thoughts Concerning Education, Of the Conduct of the Understanding and his philosophical masterpiece An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and laid the authority position of Locke’s modern educational philosopher.

In 1988, Mr. Wenjun Xu published the paper Development of the Research on Locke in this Century in the Journal Philosophical Trends, which summarized the general overview of Locke’s thoughts abroad at that time, and outlined the academic research on Locke’s educational thoughts from loose elucidation to systematic research. According to Mr. Wenjun Xu’s inference, Locke’s educational thoughts in the 21st century will be the latest and most bright spot of Locke’s research, there is still room to write a monograph to accurately evaluate the content and influence of Locke’s educational thoughts......although Locke has never forgotten and always influential, but in various times he is always wrongly underestimated. [6] 35 Mr. Xu’s profound insights indeed represent the new direction of the research on Locke’s thoughts.

Combined with the latest research achievements, the research on Locke’s educational philosophy in the west has gone through three stages. In the first stage, the educators discovered the close relationship between the educational book Some Thoughts Concerning Education and the philosophical book An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and tried to combine these two works to elucidate Locke’s philosophy of children’s education. At this stage, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding is regarded as Locke’s philosophical psychology work. For example, Peter Gay, an expert in research on Locke’s educational thoughts, once wrote in his John Locke on Education, Locke is well-deserved as the father of enlightenment education. His An Essay Concerning Human Understanding published in 1690 laid the foundation of psychology for modern education. The reason why Locke revised his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding after the year 1690 repeatedly is precisely to make the books Some Thoughts Concerning Education and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding well linked and perfectly combines his philosophy with his pedagogy. These two works quickly
became, and are still classics of modern educational philosophy. Moreover, these two works' perfect combination "jointly laid a new starting point for modern educational theory and profoundly influenced future generations of educational philosophers such as Rousseau, Kant, Basedow, and Pestalo." In one place, Peter Gay further added, "The important reason why Locke's educational works can quickly attract educators at that time and have such a long-term influence is that there is an obvious and close relationship between theory and his philosophy. This philosophy quickly controlled the ideological field of the 18th century. Locke did not propose his educational concept in isolation, but regarded education as part of his own worldview." In addition to Peter Gay, SJ Curtis and M. E. A. Boulwood also pointed out in A Brief History of Educational Ideas, “The philosophical theory expounded by Locke in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding does indeed add a finishing touch to his educational theory. It’s a wonderful piece, so when interpreting Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education, he must link his philosophical theories.”

Early education philosophers all agreed that there is a necessary connection between Some Thoughts Concerning Education and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and based on this, Locke is positioned as an educational philosopher. However, with the deepening of research, some scholars began to question the inevitability of this association.

In the second phase, although educational thinkers also admitted that there is a clear connection between Some Thoughts Concerning Education and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, they do not think that this connection is intentionally done by Locke, let alone that this connection is complete and thorough, so they proposed to interpret this connection carefully. Lawrence A. Cremin once wrote, “As we all know, Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education is just a collection of private letters in terms of content, and the content is relatively loose, not a system, so if you think it was derived systematically and completely from the philosophical principles elaborated in his philosophical book An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, this conclusion will be obviously far-fetched.” SSA Laurie pointed out in his Studies in the History of Education Opinion from the Renaissance: “There is indeed something that cannot be ignored between the two works of Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education and his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, but this association and consistency is not deliberately done by Locke, that is to say, the "perfect, essential, and clear consistency" that Peter Gay claims is obviously not true.”

The educator Nina Reicyn pointed out: “Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education cannot be regarded as an educational theoretical system that is necessarily derived from the philosophical principles interpreted in his An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. When Locke gave his friend Edward Clarke specific advice on how to educate his eldest son, he had not thought of applying his philosophical principles to these daily private communications.” J. J. Chambliss pointed out in his Educational Theory as Theory of Conduct-From Aristotle to Dewey that Some Thoughts Concerning Education is not just about the application of educational psychology theory elaborated in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, rather than being an application, is more of a complementarity. Locke emphasized an educational theory based on the rational judgment of parents in the Some Thoughts Concerning Education. He does not emphasize that children use their own rationality to reflect and judge, because the child’s rationality is not mature at this time; when the child’s rationality is mature, education will mainly focus on how to use his own rationality to judge, so as to become a person with independent judgment ability. In other words, Some Thoughts Concerning Education focuses on “action”, and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding focuses on “judgement”. So if the Some Thoughts Concerning Education is a complete application of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, it is obviously not reasonable. Yolton affirmed what Peter Gay referred to in his John Locke & Education, “Locke really does not discuss his educational theory in isolation”, but he then added, Although we can see from his two books about his
philosophy and pedagogy, there is indeed an obvious connection, and it can be found that Locke’s educational thoughts are obviously affected by the philosophical principles he put forward in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, but we cannot conclude that this connection is intentionally done by Locke. Furthermore, we cannot conclude that Locke’s educational theory must be the application of his philosophical thinking in education. Therefore, when we interpret any of Locke’s two works, we must combine all Locke’s works. [7] 10-11 In Yolton’s view, Peter Gay has over-interpreted the definition of the relationship between these two works as “exaggerated”. Regarding how these two works are related, Yolton gave his own opinion, An important factor of Locke’s educational philosophy contained in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and Some Thoughts Concerning Education, the theory of child development psychology, this is a philosophy of mind formed through practical experience observation. From the perspective of this type of philosophy, it is associated with psychology. In the history of western education, except for Comenius and Montessori Nie, Locke may be the only philosopher who extended the philosophical mind to the field of education. Although Locke is not a Piaget of the 17th century, and although Locke does not have his own children [12] 394, it is difficult to deny that Locke has Qualifications and abilities suggest that children’s education should be taught according to their age and ability to accept, and indeed we can see many similarities with Piaget.”[13] 14 Yolton’s interpretation of Locke’s philosophy of education is very comprehensive, all content of Locke’s educational philosophy for children is touched.

In the third stage, the educators not only discovered the connection between Locke’s adult educational monograph Of the Conduct of the Understanding and his philosophical work An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, but also from the standpoint of education philosophy the philosophy of adult education is comprehensively elaborated. When Locke’s educational philosophy is fully integrated with his political and religious ideas, his educational philosophy becomes a complete ideological system. One person here needs special mention is James Axtell, who was not only the first educator to elaborate Locke’s philosophy of children’s education, but also the first to discover that there is an intrinsic relationship between these two works and the book Of the Conduct of the Understanding. This point Yolton once mentioned in his John Locke on Education, "In addition to discovering the internal connection between Some Thoughts Concerning Education and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Axtell’s greater contribution was that he discovered that Of the Conduct of the Understanding is the most important work related to these two works.[13] 12 This great discovery not only raised Locke’s theory of adult education to the highest level of educational philosophy, but also closely link Locke’s child education and adult education. Inspired and guided by Axtell, Lee Ward discussed Locke’s philosophy of children’s education and adult education in more detail in his works John Locke and Modern Life in 2010 [14] 10-15, and for the first time fully expounded the modernity of Locke’s philosophy of education, thus providing the most valuable theoretical reference for subsequent research.

3. Current Research Status in China

Compared with the prosperous research on Locke’s educational philosophy abroad, the interest of Chinese scholars in the 21st century on Locke’s thoughts is still mainly concentrated on his political and philosophical levels, while the study of Locke’s educational thoughts is still only on the one-sided and simplified exposition of Some Thoughts Concerning Education, there is still no in-depth introduction or interpretation of this book. Judging from the research on the thesis, domestic scholars still generally believe that Locke’s main contributions are in political philosophy and epistemological philosophy, so his educational philosophy has not attracted much attention in China. Judging from the available information that can be collected, Locke’s
educational thoughts are almost the most obscure in the history of educational philosophy research, scattered in various brief introductions to educational history. These monographs are not so much a study of Locke’s educational philosophy, but rather an unnecessary combing of the minutiae in Locke’s educational thoughts. In addition, there is a phenomenon that needs to be emphasized: Now that China is influenced by people’s pursuit of elitism education, many domestic educators’ research on Locke actually focuses on how to train a personable noble gentleman. What is more regrettable is that these studies have focused too much on external imitation, and have not noticed that the gentleman of Locke not only has a handsome external image, but more importantly, they also have a high degree of political vigilance and social responsibility. In other words, the gentleman Locke pursues did not rely on horse racing, bowling, or some elaborate educational advice to become a good citizen. This can be seen from the development of the British public school influenced by Locke’s educational thoughts. However, it is gratifying that there are three books in China that have begun to pay attention to and elaborate more on some of Locke’s educational philosophy. Published in September 2012, the book Freedom and Education-Educational Philosophy of Locke and Rousseau edited by Researcher Jingdong Qu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Nan Wang of China University of Political Science and Law, and the American professor Tracov’s book, translated by Wenzheng Deng, For Freedom: Locke’s Educational Thoughts, to some extent, has also created a new chapter in the study of Locke’s educational thoughts. These two books not only combine Locke’s educational works Some Thoughts Concerning Education, Of the Conduct of the Understanding with his Two Treatises of Government and An Essay Concerning Human Understanding for interpretation, and also regards Locke as the pioneer of modern educational philosophy. In addition to this book, there is another book that is very important, that is translated by Xueqin Mei and others, Locke in the Context written by Canadian philosopher James Tully. In the sixth chapter of this book, the detailed elaboration of the research on Locke’s philosophy of education has extremely important value for the study of Locke’s educational philosophy. Of course, in the only three books, from the perspective of the content of the works, neither Locke’s qualification as an educational philosopher is clearly defined, nor a comprehensive and overall discussion of Locke’s educational philosophy.

Similar to the research situation of works, the research of Locke’s thoughts in domestic academic papers mainly focuses on the elucidation of his political thoughts and philosophical thoughts, while the study of his educational philosophy still stays in the one-sided and simple at the interpretation level, this can be seen at a glance from the status of papers published in some authoritative journals. From 1988 to the present, there have been more than 20 academic dissertations on Locke’s educational thoughts in China. However, the study of Locke’s educational thoughts is not optimistic: either one-sidedly discusses the educational significance of Locke’s sports thoughts, either equate Locke’s educational thoughts with children to Locke’s educational philosophy. In addition, according to the reprint of the research on Locke in recent years, Locke’s thoughts is still relatively concerned about his political liberalism, property view, and epistemology. Although there are several articles about Locke’s educational thoughts, they focus on Locke’s gentleman education which is actually a part of his educational thoughts. What’s more, Locke’s gentleman education is more than just a culture sign, so relatively speaking, the current level of research on Locke’s educational thoughts in China still stays at a superficial level.

4. The Specific Content of Locke’s Educational Philosophy

When referring to Locke’s educational thoughts, people will immediately think of his famous work Some Thoughts Concerning Education. In fact, there are other four works related to Locke’s educational works: Elements of Natural Philosophy published in 1664, The Report of
the Board of Trade on the Reform of the Poor Law published in 1697, and Some Thoughts Concerning Reading and Study for a Gentleman published in 1703 and Of the Conduct of the Understanding published in 1706. From the content contained in various works, Some Thoughts Concerning Education and The Report of the Board of Trade on the Reform of the Poor Law belong to Locke’s Children Education, and the other three belong to Locke’s adult education. There is a close internal relationship between these five educational works. If you comprehensively study these works, you can get a glimpse of Locke’s educational thoughts. Moreover, with the deepening of research, scholars have found that Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding and his educational ideas are intrinsically related: The philosophy of humanity and child development psychology contained in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding are exactly Locke’s Theoretical basis of adult education and children education. Based on this, scholars promoted Locke’s educational thoughts to the level of educational philosophy and conducted in-depth analysis. Not only did he realize the philosophical turn of Locke’s educational thoughts research, but also clearly highlighted the complete vein of Locke’s thoughts system. Two levels of Locke’s educational philosophy: children’s education philosophy and adult education philosophy. The philosophy of children’s education is mainly concerned with body education, moral virtue education and learning education in body-mind education; adult education philosophy is concerned with intellectual virtue education and the cultivation of independent judgment. Locke’s educational philosophy perfectly combines personal education and civic education, and elaborates a modern philosophy of mind and body education.

5. Conclusion

There is a perfect “person” in every educational philosopher’s educational theories, ancient and modern, such as Plato’s “philosopher” and Chinese Confucian “Junzi”. The gentleman is Locke’s perfect "person" and represents the collective personality of a brand new social class, the future British bourgeoisie. They are rational and tolerant, elegant and noble. As Peacham said, “A qualified gentleman must make himself a useful and beneficial person for his country, and he must serve the country through the virtue he possesses: loyalty, justice, and eloquence which make UK become a united and harmonious country [15] 2, 8”Those who have been drunk, adulterous, cursed and those idlers will lose their qualifications as a gentleman. His educational philosophy not only has a unique position in the history of modern western education, but also a key part of his civil government from abstract theoretical possibilities (practicable) to practical feasibility. [16]547-571 Its pioneering modern education paradigm shows us the unique and important role played by modern education in the process of personal physical and mental development, national civilization progress, and national prosperity. Although this effect is limited, Locke believes that as long as a proper education is maintained, without the shadow of God and the intimidation of “Leviathan”, people can also enjoy the happiness of the world and the peace of the soul.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express deepest gratitude to my family and friends for their understanding, support, and encouragement in getting this paper done. Sponsored by the Foundation of Shaanxi Provincial Educational Science Planning Project “Research on the Mechanism of the Integration of Civic Moral Education into Mainstream Ideological Identity from the Perspective of Locke’s Educational Philosophy”.
References


