Title
Liberal Arts Education for Whole Person Cultivation: A Case Study of Three Universities in East Asia

Abstract
The study investigates liberal arts education (LAE) models in three institutions in three Chinese contexts. It examines how LAE contributes to whole person cultivation using data from documents, semi-structured interview and online survey. The study contributes to the exploration of LAE models in non-Western societies.

Key words:
liberal arts education; whole person; East Asia

Introduction
Liberal arts education (LAE) has come to the fore in educational research around the globe in recent years as scholars and administrators have realized the importance of its educational goal of nurturing innovation, critical thinking, and lifelong learning and its value for social responsibility and citizenship cultivation, which are crucial qualities and capabilities for 21st century social challenges (CBC Radio, 2020; Godwin, 2015; Nishimura & Sasao, 2018; Ono, 2019). Under this trend, higher education institutions (HEIs) around the globe are trying to refine and explore their models in LAE and the cultivation of a whole person with capabilities for the 21st century (Boyle, 2020). The question of how LAE, often regarded as a feature of American higher education (Godwin & Altbach, 2016), could be well developed into other societies with different traditions and cultural backgrounds, however, has been contested. Against this background, this study explores how LAE can cultivate whole persons with capabilities for the 21st century in the East Asian context by doing a case study.

Review of the literature
LAE originated from notions of the examined life and reflective citizenship prevalent in Greco-Roman philosophy (Nussbaum, 1998). In modern societies, LAE refers to education at the undergraduate level, focusing on cultivating the whole person as a wise citizen with broad knowledge and a sense of civic responsibility (AAC&U, 1998; Nussbaum, 1998). The educational outcomes of LAE, critical thinking, civic engagement, and intercultural competence are realized through an internationally recognized model characterized by small-class teaching, mentorship and interaction between students and faculty members, residential experience, extra-curricular and community-based activities (Godwin & Pickus, 2017; Jung et al., 2016; Nishimura & Sasao, 2018). Drawing upon British and American traditions of intellectual learning and democracy (Nelson, 2020; Shen, 2016), LAE has become an approach to higher learning in many institutions worldwide.

While a worldwide scan of LAE programs reveals a consistent focus on global citizenship and an effort to cultivate a person in an all-round way to prepare students for the future, it also indicates a significant range in understanding, approach, and challenges associated with
LAE programs (Jung et al., 2016; Kirby & Van der Wende, 2016; Nishimura & Sasao, 2018; Shi & Lu, 2016; Wang, 2015). Regarding LAE in the Chinese context (mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan), there has been considerable research already. Many scholars have studied the challenges of LAE implementation in comprehensive research universities in the three contexts in East Asian societies (Chai, 2016; Huang, 2016; Jiang, 2014; Kirby, 2017; Postiglione, 2016; Shi & Lu, 2016; Yang, 2016). To reach the ultimate goal of LAE, there is still a long way to go in the three societies where the short-term economic return is valued more highly than whole person development over the long-term. Also, there has been very little research on the universities that are historically connected to the former Christian universities of liberal arts tradition. As Yang (2016) argued, there are shared values in education between the Confucian tradition and LAE. It would be interesting to explore how LAE could be adapted in the non-Western context by drawing on multiple cultural and epistemological traditions (Jung et al., 2016). Therefore, my research will fill this gap with case studies of three universities with a liberal arts tradition related to the former Christian Universities in China. The three case institutions I selected are Yuepei College at Peking University in mainland China, Lingnan University in Hong Kong, and Tunghai University in Taiwan. The study examines how LAE could be adapted into different societies in three Chinese contexts with a shared tradition of Confucianism and contribute to whole-person cultivation (Jiang, 2014; Marginson, 2011; Yang, 2016).

**Theoretical Framework**

I use the capabilities approach as the theoretical framework for this study. The capabilities approach is proposed and developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2001, 2009; Sen, 1999). It is an alternative approach different from human capital, focusing on "what are people actually able to do and to be" (Nussbaum, 2009, p. x). In contrast to human capital approaches, which are limited to a focus on skills, the capabilities approach is concerned with a broader conception of wellbeing and human flourishing. It involves substantial freedoms with a set of interrelated opportunities to choose and to act (Sen, 1999).

In terms of the purposes of LAE in this era, there have been several arguments which share some core values in common. Nussbaum (1998) proposed that LAE in this age encompasses critical thinking, self-examination, respect for both the common humanity and diversity of others as world citizens, together with the preparation of professional and technical knowledge for a career. Similarly, Chopp (2014) maintained that the fundamental principles of LAE are critical thinking, moral and civic character, and using knowledge to improve the world. Also, Ferrall (Ferrall, 2011) argues that LAE develops curiosity, creativity, critical self-reflection, a sense of social responsibility, and communication skills. As LAE has been adapted to East Asian and other contexts, there is a shared understanding of the purposes of LAE in a global and cross-cultural context in the 21st century, across time and space. Carol Geary Schneider, the President of AAC&U, proposed that these purposes include cultivating broad knowledge; developing the powers of the mind; and fostering ethical and civic or societal responsibility (Jung et al., 2016). And these aims of LAE are usually realized by
means of extra-curricular and community-based activities, student-student and faculty-student interaction, and on-campus residential experiences (Jung et al., 2016).

Based on these arguments and statements, I summarize the purpose of LAE in four points: nurturing broad knowledge, developing the power of the mind, fostering moral and civic character, and cultivating social responsibility. These concepts can be understood through the lens of the capability approach, which includes substantive freedom to be and do (capabilities) and achieved forms of being and doing we have reason to value (Spreafico, 2013).

**Conceptual Framework**

The following conceptual map guides this research (See Figure 1). First, I examine the curriculum, models and goals of LAE in the three selected universities. Using the tool of Ideal Type (Hayhoe, 2007; Holmes, 1981), I explore and compare how LAE in the three institutions are influenced by the social, political, historical, and cultural factors in the three societies, such as socialist ideology, Confucian tradition, Christian tradition, and American LAE. Then, I look at how the means of training and goals of LAE could contribute to the cultivation of a whole person with capabilities for their society by analyzing the empirical data from interviews and surveys. Also, I compare the differences and similarities between the ways they are cultivating capabilities and whole persons in the three cases and compare them with the Ideal Type of citizens in their social contexts. Finally, looking through the perceptions of students and alumni, I analyze how the capabilities are cultivated through the LAE models in the three institutions.

**Methodology**

I conduct this research in three phases using mixed methods, including document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey (Labaree, 2019; Simons, 2009). First, I do a qualitative study that explores how the historical, cultural, and political ideologies influence the mission, goals, and curriculum of LAE in each institution by doing documents analysis. Based on the findings, I then design and conduct semi-structured interviews with faculty members, administrators, students, and alumni to explore how these goals are implemented in both the pedagogy and extracurricular activities in their institutions and what are the challenges. Finally, I use an online survey to collect quantitative data from fourth-year undergraduates and alumni to examine how the LAE models contributed to their capabilities cultivation.

**Findings**

The study finds that the three institutions all carry on some inheritance from the former Christian universities with a LAE tradition. Lingnan and Tunghai have a focus on cultivating whole persons with LAE, while Yuanpei focuses on cultivating well-developed citizens for the socialist society. Their LAE follows the common model of broad knowledge, residential learning, close student-faculty relationship, and small-class teaching. Besides, they have developed special features in the current society, such as community engagement, interaction with local society, and international perspectives. For example, Lingnan has a "modified" LAE model, which is practical-oriented, forward-looking, and adapting to local and global society, while Tunghai has a backward-looking, idealist and elitist model. Looking through
the capabilities approach, the three institutions are cultivating students with various capabilities for further personal and career development. The capabilities focus on broad knowledge, interpersonal relation, service and social responsibility, community engagement, and global perspective. These goals are supported by their models and curriculum. The quantitative analysis of the survey examined how LAE models contribute to the cultivation of capabilities for students and alumni in the case universities. First, I checked whether students background is related to their choice of future work and development of capabilities by using linear regression and chi-square test. Then, I examine the relationship between the LAE model aspects and corresponding aspects of the intended outcome based on theoretical framework. I found a significant positive relationship among the LAE models (curriculum, mentorship, small-class, residential learning, and extra-curricular activities) and the outcome of education (broad knowledge, power of mind, civic character, and social responsibilities) from the lens of capabilities approach. Also, I use linear regression and logistic regression to examine the association between factored scores of capabilities items and the satisfaction and overall evaluation of LAE they received. Moreover, I will use ANOVA to compare the means of the scores to find if there is significant different between the two universities in students’ satisfaction and students’ self-assessment of capabilities development. Finally, I summarize the findings and interpret the result based on the research design and theories.

Discussion

The study examines how LAE can cultivate students as responsible citizens with capabilities for the uncertainty of futures in the 21st century. In contrast to human capital theory, the study takes the lens of the capabilities approach to examine liberal arts models and their innovative practices for nurturing all-round development of critical thinking, civic engagement, and intercultural competence. The study found that the three universities incorporate interdisciplinary curriculum, mentorship program, residence program, and service learning into their LAE models to cultivate capabilities for life flourishing and sustainable development after graduation in students from various backgrounds. Interestingly, the quantitative analysis identified a positive association between the training models (curriculum, mentorship, and extra-curricular activities) and aspects of capabilities (broad knowledge, power of mind, and civic character). The research also finds that university ranking and practical expectations (employment and income) in the current society are still the major challenges for educators and policymakers to implement LAE towards its ultimate goal of the whole person cultivation.

Significance

The research contributes to our understanding of the mission and goals of higher education broadly. It interrogates how education can incorporate innovative practice and cross-disciplinary study for future citizenship cultivation and examines the role of colleges and universities in nurturing citizens and promoting diversity and inclusion in the current society. Adopting the ideal types approach, it opens up the discussion of ideal citizens cultivation from educational goals, models, and other societal factors. The ideal type approach brings contexts and tradition into the analysis, opening a new direction for an empirical study on
how different traditions and cultures can contribute to the LAE models and goals for global citizen cultivation.

Figure 1

References


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