

# *Rousseau's thought of labor education in the process of citizen molding*

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**Abstract:** Labor education is an important part of Rousseau's educational thought. From the perspective of Citizen molding, its function includes two aspects: On the one hand, labor education is a way for Emile experiencing natural freedom; on the other hand, labor education is an important way for Emile to cultivate social freedom. There are two requirements in the process of labor education: First, the implementation of labor education should be carried out through an independent and interesting and practical occupation; Second, the simplicity of the educated in the labor education and the cultivation of their emotional identity. These requirements are relevant to the molding of citizens. Rousseau's thought have important implications for the implementation of today's labor education: The combination of vocational labor and labor education in the way; the combination of perceptual experience and moral identity in the process; the combination of individual standard and social standard in the goal.

## 1. Introduction

Labor education emphasizes the importance of work and practice in education, and pays attention to the combination with the development of the country and society. In recent years, China attaches great importance to the development of labor education in policy and practice, but there are still some shortcomings, such as the lack of a clear curriculum, the lack of quality of labor education teachers and so on. Rousseau is an outstanding thinker and educator of the French Enlightenment in the 18th century. He constructs naturalistic education theory for the purpose of cultivating free citizens. Among it, Rousseau attaches great importance to labor education, and focuses on the specific implementation of labor education in the third volume of his masterpiece *Emile*. We hope that through the in-depth interpretation of this education classic, and integrating the existing relevant research, on the one hand, to explore the implementation content of labor education thought, to explore its relationship with the overall education goal--cultivating free citizens, on the other hand, to excavate its significance and enlightenment, so as to provide reference for the development of today's labor education.

## 2. The orientation of labor education in citizen molding

### 2.1 Citizen image and the process of molding

Rousseau's image as a citizen is relevant to the context of his time. In the 18th century, the western world was in the fierce social changes. The rapid development of capitalism and the shackles of feudal rule constituted the main contradiction of the society at that time. Under the feudal rule, the bourgeoisie launched the Ideological Enlightenment Movement and the Bourgeois Revolution aimed at overthrowing the old system and establishing the society. The enlightenment advocated rationality, freedom, respect for human values, and tried to prepare for the arrival of a new society. As one of the representatives of the enlightenment, Rousseau also focuses on the molding of new society and new people. According to Rousseau, education and politics are inseparable [1], and the construction of a future society is only possible if a new kind of citizen is cultivated.

The image of the citizen constructed by Rousseau is closely related to the shaping of the community. The citizen is only a fraction of the unit, which depends on the denominator. Its value lies in its relationship with the whole and the society. The characteristics of citizens are as follows: the existence of individuals depends on the state, and the interests of the state are supreme [2]. Specifically, the private interests of the citizens of the new society are subordinated to the public interests and they regard themselves as part of the community; they actively and personally participate in public affairs and achieve self-realization in the community. In other words, this is a citizen with social freedom, and the central theme of Rousseau's political theory is the realization of human freedom in the community of public life [3]. In order to achieve this goal, Rousseau's civic education aims at promoting the transformation from "natural person" to the citizen, and fostering the citizen's social freedom based on the natural freedom of "natural person".

### 2.2 Orientation of labor education

According to Rousseau, there is a difference between a "natural person" and a "citizen": the former belongs only to himself and lives a self-sufficient and individualistic life, while the latter lives in a community and social contract. But Rousseau never give up the hope of raising people as citizens. He tries to propose a new scheme in theory, that is, trying to raise a "natural person living in society", the key lies in the harmony of naturalness and sociality and the transition from natural freedom to social freedom. For this reason, the process of Emile's education is divided into two stages: first, the children aged 0-15 years and the teenagers are mainly educated in nature, then to the youth of 20 years of age to moral, social education-based. The former stage is the important foundation of the latter stage. In this process, in conjunction with intellectual education, labor education is carried out at the stage of Emile's 12-15 years of age, which is at the intersection of the two stages, it plays two roles in promoting the transformation of Emile from "natural person" to citizen. First, labor education is a way for Emile to experience natural freedom; Second, labor education is an important way to cultivate Emile's social freedom.

Firstly, Rousseau affirms the importance of free nature in the cultivation of human beings, which is dominated by "the sense of survival". Specifically speaking, "the sense of survival" is self-preservation, and it is the love of life formed in the experience. Rousseau put more emphasis on the exploration and experience of the nature of life as a free and independent state. Besides, labor education is also the basis for Emile to enter into political life and become a citizen, because it inspires all kinds of realistic actions to save life, and its peak is political life [5]. Therefore, Rousseau emphasized that Emile must work like a farmer and think like a philosopher, and physical exercise and mental exercise are mutually compatible in physical labor. In a word, labor education plays an important role in the way that Emile experience free nature and "sense of existence", making him

become a citizen on the basis of enriching “sense of existence”. Secondly, labor education is also the carrier of cultivating the sociality for Emile. As a teenager, Rousseau slowly introduced Emile to the concepts of government and law. It is in the process of labor education that Rousseau leads Emile to gradually understand the social relationship of occupation and labor, and emphasizes the social standard of his occupation choice, which initiates the cultivation of citizenship and social freedom.

### **3. The implementation of labor education in citizen molding**

Rousseau believes that the development of labor education needs to be combined with professional productive Labor. There is a close relationship between vocational production and labor education, especially at the present time when social production is highly differentiated. In the modern world, the goal of vocational education involves work and labor skills, and is a professional education closely related to labor practices [6]. And Rousseau elaborates the implementation process of labor education, first of all, defines the criteria of vocational choice in labor education, and then indicates the training objectives of the educated.

#### **3.1 Career choice in labor education**

The labor education in Emile is carried out in the professional productive work. In the third volume, Rousseau discusses in detail the criteria for Emil's choice of occupation, including independence, interest and practicality. Among them, the selection criteria of independence and interest mainly guide Emile to experience free nature and “sense of existence”, while the emphasis on practicality lies in guiding Emile to understand the social attribute contained in occupation and laborer, to foster his social freedom.

Achieving self-preservation through an independent occupation. Rousseau stresses the freedom necessary to maintain the individual, “to maintain their own independence, and not completely dependent on others to survive in the world” [7]. Although this individualistic claim may originate from his discontent and rebellion against the society of the time, which emphasizes the opposition between the individual and the society in which he lives, the rationality of his view lies in the affirmation of the emotional priority of “self-love” shows that the individual is the root of all activities and our ultimate goal. Here, Rousseau shows concern for “self-love” and one's most basic right to existence, which does not conflict with his assertion of social freedom. Therefore, in Emile's career choice, he put the independence of career in the first place. We look at them in terms of the necessary connections between technologies, putting the most independent technologies first [8]. Under the social conditions of the time, Rousseau believes that the agricultural producer is bound to his land, and the products of the land were entirely at the disposal of others. Therefore agricultural labor is heavily dependent on others and can't meet the standards of independence. This judgment is based on Rousseau's social experience at the time, and it is not surprising before the coming of industrial age. Behind this assertion lurks Rousseau's passionate pursuit of natural liberty and emphasis on the primacy of individual rights. In times of crisis and revolution, Rousseau argues that the big man becomes the little man, the rich the poor, and nobody can avoid his fate in the course of social change, and thus acquiring a labor skill to save himself is an important guarantee against the depravity of human nature. In Rousseau's view, the realization of self-preservation and the experience of “sense of existence” are the way to and the basis for the realization of good.

Explore the nature of freedom through an interesting occupation. Rousseau respects Emile's interest in the choice of occupation. He believes that a person's occupation must be in line with his own interest. Take a page from Berlin, Rousseau talks about freedom in two dimensions: positive freedom and negative freedom. The former emphasizes more on the initiative of the educated themselves, while the latter emphasizes more on the responsiveness of the educated. If the above-

mentioned pursuit of occupational "independence" is a helpless choice to avoid the influence of bad society, then the emphasis on children's interests is a hope that the educated experience the positive freedom of the free nature. From the point of view of human nature, Rousseau believes that people act with the qualifications of the initiative, and people have autonomy, so in the choice of occupation to do "not by us(teacher), but by his own in the spirit of the above choice of his occupation". We can see Rousseau's affirmation of the autonomy and initiative of the educated, which is the opportunity created by labor education for children to experience the nature of freedom. On the other hand, Rousseau believes that workers in uninteresting occupations are as numb as machines, and he is extremely wary of exposing children to such conditions in the labor educational process, because it is not only an oppression of the free will of human beings, but also deepens the negation of autonomy for people in work, and leads to the individual giving up the stipulation of one's being the initiative.

Understanding social relationships through a practical occupation. Rousseau believes that Emile should choose a honest occupation. A occupation is dishonest if it has no practical value. Honesty here refers to utility, and the degree of utility is judged from the point of view of social needs. According to the image of citizen molding by Rousseau, the important characteristic is that the individual belongs to the community, and the value of the individual lies in the relationship with the society. The citizens in the community are willing to submit themselves to the public interest and dedicate all their strength and freedom to the community. In such a community, the individual no longer sees himself as an independent person, but only as part of the community. Therefore, in this kind of political ethics, the citizen must actively and personally participate in the public affairs, and labor is the embodiment of the community contribution. Rousseau gives concrete examples. He does not allow Emile to become the embroiderer, the goldsmith, the painter. He also opposes Emile's choice of the Urbane. He supports Emile become a shoe repair and road repair, because this kind of occupation has the nature and function of serving others most. As it turns out, Rousseau is talking about utility from a social perspective. In other words, a real utility job is one that satisfy the needs of the rest of society. Thus, Rousseau's emphasis on the practical nature of work is based on the hope that the educated can experience the public spirit, which is "public will" in such work. Rousseau constructs a new society based on "public will" as the moral foundation of the republic. He emphasizes that the social pact means that each of us is under the supreme guidance of the public will, with all his own power, and to accept each member in the community as an integral part of the whole [9]. In combination with this guiding ideology, we can find Rousseau's emphasis on the moral orientation of the practical nature of occupation. In other words, Rousseau argues that occupational labor as a way must cultivate the educated people's sense of contribution to the community, and this is the very beginning of the development of social freedom.

### **3.2 Subject Training in labor education**

Citizen molding is not only an educational task to be completed, but also a process of inner transformation for the educational subject. To this end, Rousseau clearly points out that Emile should achieve two requirements in labor education: participating in labor honestly, cultivating the emotional identity. Specifically speaking, the former requires the educated to avoid forming prejudice against labor at the cognitive level, while the latter is to cultivate the moral emotion for labor at the aspect of values.

Rousseau believes that Emile should be "honest" in labor practice, do not have any distracting participation in labor. I do not want others to see us as a gentleman, but as a true apprentice. There are two reasons for requiring an educated person to devote himself to work: First, Emile needs to fight against prejudice in society. Because in the French social environment at that time, the upper class generally lives a parasitic life and despised labor and laborers, so Rousseau guide the educated

to avoid the impact of social environment. In Rousseau's view, a "honest" mind is closer to the state of nature, so it cannot be carried away by social prejudices. It is also a symbol of human freedom and independence, and a manifestation of a "sound mind". According to Rousseau, there is a moral continuity between the "natural person" and the citizen, and the transcendental good of the natural person is the foundation of the citizen's life in the community. The implementation of labor education should also pay attention to explore and maintain the good intentions of the educated. Secondly, "honestly" participating in labor practice is the process of full devotion to professional production, but also the way to know and understand social relations. As Rousseau asks, our goal is not to learn the craft of a carpenter, but to promote us to integrate into the position of a carpenter. In Rousseau's view, this helps Emile to truly observe the life and destiny of a particular class. It is also convenient for Emile to know and understand the complicated social relations, which is undoubtedly beneficial to the cultivation of his social attribute and citizenship. Through "honest" participation in labor practice, the educated can experience social life through a simulation way, in order to prepare for integration into the community.

Rousseau believes in the need to cultivate Emile for professional work of the emotional identity, and the need to guide Emile to develop respect for workers and the positive feelings of work. According to Rousseau's view of human nature for the social contract, human nature is not absolute rationality, because rationality is a kind of ability that people develop and mature gradually after they enter the social state. Rousseau attached great importance to emotion, and he believed that the essence of human is emotion, which is expressed as "self-love" and "mercy" in natural person and "self-esteem", "love" and "conscience" in social person. In his professional work, Rousseau hope the educated to develop a sense of self-esteem. The educated should not merely remain in the the needs of labor, but also to obtain honor and work". Here, honorable labor is one way to build self-esteem. Rousseau ascribes great moral significance to work: on the one hand, in Rousseau's view, work is a social obligation that everyone must fulfill, the individual's work is closely related to the satisfaction of all the needs of society, and therefore from the perspective of the social community. On the other hand, it is related to the social turbulence at that time. The good feelings towards labor and workers are a good antidote to the bad fortune, which will help individuals break away from the arrangement of fate, with a very high sense of identity into labor production, to obtain individual freedom and independence.

#### **4. The enlightenment of Rousseau's labor education thought**

Entering a new era, China attaches more importance to the role of labor in the educational process. A few days ago, the policy-*The comprehensive strengthening of the new era of labor education in primary and secondary schools*- marks China's labor education into a new stage of development. From the perspective of function, labor education is the way to realize the integration of moral education, intellectual education, physical education and aesthetic education, and also plays an important role in the training of qualified citizens in the new era who are responsible for the important mission of the Chinese Dream [10]. The role of labor education in the cultivation of citizens is very important. From the process of its implementation, Rousseau's thought of labor education can bring inspiration to today's labor education.

##### **4.1 The combination of vocational labor and labor education**

The labor education needs the concrete practice way, and should be carried out in the specific situation and the field. In the current education practice, schools often regard doing clean and agricultural activities as the main way of labor education, but this practice will lead to the simplification of labor education. If we take the above-mentioned activities as the main form, labor

education will fall into the mire of daily chores, and students will lose the opportunity to observe and experience the society, and also lose the educational significance of work. In terms of the kinds of labor, it can be embodied as daily labor and productive labor. But labor is not equal to labor education, the emphasis is on the experience and education in the process of labor. Therefore, according to Rousseau's educational experience, specific professional work should be combined with education. This approach enables the realization of the authenticity of labor education, which is formally experienced in specific professional work, because the focus of labor education provides students with real labor opportunities, and let students experience the labor process in real life, specific positions, feel the hardships of different work to strengthen the practical experience of students [11].

#### **4.2 The combination of perceptual experience and moral identity**

The opinion states that, the objectives of labor education include “firmly establishing the concept that labor is the most glorious, the most noble, the greatest and the most beautiful”, “recognizing that labor is neither noble nor lowly, loving labor, respecting ordinary laborers, and cultivating the spirit of labor of diligence, thrift, struggle, innovation and dedication” [12]. It can be found that the goal of contemporary labor education is to cultivate children's moral identification with labor, which is based on perceptual experience. Therefore, in the process of labor education, it is necessary to deal with the relationship between perceptual experience and moral identity. Based on the theory of perceptual experience, Rousseau's labor education pays great attention to the perceptual experience of children. For example he asks Emile to participate in professional work with an “honest” attitude, guide him to realize the real experience in occupation and labor, and try to cultivate a kind of morality suitable for community life. Therefore, in the process of labor education, to avoid rigid education of moral goals, it should be based on students' personal experience, emphasizing students' personal presence in the process of work. There are personal labor experience, close relatives of the labor emotion, cordial labor cognition. In a word, labor education in primary and middle schools is a kind of experimental labor, a kind of educational activity in middle schools, and a kind of labor with educational learning and experiencing nature.

#### **4.3 The combination of individual standard and social standard**

From the perspective of individual standard, labor refers to people's purposeful activities in order to meet their material and spiritual needs as well as to realize their overall development. Therefore, in the process of labor education, we should pay attention to the exploration of individual-oriented labor function. For example, Germany and Sweden prefer to help students understand the labor world through labor education, and train students to prepare for career choice. As far as the social standard is concerned, labor is the direct way for the educated to observe and experience the social relations. In the practice of labor, children can understand more deeply the relationship of mutual needs among people, the understanding of individual needs is always realized in the social support, therefore we should pay attention to the function of labor education under the social standard. In other words, social moral norms are formed and developed in the process of labor. Moral norms are directly related to the mode of labor and the mode of production. Therefore, it is necessary to guide the students to realize the lofty social significance in the labor education.

### **5. Conclusion**

Labor is of great significance to people, and labor education is an important part of educational practice. Rousseau has carried on the complete and concrete elaboration to the labor education. Labor education is the process of practice, and Rousseau discusses the principals involved in the process of

labor education from two aspects: occupational choice, subject training. occupational practice is the specific way and form of labor education, which provides a way for the development of labor education; the educated are the important object of labor education. Rousseau's elaboration of the two aspects closely fits the educational goal of "citizen molding", which makes it true to be implemented in the development of labor education. Therefore, no matter the method or idea, Rousseau's labor education is consistent. Rousseau's labor education thought has many reference points, which will provide more abundant theoretical resources for the development of labor education in the new era.

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