Exploring Education in Taiwan by Reflecting on the Movie “3 Idiots” and Education in India

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篇名: Exploring Education in Taiwan by Reflecting on the Movie “3 Idiots” and Education in India

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I• Introduction

I.1. Motivation

“3 Idiots”, an Indian Bollywood movie, is a touching comedy movie. It is not only abundant in educational implications but stimulating in deep thoughts about learning from different angles. It was all the rage, attracting us as well. No sooner did we watch the movie than it charmed us into self-reflection on the story behind the scenes. Impressed by a variety of common education-related problems, such as how to let the myth in rote learning fall apart, how to resolve the conflicts between parents and children originated from expectations, and how to strike a balance between the fulfillment of one’s dreams and the stress from academic performance, we decide to conduct a deeper study on educational issues.

I.2. Purpose

To provide a new interpretation applicable in the real-life world rather than one in the dictionary, we arrange to redefine “education” and “learning”.

I.3. Methodology

Based on the plot in the movie and the trend of education in Taiwan and through the comparison between India and Taiwan, we proceed to reflect on the two countries’ strengths and weaknesses in the education system, clarifying the differences between them. By analyzing the collected data, we want to see what we can improve in the educational domain in Taiwan. Accordingly, we split the thesis into four topics, including “About the movie”, “Problems implied in the movie”, and “Parents’ expectation of children & Reaching for dreams”, and “Brief discussion about education in India and Taiwan”,

II• Thesis

II.1. About the movie

II.1.1. Outline

Rancho, Farhan, and Raju were the students of college called Imperial College of Engineering, sharing the same room as well. They had different goals to achieve.
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Rancho wanted to establish a school of his own. Farhan wanted to be a wildlife photographer. As for Raju, he wanted to find a job to better the condition of his family. In their college life, they went through many interesting and thrilling things. Dean Viru’s opinions frequently clashes with Rancho’s. After his daughter’s baby was saved by Rancho, Dean Viru knew that Rancho was right and agreed with him. This movie is talking about education and people’s dreams and aimed at satirizing the education situations in India, including rote learning, suicide, parents’ expectation of children, and so on.

II.1.2. Main Character analysis

II.1.2.1. Rancho & Farhan & Raju

Lancho, a student whose thought was quite different from others. Despite outstanding academic performances, he thought everyone should pursue his or her dreams instead of high scores. Upon attending the university, he challenged the senior and Dean, which made Dean prejudiced against him. Nonetheless, Dean ended up taking away his discrimination against him in the wake of some events.

Farhan, who had a partiality for photographing, wanted to be a wildlife photographer. His parents expected him to be an engineer. Inspired by Rancho, he dared to pursue his dream.

Raju, whose father suffered from stroke, was born into a poverty-stricken family. His parents put expectations on him, and hoped he would study hard and find a good job. Instead of having good academic performance, he was a thorn in Dean’s eyes. However, he finally got a job in that his attitude impressed the interviewers.

II.1.2.2. Dean Viru

Dean Viru, a very traditional person, firmly believed that score is everything. What’s more, he discriminated against dull students but with a preference for smart students. He gauged students’ abilities by their grades. He forced his son to be an engineer instead of a writer. Unable to put up with the pressure, his son committed suicide. Eventually, he changed his thought owing to Rancho.

II.1.2.3. Chatur
Only by rote learning did Chatur get high scores. He was a student getting high scores by hook or by crook. On account of it, he got embarrassed when giving a speech. Since he couldn’t speak Hindi, the speech draft was written by others. Rancho revised it and made it absurd.

II.1.2.4. Analysis

Rancho, Farhan, and Raju had a common feature: they all wanted to change not only themselves and the situation they faced. Rancho wanted to change the thought that people pursue high scores, Farhan wanted to change his parents’ expectation, and Raju wanted to change his family’s economy condition. Farhan and Raju were bad-grade students but not dull students. They were just not interested in engineering; on the contrary, Rancho was interested in it. Far from encouraging them to study hard, he made them stick to their dreams and told them that rote learning is wrong in several ways. Finally, all of them really realized their dreams. To make the audience know that good grade doesn’t represent everything, the existence of Farhan and Raju serves as a contrast to Rancho, Dean Viru, and Chatur.

II.2. Problems implied in the movie

II.2.1. Rote learning

In a class, the professor asked “What is a machine?” Rancho answered it in his own way, which didn’t satisfy the professor. However, Chatur answered it as precise as the definition, which made the professor satisfied.

What the professor wanted is nothing but definition. If students memorize the definition, can they pass all the tests? To learn is to think. We cannot acquire knowledge unilaterally from teachers or books. “I think so I am.” Descartes quoted as saying. If we don’t make good use of it, we are just machines. To make Raju know rote learning was wrong, Rancho revised Chatur’s speech draft and made the draft absurd, which irritated Chatur and Dean. Because Chatur couldn’t spoke Hindi, he memorized it mechanically. As a matter of fact, Chatur can try to understand the meaning in the draft first. That would help him have a deeper understanding. Like our learning methods, due to stress from many tests, some Taiwanese students may choose rote learning. However, if we use a right way to learn thing deeply in our minds, learning is not merely learning but a connection to daily life. (威廉, 2005)
II.2.2. Passion for learning

Rancho blamed Dean Viru and said school taught them how to get higher scores rather than engineering. He also stated according to statistics that one student died per 90 minutes. Then, Dean Viru brought him to the class, asking him to teach the students in the classroom. Surprisingly, Rancho wrote down two terms, making the student define them after 30 seconds. During this 30 seconds, every students went all out to consult the books, but no one was able to define them at last.

In this competition, what on earth was every one crazy for? They didn't get excited about having a chance to learn new things; instead, they just wanted to win the competition. As for students in Taiwan, to pass every test with flying colors, students have to study really hard. Stress from learning tends to put side effects on students and kills students’ passion for learning and causes low thirst for knowledge. Besides, students become reluctant to learn so many things. In fact, passion for learning is a rather important key point to students. As long as students have it, they will regard learning as fascinating instead of troublesome. Whenever they are faced with adversity in learning, they will set out to deal with it.

Learning is originally a pleasant thing; however, the system Taiwan enacts deforms it and makes tests terrible things.” The biggest problem that Taiwan has lies in the fact that junior high students learn what senior high students learn, and senior high students learn what university students learn, which kills their passion for learning.” (張舒涵, 2011) It is mainly because most of the people think that the one who learn more is the winner. Learning is to broaden one’s knowledge and horizons rather than show off. If we lose our passion, learning is no longer a happy thing, and we are merely knowledge receivers. Mencius remarked, “There is no royal road to learning but to find your lost heart.” We should find our heart first, and then learning may not be a difficult thing anymore.

II.2.3. Knowledge acquirement and usage

There was a tradition that freshmen were requested to wear only underpants to pay tribute to the seniors. At that time, not wanting to do that, Ranch hid in a room. If he did not go out of the room, a senior would urinate on him. He tore down the wire of the light in the room, combining it with a spoon, putting it out of the room. Hence, the senior got electrocuted and fell to the ground. He used what he had learned, and protected him in emergency. Mona, Viru’s daughter, was going to give birth, but the
flood hindered the way to the hospital. Rancho and other students had no option but to suck the baby out with a vacuum cleaner. After perspiration, they delivered the baby successfully, but it turned out to be a stillborn. Fortunately, at that time, Raju said “Aal izz well”, which meant “Everything is fine”, and resuscitated the baby.

Many students don’t know the reason why they have to learn so many things. In the movie, we can see Rancho used what he had learned to protect himself and help deliver a baby. The two examples were both in critical situations; however, Rancho solved them with ease. If Rancho hadn’t learned these things, he might not have been able to handle them. Knowledge is not a tool for passing tests. In other words, if we use knowledge in daily life appropriately, we will benefit a lot from it.

II.3. Parents’ expectation of children & Reaching for dreams

Farhan persuaded his father to accept his dream to be a wildlife photographer. In spite of less income, he would be happy about fulfilling his dream. After he succeeded in persuading his parents, Raju had a good piece of news. He got a job because of his attitude. Dean Viru had promised that he would shave if Raju got a job. Angry with Raju’s getting a job, Dean Viru decided to prepare a difficult examination to make him flunked. As a result, Pia, Dean’s younger daughter, gave them the key to Dean’s room to enable them to steal the exam paper. Owing to her brother’s death, Pia didn’t want to see his father destroy another person’s future. Pia’s brother, who wanted to be a writer, decided to fell down the train because of stress from his father, Dean Viru. There was another tragedy. Joy, a student, whose family expected him to perform well in college, but Dean called his father and told him his son couldn’t graduate due to his not submitting assignment on time. His father was disappointed. Before long, Joy committed a suicide. Rancho said that he died of stress.

Many students dare not pursue their dreams due to the stress from parents. Most of the parents in Taiwan think attending a prestigious university and having a good job are the most important things. Our education system is still aimed at striving for perfection, which makes children over-cautious and dare not pursue their dreams. We should let children go and explore the world themselves. “You may give them your love but not your thoughts. For they have their own thoughts. You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth” quoted from Gibran’s poem—“The Prophet” What parents should do is lead them to their dreams rather than limit them. In the movie, Pia’s brother, and Joy resorted to suicide when unable to put up with the stress. If parents respect their children’s dream, they will
lead a happy instead of ending their lives by suicide. If Pia’s brother had stuck to his dream, his father, Dean Viru might have changed his mind. That is, we should be independent from our parents.

II.4. Brief discussion about education in India and Taiwan

II.4.1. Education in India

II.4.1.1. Current education situations and policies and assessment tools

The Caste system, an unfair system enacted by Brahmanism, has divided the society into several statuses. Owing to the Caste system, opportunities to be educated are not even. “The Mandal Commission was established in 1979 to identify the socially or educationally backward and to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination.”(Wikipedia) Throughout the past thousands of years, the Caste system has not just widen the financial gaps between the higher- and lower-class Indians but it has also deprived numerous civilians of the opportunities to be educated. Deeply rooted in most Indians’ minds, the unfair system has long been taken for granted. Due to the wrongly-taken concept, like a vicious circle, the inborn inequality in education resources and the huge difference in economic and social backgrounds among different classes have failed to implement educational equality or further to popularize the opportunities to be educated.

Fortunately, free compulsory education policy has taken effect since April, 2010. People who suffer from poverty are allowed the chances of basic education at least. In 2011, the government has decided to lengthen compulsory education from 8 years to 10 years. However, the economic burden on the government will get heavier. (印度提出 10 年義務教育新目標基礎薄弱亂象叢生)

II.4.1.2. Advantages

Mathematics and science which Indians consider the most are so important to them. In India, schools teach students how to think logically and there are no absolute answers to the questions.(陳星貝) Sufficiency in basic constructions is a problem in India; However, with that education system and low demand of constructions, their knowledge-based software industries and engineering are so flourishing and well-known in the world.(陳國川)
II.4.1.3. Disadvantages

Schools are biased towards knowledge in the book, leading to no personality development and disconnection with the real life. (吳文侃 & 楊漢青, 1999) Suicide rate due to heavy stress from tests is also high. Additionally, universities in India are not enforced to be evaluated in laws; hence, the qualities are low, according to the research(葉興台). What’s worse, students choose departments not in that they feel interested in but in that they help make a fortune and bring high status in the future.

II.4.2. Education in Taiwan

II.4.2.1. Current education situations and policies and assessment tools

Compulsory education system for 9 years in Taiwan has existed since 1968. The length of compulsory education in Taiwan will be lengthened to 12 years in 2014. Education is universal because the government would support low-income households and disadvantaged group even if you can’t pay for the tuition.(國家教育研究院, 2011)

II.4.2.2. Advantages

To encourage students to realize their potentials and develop their own personality, a variety of Taiwan’s education policies are legislated to make students enter universities in multiple ways. For instance, which university to enter used to depend only on Scholastic Aptitude Test, but academic performances on high school bases along with special performances in extracurricular domains are currently another way to enter a university.

II.4.2.3. Disadvantages

Spoon-fed education has long been around in education system in Taiwan, a teaching approach most schools adopt to educate students. In classes, teacher passes on knowledge at a very rapid pace and asks the students to acquire and absorb it in a short time. Be it ever so many and complicated, students have to memorize all what had been taught in school to pass the tests. Therefore, rote learning is one of the learning ways students resort to for the purpose of getting good grades on tests because of the stressful learning surroundings. Therefore, with no changes in the
steadfast teaching approach and changes in the attitudes of students toward their learning, constant changes in education policies only make student and parents confused and get much more criticisms. A large number of graduates suffer from the difficulty in finding jobs and seek to work overseas, which in turn leads to high unemployment rate and brain drain.

II.4.4. Comparison in education between India and Taiwan

Although most of the tests in India are not multiple-choice questions but essay questions, they are still limited in knowledge in the books. For instance, when asked “Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement”, students should write down the reason, the course, and the influences on India. (陳星貝) Students’ personality developments are ignored; Hence, certain occupations become the only choice graduates make. Apart from software industries, outstanding people in other domains are seldom known. Multiple-choice questions often appear in tests in Taiwan, which is as common as common can be. Nevertheless, students may guess an answer when not knowing the exact answer. It makes students take a test without elaborate thinking, but students take it for granted that multiple-choice questions are to appear in any tests. However, if the conception is still in student’s mind, multiple admission ways are useless in Taiwan.

In India, software industry is so prosperous that most of the students do their utmost to enter engineering department to learn. To be educated is the way to get far from poverty, so they seize every opportunity to learn and polish themselves in skills. However, the same phenomenon is seldom seen in Taiwan. Students in Taiwan don’t have to worry about the chance to be educated, and hence, they can’t imagine that. The attitude students take towards learning in school changes. Due to heavy stress from tests, some lose passion for learning. And some get high scores by fair means and fouls. All they want is know how to get high scores rather than to improve themselves. What we can say about students in Taiwan is that they are short-sighted about their future. After they enter the society, will what they have learned in school help them?

The same problems in India and Taiwan are the emphasis of knowledge on the books, the so-called rote learning, a mechanical learning process, which might restrain students from thinking deeply and critically.

III● Conclusion
In the movie, most of the plot indicates many problems about learning. We should find out some ways to solve them. Education system in Taiwan makes students study and study. Do students learn how to survive in the society? The movie tells us that it’s time to reform not only our education system but also our mind. Our minds are important because the changes of education system may not change our mind to learning. We should change it ourselves.

In “Brief discussion about education in India and Taiwan”, we learn that despite logic thinking, Indian students’ thinking is about knowledge instead of their personality development. Taiwan is even worse because of learning without thinking. We think Taiwanese students should develop their thinking abilities not only in knowledge but also in their own development. Creative people are still waiting to be discovered. In conclusion, Taiwan should cultivate much more creativity of students. If Taiwan still limits students to stick to knowledge on the books, students’ thought won’t be flexible. Therefore, Taiwan should promote thinking and problem solving instead of memorizing. That will probably cause less stress to students. Knowledge is dead, but thinking will make it alive.

In “knowledge acquirement and usage”, we deduce that through education, we can acquire knowledge, but through learning, we can use it in daily life. We provide a new interpretation: Education is not only knowledge transmission. Learning is not for scores but for mental growth, which cultivate a person into a mature person. Everyone is the same when birth, but it is learning that makes us different. To sum up, education won’t be complete without learning and thinking. We can cope with tests if we concern education. However, we won’t stand out if we don’t consider learning and thinking important. Just change our attitude towards education, and we will see a completely different world.

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