

## **Reconstructing the Moral Relationship between Teachers and Students in China: Predicament and Transcendence**

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**Abstract:** Education revolves around human nature and necessitates the establishment of relationships. For a considerable period, discussions on the teacher-student relationship have primarily focused on its professional aspect, neglecting the moral connection between educators and learners. Through investigation, this study reveals that the current moral relationship between teachers and students in China faces a complex predicament due to both external factors related to societal changes and internal factors stemming from weakened interpersonal bonds. The moral relationship between teachers and students exhibits three prominent issues: firstly, it is strained by educational realities; secondly, there is an increased prominence of moral risks and anomie; thirdly, institutional existence supersedes ethical considerations within this relationship. To address these challenges effectively, it becomes imperative to recognize the essential restoration of the moral teacher-student bond while simultaneously achieving moral transcendence based on its foundational state. By reviewing the developmental trajectory of this bond, this paper proposes a tripartite framework for constructing a morally sound teacher-student relationship encompassing symbiotic morality, normative mutual promotion, and transcendent mutual assistance.

**Keywords:** Teacher-Student Relationship, Morality, Reconstruction.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

For participants in the field of education, the teacher-student relationship serves not only as a means but also constitutes the essence of education itself, becoming an essential and distinctive element in human development and contributing to the potential community building within schools (Bernstein - Yamashiro, 2004). The teacher-student relationship encompasses various dimensions, including moral, hierarchical, knowledge-based, contractual, virtual relationships, among others. As the connotation of this relationship evolves with social progress and productive forces develop further, it undergoes constant superposition and dynamic growth. Among these dimensions, the moral aspect holds significant theoretical implications and practical importance for students' moral development and school's ethical education construction. The evolution of productive forces brings both benefits and challenges to the teacher-student relationship. With modernity's advent came concepts like

democracy and equality that have weakened hierarchical structures and class consciousness within this relationship, fostering its positive development. However, society's increasing reliance on science and technology along with its pursuit of efficiency has gradually eroded the moral bond between teachers and students."

## 2. CONNOTATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF MORAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The moral relationship between teachers and students refers to the moral connection between teachers and students in teaching practice, as well as the moral cultivation and educational quality reflected in the process of communication. The moral relationship between teachers and students has a rich connotation: the moral relationship between teachers and students is not limited to the category of teacher ethics, but the moral cultivation reflected in the common life of teachers and students. Teachers are the promoters of students' all-round development, and have the obligation to guide and lead students' moral development. Teachers are students' moral models, and are the guides, standardizers and evaluators of students' moral development. Teachers embody such qualities as kindness, dedication, dedication, honesty and friendliness in their communication with students. Students are the practitioners of respecting teachers and loving learning, the learners and practitioners of morality, and the co-builders of the moral environment in schools. Through communication, teachers and students can achieve mutual moral development, solve moral dilemmas, prevent moral risks, and build a good moral environment. The moral relationship between teachers and students is the key link in building authentic education, and the interpersonal basis for realizing school moral education. First of all, the essence of education requires that teachers and students should not only have a professional relationship in the general sense, but also a moral relationship. Secondly, the inherent requirements of education require students to master the ability to build moral interpersonal relationship, create a moral living environment, and generate the ability to sustain moral development. The moral relationship between teachers and students can develop moral character, generate moral experience and solve moral problems, which plays a key role in the cultivation of the above abilities. Some researchers believe that since there is a "moral teacher-student relationship", is there a "non-moral teacher-student relationship"(Tan, 2021). From the perspective of education, the

proposition of "non-moral teacher-student relationship" is not valid, because any form of education should have moral attributes. But there are two problems in reality: first, morality and moral education are ignored in the knowledge-based teaching, and the teacher-student relationship with moral attributes has disappeared in this teaching activity. The relationship between teachers and students is purely the exchange of "knowledge-money", and the relationship between teachers and students is a professional relationship, an exchange relationship or an economic relationship. Second, educators do not try to build education from the perspective of interpersonal relationship, let alone the relationship between teachers and students from the perspective of morality. For a long time, people have discussed the teacher-student relationship under the general professional relationship, ignoring the particularity of the moral relationship between teachers and students, and ignoring the demands of moral development for the teacher-student relationship. Although people have found the importance and particularity of the teacher-student relationship in theoretical research and educational practice, they have ignored the construction of the teacher-student relationship in the system of moral education, and have not tried to explore the development of the teacher-student relationship from the perspective of morality. In the author's investigation, the development of the teacher-student moral relationship in China is facing a complex predicament, which not only has the strong impact of the change of the times on the teacher-student moral relationship, but also has the neglect of the theoretical construction. However, the thoughts about the teacher-student relationship, especially the moral construction of the teacher-student relationship, China not only inherits the rich cultural resources, but also has its own practical ethics.

### 3. HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE ETHICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS IN CHINA

#### 3.1 Cultural Gene: The Ethical Bond between Educators and Pupils in Ancient China.

Under the overarching influence of Confucianism, ancient Chinese education centered on morality as its primary focus in both theory and practice, with educational philosophies emphasizing the cultivation of virtuous conduct and self-improvement (Hu, 1998). Chinese ancient educators and thinkers have formulated a distinctive framework of principles - for the attainment of educational success, teachers must serve

as moral exemplars, fostering a robust ethical bond with their students that serves as the foundation and wellspring of education. The teacher-student relationship in ancient China occupies a unique realm within interpersonal connections, characterized by its non-familial kinship nature and detachment from political vassalage. The traditional moral relationship between teachers and students is reflected in the following three aspects: Firstly, it encompasses reverence for teachers and adherence to the principles of 'Tao', which epitomizes the educational ecosystem of "the community of teachers and Tao" and forms the cultural foundation of the moral bond between educators and learners. The integration of "teacher" and "Tao" creates a unified entity where "respect for Tao" serves as a prerequisite for "respecting teachers," while demonstrating that honoring teachers is a tangible manifestation of respecting Tao; ultimately emphasizing that the existence of Tao relies on the presence of knowledgeable instructors who embody its essence. Secondly, trust between teachers and students constitutes an emotional basis for their relationship, showcasing their dynamic connection. Teachers not only carry forth Tao but also guide students towards it. While traditional Chinese education emphasizes inheritance, both teaching methods aspire to foster student achievements beyond what has been taught. Consequently, innovative thoughts from students regarding their mentors' teachings are regarded as a form of inheritance itself. Only through sincere mutual understanding can valuable suggestions be put forward by students without hesitation. Lastly, safeguarding educators' well-being and upholding Tao represents an inherent force that sustains teacher-student relationships while reflecting their developmental trajectory within interpersonal dynamics. Students' deep affection for their instructors generates a strong sense of duty to protect them by unwaveringly believing in them and defending their dignity, academic pursuits, and personal lives—even at great personal sacrifice (Cheng & Yang, 2017).

### 3.2 Contemporary "Confusion": An Exploration into Referential Ambiguity.

In the early years of New China, the study and practice of teacher-student relationships were heavily influenced by political ideology, with researchers primarily utilizing class and struggle perspectives to examine their formation. The promotion of democratic and egalitarian teacher-student relationships was also aimed at eradicating remnants of feudalism and capitalism from the old society, while simultaneously reflecting New China's policy to attract patriotic intellectuals. "The traditional feudal

bourgeois teacher-student relationship had been largely dismantled, paving the way for a new era of democratic and equal relations," which called for continued efforts to break down outdated models in order to consolidate and develop more progressive ones. However, due in part to Soviet-style educational standardization efforts that emphasized indoctrination and discipline over other forms of pedagogy, teachers often held an overwhelmingly dominant position within these relationships.

The reform and opening up has facilitated the transformation of educational methodologies, prompting scholars to reflect upon and critique the construction of a teacher-student relationship that aligns with the specific context of Chinese education. In the post-1980s era, it was observed that China's educational practices predominantly relied on a cognitive approach characterized by "knowledge + indoctrination." However, this approach lacked a foundation of mutual trust-based security, belongingness, and intrinsic interest between teachers and students. Consequently, human presence within education seemed to be marginalized (Elias et al., 2008). Through critiquing erroneous educational concepts, the researchers propose the notions of genuine education and a return to real-life experiences (Lu, 2001), reconsidering individuals as the "primary agents" of education and incorporating the concept of "interpersonal relationships" into the educational framework (Lu, 2008). This marks the initiation of an inquiry into the ethical dynamics between educators and students in contemporary China. In the late 1990s, subjectivity philosophy was introduced to China, prompting scholarly endeavors aimed at nurturing individuals as moral agents (Yan, 2020). Researchers have attempted to construct moral education based on subjectivity; however, through theoretical deduction and practical reflection, it has been discovered that the moral teacher-student relationship from a subjective perspective is not without flaws. Subjectivity advocates for the realization of one's own value in the pursuit of goodness. While the value and role of the subject in education are boundless, it gradually transforms into a monistic existence. In order to rectify the shortcomings of subjectivity, the theory of intersubjectivity emerged. Although intersubjectivity enhances interpersonal communication and educational methods, it still solely focuses on individual moral development without achieving a comprehensive transcendence beyond subjectivity. One of the contemporary education's tasks is to establish a coherent ethical framework within a society grappling with multiple crises, and to exert influence on the prevailing social paradigm. While the cultural diversity during this transitional period has propelled reforms in teacher-

student relationships, fostering a deep-rooted understanding of democracy, freedom, equality, and openness among educators and learners alike, the resulting contradictions and conflicts have left both parties perplexed, rendering the teacher-student relationship ambiguous.

### 3.3 Gradually elucidating: progressing in exploration.

Entering this century, the research on teacher-student relationship has been advancing in exploration. Professor Ye Lan pioneered the field of educational communication and proposed the educational concept of "life·practice" in the pursuit of new education, thereby establishing a foundation for contemporary teacher-student relationships. The teacher-student relationship within the educational concept of "life·practice" is not solely based on cognition; rather, it is rooted in life activities. Teaching takes place through multidimensional interactions between teachers and students. The inherent indivisibility, mutual stipulation, and interactive generation are essential attributes of the teacher-student relationship (Ye, 2013). Professor Ye Lan has paved the way for the reconstruction of teacher-student relationships in contemporary China. In order to effectively foster students' moral development and address the challenges faced in school education, research on Chinese moral education has shifted its focus towards "interpersonal connections" and yielded fruitful outcomes, establishing a solid theoretical foundation for investigating the moral relationship between teachers and students. Professor Lu Jie, building upon holistic human development and grounded in life-oriented moral education, proposes advancing Chinese moral education through a relational existence perspective. By employing Marx's dialectical materialism to examine the interplay between individuals and practice, Professor Lu Jie introduces an educational approach centered around "practical activities for self-construction," gradually constructing a comprehensive framework for life-oriented moral education. Viewing moral education from a practical standpoint propels us closer to realizing an ideal state of human morality. Practice serves as humanity's original essence; only through practice can individuals comprehend interconnectedness, transcendence, and construct an exemplary life. Consequently, practice emerges as the fundamental pathway towards cultivating harmonious teacher-student relationships. In terms of moral education in life, the fundamental principle is to transform abstract norms into individuals' conscious awareness of morality. Consequently, life moral education aims to liberate traditional moral education from its mechanical, static, and isolated approach towards individuals. It seeks to eliminate

educational designs that do not prioritize individuals as the ultimate goal and break free from rigid educational planning. Instead, it encourages learners to reconnect with the world of life and childhood, fostering their ability to construct a meaningful existence. This process triggers an intrinsic desire for value-based learning and gradually guides children towards adulthood. The motto 'from life, through life, for life' has become the cornerstone of school moral education curricula by utilizing ethical experiences within schools to impact children's lives effectively. By shifting away from a knowledge-centric curriculum perspective and embracing infusion-based teaching methods, schools can establish relationships that facilitate experiential interactions and integrate diverse perspectives into children's moral development. It advocates for schools to serve as environments where dynamic teacher-student relationships occur and flourish.

Professor Feng Jianjun proposed the concept of public education relationship by incorporating and assimilating the subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and otherness inherent in educational relationships. Education is a lifelong process experienced by both teachers and students, where their lives intertwine with educational content to form a symbiotic existence. This symbiosis is based on the coexistence of teachers' and students' lives as unique entities. Only when their lives are integrated into the teaching process can teachers and students establish a mutually beneficial coexistence. The purpose of establishing a public education relationship is to create an ethical community with internal connections. Within this relationship, education subjects emphasize "symbiosis, coexistence, and coeducation," highlighting individual differences while promoting mutual care and responsibility among individuals to form a symbiotic entity. The public education relationship challenges fixed roles and static identities between teachers and students by emphasizing dynamic contributions to knowledge creation and personal growth. It criticizes unidirectional teacher-student relationships, asserting that educational processes occur within the life symbiosis of both parties involved - as learners who grow together towards common development. Both teachers and students act as subjects of learning and mutual growth within this context, facilitating shared life experiences for collective advancement (Feng, 2016). Professor Feng Jianjun's theory offers a novel perspective on the advancement of the ethical rapport between educators and students. The development of the moral relationship between teachers and students possesses a distinct characteristic of contemporary times. The advent of the market economy has engendered novel human interactions,

thereby creating new avenues for fostering modern independent personalities and establishing a pragmatic foundation for cultivating subjective and intersubjective relationships between teachers and students(Lu, 2000). Concurrently, scholars have endeavored to deconstruct or construct localized perspectives on the moral relationship between teachers and students, offering numerous valuable insights.

#### 4. THE ETHICAL DILEMMA IN THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN CHINA FROM A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

In traditional Chinese society, the prevailing feudal patriarchal ethics have traditionally governed the teacher-student relationship. However, with societal changes, these conventional patriarchal norms are no longer applicable, leading to a transformation in the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship(Li & Lan, 2017). The presence of traditional morality is gradually diminishing in the current way of life, mode of communication, and lifeworld. The societal way of life itself is undergoing profound transformations(Gao, 2001), posing a predicament to the practical interaction between educators and students.

##### 4.1 The ethical dynamics between educators and students amidst educational tension.

With the progression of time, there has been a gradual increase in student group's self-awareness, leading to a growing emphasis on identity and cultural respect within the teaching process. Consequently, greater expectations are placed upon teachers for positive support encompassing satisfaction, encouragement, and reliance. However, disparities in educational methodologies and cultural preferences have engendered tension within teacher-student relationships, resulting in challenges pertaining to students' academic accomplishments, social cognition, emotional development, behavioral growth as well as an overarching educational crisis (Anderson et al., 2011).

Firstly, the teacher-student moral relationship is influenced by the cultural tension arising from intergenerational disparities between teachers and students. Over time, this relationship becomes an intergenerational one, wherein the age gap naturally gives rise to differences in thinking and behavior that reflect intergenerational cultural disparities. Specifically, these disparities manifest as conflicts between "adult culture" and "normative culture," represented by teachers, and "youth culture" and "rebellion



culture," represented by students. Consequently, it becomes challenging for teachers to employ a singular cultural approach to control teaching methods and establish effective teacher-student relationships. This challenge is particularly pronounced in contemporary China where intergenerational differences are increasing rapidly. The resulting divergence in value orientations among different generations has led\*\*\* obstacles in fostering a strong teacher-student moral relationship (Wang, 2023).

Secondly, the teacher-student moral relationship is characterized by an imbalance between the effectiveness and legitimacy of education. Over time, education has prioritized "instrumentality" and "effectiveness", resulting in the consolidation and strengthening of teachers' authority while diminishing the status of students as active participants in their own education. Consequently, the teacher-student relationship has been reduced to a mere tool for achieving educational objectives. However, with the emergence of subjectivity and recognition of students as autonomous individuals, respecting their independent choices has become a consensus that reflects the legitimacy of education. Nevertheless, this emphasis on subjectivity has led to certain drawbacks: some scholars argue that education should solely serve individual development without considering broader social responsibilities or national missions. While it is undeniable that people are at the core purpose of education, blindly prioritizing individual needs may neglect societal obligations and national goals. In summary, for education to be effective and legitimate (Yan & Feng, 2011), there must be a balance between these two aspects. Currently, however, there exists a zero-sum game scenario in which either teachers' educational authority weakens to safeguard students' autonomy or teachers maintain their authority at the expense of students' right to make moral choices.

#### 4.2 The presence of moral risk and moral anomie undermines the ethical bond between educators and students.

According to German sociologist Ulrich Beck, the process of globalization has not only brought about greater interconnectedness but also ushered in a society characterized by pervasive risks (Beck, 1998). With the progression of reform and opening up, China has transitioned from a "society devoid of risk awareness" to a "risk society characterized by an acute perception of imminent crises"(Zheng & Huang, 2012). In a society characterized by risk, the social consensus on moral values is confronted with numerous challenges, including moral apathy, ethical lapses, and technocentrism. The advent of this risky society has led to two

consequences for the moral climate within educational institutions. Firstly, the role of morality in schools has become ambiguous; the ethical framework has weakened and achieving a shared value orientation has become increasingly difficult. Consequently, even distinguishing between good and evil has become blurred (Gigmont & Hongta, 2006). Revised sentence: Secondly, in a society characterized by risk, individuals place their "trust" in technology (Zheng, 2011) and value "diversity", while exhibiting moral "indifference"(Gao, 2015). Consequently, the field of education witnesses a decline in trust and interest towards morality, thereby undermining the foundation for establishing moral relationships to some extent(Zhang, 2019). The moral configuration within the risk society manifests as moral vulnerability in educational institutions: the efficacy of the ethical framework within schools to combat moral disarray is diminished, thereby eroding the ethical underpinnings of education and weakening support for the school's moral structure. The emergence of moral hazard exacerbates the state of moral anomie on campus, serving as a metaphor for the educational predicament within schools. "Moral anomie" refers to the inability of moral values and behavioral norms to effectively integrate and regulate social life, resulting in confusion regarding moral values and a breakdown in ethical behavior. Within an educational context, moral anomie signifies a state where established values and behavioral norms are denied, questioned or disregarded, gradually losing their binding force and influence over teachers and students. This crisis of existential significance undermines effective communication order and behavioral norms within schools. Consequently, moral anomie leads individuals to reject the importance of morality in educational interactions, eroding the foundation for establishing meaningful connections between teachers and students.

4.3 The moral dimension of the teacher-student relationship is superseded by its institutional nature.

The institutional nature supersedes the morality of teacher-student relationship, not voluntarily but rather due to a clear and realistic backdrop - education under the common dominance of scientism and utilitarianism. Scientism necessitates education to adhere to strict logic and rigorous rules, which are evident in school systems and regulations; utilitarianism drives education towards efficiency and speed, as reflected in various forms of assessment. As a result of these assessments and systemic influences, the professional characteristics of teachers are increasingly prominent. However, establishing interpersonal moral relations requires emotional

connection, value sharing, spiritual bonding, and long-term interaction. The flexible attributes of moral interaction inevitably yield to the rigidity imposed by science and utility. The professionalization tendency of the teacher-student relationship has impeded the moral bond between teachers and students: teachers, who are influenced by traditional culture and guided by modern professional norms, have failed to establish a synergistic connection due to their dual identities. Consequently, the ethical responsibility of teachers to enlighten and educate in accordance with traditional values has been regulated by laws, regulations, and even contracts, transforming it from an ethical relationship into a professional one characterized by clear responsibilities and rights. This represents a shift towards a business-oriented model in educational activities. While there may be certain advantages associated with this trend, its disadvantages are particularly evident within education, especially concerning the cultivation of school morality. Firstly, the professionalization of teacher identity erodes the moral prestige and honor traditionally associated with teaching roles as educators transition from sacred figures to secular professionals. Secondly, although rules and regulations clearly define teachers' "responsibility" for moral education, it is challenging to assess or quantify this aspect effectively; thus establishing a low input-output ratio for teachers in terms of fostering moral relationships with students. Thirdly, schools should ideally serve as nurturing emotional communities but have instead become "morally impoverished" institutions under the dual influence of bureaucracy and institutionalization. As such, the teacher-student relationship remains constrained within the confines of professional ethics.

The performance of the institutional relationship between teachers and students can be summarized as follows: the formalization of dialogue, emotional detachment, and normalization of conflicts. However, it is essential to ensure that dialogues between teachers and students are conducted in an atmosphere of equality, democracy, and care. Unfortunately, these dialogues have become primarily focused on grades and rules rather than fostering genuine moral connections. Consequently, they have been reduced to mere "agreements on grades" or "games on rules," undermining the space for establishing meaningful ethical relationships. Furthermore, while emotional bonds between teachers and students should ideally be built upon personal interactions in daily life contexts, they are currently overshadowed by various systems and regulations. As a result, this relationship has become mechanical and rationalized over time with diminishing emphasis on cultivating moral

connections.

## 5. RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN MORAL EDUCATION.

Neil Nottings, an advocate of the theory of caring education, posits that moral education is a pedagogical endeavor that primarily focuses on nurturing the moral development of learners during the educational process and subsequently equips them with the capacity to treat others ethically. In her conceptualization of moral education, the foundational element lies in providing ethical treatment to students within an educational environment. Underpinned by a framework of care, she proposes a model for moral education known as "example-dialogue-practice-consolidation," which centers around fostering moral relationships. This model encourages active cultivation of a "morality-caring" relationship structure in students' lives and deems its successful establishment as indicative of effective moral education. Nottings asserts that "the theory of caring is relationship-centered," emphasizing that this approach prioritizes establishing caring relationships rather than viewing care solely as a virtue. She contends that the teacher-student relationship in moral education should not be coercive, antagonistic, or homogeneous; instead, it should be built upon considering the emotions and needs of those being cared for. Teachers and students are regarded as equal participants responsible for constructing a shared teacher-student relationship rooted in care, wherein "the act itself can be morally significant," forming a relational structure characterized by "teacher-caring-student".

To achieve the reconstruction of the moral relationship between teachers and students, it is essential to restore moral connections within this relationship. By infusing moral connections into the teacher-student dynamic, educators and learners can return to a teaching relationship rooted in ethical care. Within this framework, teachers and students collaboratively foster a moral atmosphere, co-create values, and collectively practice ethical norms. Morality thrives on the premise of a symbiotic bond between teachers and students. This study examines the moral dimension of the teacher-student relationship, incorporating the concepts of mutual care, transcendence, practicality, and life moral education in reconstructing this relationship. It aims to establish a framework for understanding the teacher-student relationship based on 'profession-ethics', which consists of

three fundamental dimensions: the symbiotic moral relationship, normative mutual promotion relationship, and transcendent mutual assistance relationship. These dimensions provide a basis for using 'relationship' as a method to explore theories of moral education and teacher-student relationships. By focusing on the 'teacher-student moral relationship', this study not only investigates it as an entity but also utilizes it as a research approach that combines critical analysis with practical application. Through empirical and historical studies, it explores the overall structure, changes over time, and practical characteristics of Chinese moral education through analyzing the 'teacher-student relationship'. Furthermore, it uncovers various aspects of the teacher-student moral relationship derived from professional bonds while determining their ethical implications and consequences.

### 5.1 The symbiotic nexus between morality and ethics.

The coexistence of teachers and students in the educational environment is indisputable. However, why should there be a proposition of "symbiosis" in the moral relationship between teachers and students? Symbiosis refers to the interdependence, mutual nourishment, and collective achievement through the exchange of symbols and energy for common survival and development within an ecosystem. Symbiosis entails relying on each other, nurturing one another, and striving together; if one party ceases to exist, the other will gradually decline. Diverging from the perspective of intellectual education that solely focuses on teachers' responsibility for imparting knowledge and fostering academic achievements among students, symbiosis not only discards the hierarchical "domination-subordination" relationship between teachers and students but also opposes pure intellectual education's "knowledge-money" exchange dynamic. It represents a mutually dependent, coexisting, reciprocal connection between teachers and students within teaching settings while serving as both the foundation and practical field for authentic education. In the realm of moral relationships, the encounter between "I" and "you" signifies a meeting of equals rather than an encounter with an objectified "it". Moral education plays a pivotal role in transitioning from an "I-it" dynamic to an authentic "I-you" relationship, thereby immersing individuals into a world where genuine morality thrives. The moral landscape within the confines of the "I-it" paradigm is dominated by hierarchical power structures, rendering it desolate for those who are marginalized and reduced to objects. Education and moral instruction guided by this perspective are perceived as deliberate endeavors aimed at

transforming and molding individuals according to predetermined objectives. However, Buber criticizes such intentions stating that if one party seeks to exert planned influence over another, then reciprocity within the context of an "I-you" relationship becomes inherently incomplete—a reciprocity lacking in holistic concern that recognizes others as beings akin to oneself.

Firstly, it should be acknowledged that schools do not function as competitive societies, and the interpersonal relationships within them are not based on competition or conflict but rather on symbiosis. In the educational setting, individuals coexist and collaborate not only for their own personal growth but also for the betterment of others. As the overall concept of education transcends its historical stage, it becomes evident that in our complex modernity, individualism is facing a crisis while symbiosis emerges as a consensus in educational practices. Symbiosis recognizes individuals as interconnected entities existing not only at an external systemic and interest level but also within the realms of values and spirituality. People are no longer isolated atoms in the physical world; instead, they are integral parts of an ecosystem. The notion of symbiotic relationships serves as a critique to mono-directional teaching dynamics where neither teachers nor students hold a central position or merely serve as background elements.

Secondly, symbiosis encompasses spiritual connections beyond mere coexistence which solely refers to objective facts regarding people's physical proximity without addressing internal connections explicitly. Education demands resonance among individuals at a spiritual level rather than superficial alignment in physical space while diverging paths spiritually.

Lastly, according to Helbart's perspective on education's highest purpose being morality, it is inconceivable for education to thrive within an "immoral" or "unethical" environment. Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship can be considered as either "immoral" or "amoral". How should we approach the discourse on "the morality of education" or "moral education"? In other words, when someone undermines morality within the teacher-student relationship and this behavior remains unaddressed, the moral fabric between teachers and students deteriorates. Education plays a crucial role in cultivating individuals' morality, while an individual's moral compass also influences their educational experience. Establishing ethical interpersonal relationships is an inherent requirement of education. If the moral foundation between teachers and students crumbles, education will inevitably devolve into a transactional exchange focused

solely on knowledge acquisition rather than its practicality and transcendence.

## 5.2 Normative reciprocal promotion relationship

Institutionalization and standardization are crucial characteristics of modern educational institutions. Many schools have also developed various systems in the pursuit of promoting morality. However, the pervasive presence of school bureaucracy and institutionalization often leads to these systems being perceived as a substitute for genuine moral values, thereby exerting complete control over the entire educational environment. Consequently, one might question whether the relationship between teachers and students can solely rely on such systems for maintenance or if it is merely an institutional connection. The answer is negative. While it is undeniable that flexibility is a limitation when attempting to realize socialization through morality, the rigidity inherent in systemic structures remains essential for effective education within schools. Nevertheless, this does not imply that we should completely disregard the cultivation of moral relationships; rather, our focus should be on nurturing strengths while mitigating weaknesses. Establishing normative relationships based on mutual promotion serves as a practical and realistic approach to avoiding moral risks and fostering ethical coherence among teachers and students.

Firstly, the presence of normativity serves to prevent the emergence of moral anomie. Within educational institutions, the teacher-student relationship operates within a specific normative framework, which forms a crucial basis for collective action. During the process of social learning, individuals must continually regulate their innate desires and gradually acquire mastery over autonomous decision-making. The involvement of external influences represents a "heterodyne" process through which efficient intervention can be achieved. Normativity constitutes an essential prerequisite for education's existence; without it, education becomes merely a slogan and superficial formality.

Secondly, the reciprocal promotion imbues the school norms with novel connotations to mitigate the emergence of moral risks. The primary objective of establishing an institutional system to coordinate interpersonal relations is to foster harmonious coexistence and comprehensive development of individuals and classes, rather than fostering alienation as a means to restrict people. This orientation assumes fresh implications in the reciprocal promotion relationship of norms, specifically through students' assistance to teachers and schools in educational activities and implementation of teaching authority. More precisely, it manifests in the following three aspects: firstly, students should actively participate in the

process of formulating the school's moral system, transitioning from being mere rule followers to becoming rule makers; secondly, students should engage in planning and executing school moral activities instead of passively participating; thirdly, they should supervise teachers' teaching activities while identifying instances of moral indiscipline within the school environment, thereby contributing towards building a morally sound atmosphere. This reciprocal promotion relationship does not stem from teachers possessing absolute control over teaching power or exerting arbitrary leadership over students' moral lives; nor does it arise from students assuming a dominant "subject" or "center" status within education that usurps teachers' educational authority. Instead, it represents an inspection and supervision conducted from their respective ethical positions.

Finally, the normative mutual promotion reflects the value guidance of education. Education is an intricate process. In the eyes of educators, schools are replete with diverse situations. When confronted with moral dilemmas, it is inevitable for the system to encounter omissions and gaps that cannot be entirely controlled or predicted. Relying solely on the system does not suffice in fully exercising moral and educational responsibilities. The normative mutual promotion relationship, distinct from top-down bureaucratic and command relationships, aims to ensure the effectiveness and legitimacy of education while fostering a positive development in teacher-student dynamics. The normative mutual promotion approach acknowledges that learners are "developing individuals" who require teachers' guidance in terms of moral knowledge and experience; simultaneously providing them support and recognition regarding their moral capabilities and rights from a humanistic perspective. Depriving students of their right to moral autonomy due to a lack of ethical experience contradicts educational morality. Only when students receive respect for their moral autonomy can they comprehend various ethical requirements and possess intrinsic motivation for leading a morally upright life. Similarly, teachers should transition from abstraction to reality; being perceived as ordinary individuals striving for moral excellence who also necessitate assistance and correction in matters of ethics. At the Tao level, teachers and students should establish a relationship based on equality and respect where legitimate education can take place; enabling collaboration between teachers and students on ethical issues both theoretically and practically.

### 5.3 Reaching Beyond Mutual Assistance

The transcendental attribute of human beings is primarily manifested in morality. Institutionalization represents a precautionary mindset that often



assumes the "worst-case scenario". While institutionalization is indispensable, it merely reflects the lowest level of moral vision in the field of education and cannot solely rely on systems to elevate individuals to higher moral standards. In adaptive education, the transcendence and creativity of future life gradually diminish. Within the "adaptive" educational environment, both teachers and students progressively lose their capacity to transform the moral landscape, eroding their confidence in sustainable moral development and diminishing their courage to overcome ethical dilemmas. Teachers and students merely "satisfy" adaptation to current circumstances, with their relationship confined solely to mutual "adaptation," thereby eliminating the impetus for moral growth. To transcend this limitation of adaptation, transcendent mutual assistance must be incorporated into education. The transcendent mutual assistance relationship represents the ideal state of the teacher-student dynamic. Achieving transcendence in this context is an arduous task, requiring educators and learners to possess both wisdom for resolving moral dilemmas and the courage to surpass them. In practical terms, due to institutional routines, teachers and students have developed "adaptable" teaching methods and habits that prioritize basic public morality within school education. However, morality encompasses a more profound spiritual connotation that extends beyond personal gains or losses as standards of value. It entails a proposition greater than daily virtues such as dedication, loyalty, and justice. This spiritual value cannot be attained through mere reasoning but rather necessitates non-reflective choices for realization. Consequently, achieving moral transcendence appears contingent upon individual efforts. Nevertheless, students face challenges in practicing it due to their limited moral experiences while teachers alone are insufficient in attaining this goal. The transcendent mutual aid relationship represents a crucial advancement in institutionalized education, emphasizing the significance of morality and the value of life. In response to the limitations within schools, the mutual aid relationship between teachers and students has successfully surpassed these constraints. At its core, this transcendent mutual aid relationship focuses on fostering shared moral growth between teachers and students, thereby transforming educational subjects from "individual" to "collective." Furthermore, this transcendence extends beyond mere content by challenging traditional educational systems and textbooks through teacher-student collaboration. Finally, in terms of form, teachers and students demonstrate tacit understanding and joint efforts in practicing morality, thus elevating

morality from cognition to action.

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