

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Concept of “Educational Transformation” and its Relationship to Civilizing Missions in Early China

Erica Fox Brindley* 

Pennsylvania State University

*Corresponding author. Email: efb12@psu.edu

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Abstract

This article examines the early history and evolution of the concept of *jiaohua* (教化 “educational transformation”) as a reference to civilizing missions in China. It explores Ru (Confucian) concepts advocating the widespread education of the masses, showing how such concepts were linked to notions of ethnicity and moral attainment. Then it contextualizes the first uses of educational transformation in writings concerning statecraft. Xunzi emerges as a pivotal figure who helped adapt the statecraft rhetoric on educational transformation to the largely Ru goal of spreading a morally superior Huaxia culture among the masses and to peoples of other cultures. I then move beyond this conceptual history to examine a few civilizing missions in the Han era. My purpose is to link large-scale, civilizing missions in Chinese history with the early philosophical rhetoric and show how history was shaped by these underlying conceptual orientations.

Keywords: civilizing missions; Huaxia; ethnic identity; assimilation; sinicization

The issues of ethnic identity and assimilation in Chinese history have been of special interest not just to China scholars but to China watchers and the general public of today. The news has been filled with discussions that touch upon China’s use of soft power—or persuasive and attractive, rather than explicitly coercive—approaches to win over or control minority peoples along its borders.¹ In a *New York Times* opinion piece from December, 2018, on China’s ethnic policies, James Leibold goes as far as to

I am thankful to a slew of anonymous reviewers and readers for their helpful feedback in making this a better article.

¹On soft power, see Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Perseus Books, 2004). Critics of the concept point out that much of what is understood as soft power in contemporary world politics is actually supported by more coercive elements, specifically, by understanding attraction as “representational force.” See Janice B. Mattern, “Why Soft Power Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Sociolinguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics,” *Journal of International Studies* 33.3 (2005), 583–612.

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claim that there has been a very long history of “mind control” in China.² One might certainly wonder what Leibold means by “mind control” and quibble with the claim for its long presence in Chinese history; nonetheless, his provocative piece opens up many legitimate questions about so-called educational policies designed by imperial or state powers to influence and control ethnic, alien others. In this article I examine the evolution of a key concept referring to a process of cultural assimilation, one that developed in ancient Chinese history.

The term *jiaohua* literally means “teaching and transforming” (*jiao + hua*), but I will refer to it throughout this article as “educational transformation.” As a concept, it dates back to the Warring States period and eventually comes to be associated not just with the ideal of a good education, but of an education that involves *inculcating people in the moral values and ways of Chinese culture and civilization*. In some scholarly circles, it has become a buzzword for the spread of Confucian moral education across regions of Asia, and, as such, it is not examined historically but projected onto the past to analyze Confucian self-cultivation practices throughout history.³ In this article I do not use it as an analytical tool to unpack Confucian moral philosophy. Rather, I focus on its first emergence during the Warring States to show that it was, in fact, never a neutral, philosophical concept concerned exclusively with moral development. From the very beginning, it was implicated in a particular approach to state control and policies of cultural, even ethnic conversion.

In dealing with ancient conceptions of “Chineseness,” I use the more appropriate historical term, Huaxia 華夏, throughout this article. Huaxia is one of a few ethnic markers that distinguishes between peoples who associated themselves with Central States (Zhongguo 中國), Zhou-inflected (周) cultural norms and ritual practices, as opposed to others outside this ethno-cultural sphere.⁴ My articulation of Huaxia as an ethnicity, rather than merely a “culture,” follows the definition of ethnic identity proposed by Jonathan Hall in his work on ancient Hellenistic ethnicity, with a stipulation added concerning cultural norms.⁵ Under this definition, ethnic identity consists in a constructed, shared sense of a homeland (for Zhou-period China, this was loosely defined through the notion of the “Central States”), a shared myth of origin (legendary sage kings of the past and the Three Dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou), and a shared set of cultural norms (the ritual system of the Zhou)—all of which the Huaxia possessed. And, lest we think that the issues revolve only around some weak notion of “Chinese culture,” I remind the reader that it was precisely through culture that this Huaxia, ethnic identity was thought to be transmitted and spread.⁶

In what follows, I outline the evolution of pre-Qin and early Han formulations on educational transformation, showing how it came to be associated with both a moral

²James Leibold, “Mind Control in China Has a Very Long History,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/11/28/opinion/china-reeducation-mind-control-xinjiang.html.

³As I mention below, there is much scholarship on the topic of *jiaohua* as a form of Confucian moral cultivation, most of it connecting it to politics in a general way. Wang Baoguo 王保国, “Jiaohua de zhengzhi yu zhengzhi de jiaohua—chuantong Zhongyuan zhengzhi wenhua chuanbo moshi tanxi” 教化的政治与政治的教化—传统中原政治文化传播模式探析, in *Xueshu luntan* 1 (2008).

⁴My use of “Huaxia” is comparable to using the term “Hellenistic” instead of “Greek” when referring to the sphere of Hellenistic culture in the ancient Mediterranean region.

⁵Jonathan Hall in his work, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶For more extensive discussions of early forms of ethnic identity and how culture played a role, see Erica Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE–50 CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially 118–31.

and assimilationist agenda. Notions of educational transformation were adopted and adapted from discourses on statecraft into more Confucian visions of state expansion and control.⁷ In particular, seminal articulations of educational transformation by Xunzi provide the backdrop for understanding how the concept developed as an ethnically charged educational and moral ideal, as well as an important political tool for early Chinese states and empires. It is through Xunzi's writings, I argue, that we begin to see the naturalization and accommodation of *jiaohua* from contemporary concepts of statecraft, marking a pivotal point in which the concept assumes meaning as a tool for assimilating and educating others in an ethnicized, moral way. Indeed, Xunzi's writings reveal the transformation of this term into something comparable to the notion of a *civilizing mission*, with moral undertones that cling to it as its meanings change and vary throughout the centuries.⁸

After outlining the early development of educational transformation and establishing its imperialistic implications, I link it to historical examples of civilizing missions during the Eastern Han empire. These civilizing missions reveal the ways in which the rhetoric of educational transformation matched up with on-the-ground programs designed to transform alien, non-Huaxia others into civilized human beings.

My analysis attempts to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions of educational transformation on the one hand and actual civilizing missions on the other. When early Chinese texts mention the term “educational transformation,” it is usually in a more abstract, philosophical context of idealized rulership, and not specifically about what actually has been implemented or taken place. In other types of writings, like histories, authors often do not explicitly link educational policies or assimilationist laws to concepts found in more philosophical texts. The absence of the explicit mention of “educational transformation” in relationship to actual policy does not, however, mean that it did not serve as a guiding principle or implicit force for government efforts. Although it is difficult to gauge the extent to which early imperial policies and measures were directly linked to the philosophical rhetoric of educational transformation, we may make our own determinations about how they matched up. I will attempt to bridge this gap between philosophical ideas and imperial practice by demonstrating a congruence between the moral and cultural imperatives of educational transformation and the expression of political policies, administrative practices, and diplomatic approaches to the management of both the masses (zhong 眾, min 民) and non-Huaxia peoples (these two categories need not be distinct from each other).

Recent Scholarship on Educational Transformation and Civilizing Missions

Studies on contemporary, twentieth-century Chinese approaches to civilizing projects abound. Instead of highlighting the historical ideology of educational transformation that justified projects in the past, Stevan Harrell discusses the more contemporary

⁷I use “Confucian” here to refer to the ritual traditions and views on morality and self-cultivation associated with the Ru social group in ancient China.

⁸Scholars working on borderlands history have touched on the relationship between so-called Confucian statesmen and civilizing missions. See Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 104–7, and Tamara Chin, *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yenching Institute, 2014). Uffe Bergeton provides an extensive analysis of the linguistic development of the ancient terms for “civilization” and various ethnic others in East Asia in *The Emergence of Civilizational Consciousness in Early China: History Word by Word* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

Chinese notion of “culture” as *wenhua*, translating the latter as “literary transformation” to highlight the idea that culture could be acquired through a “literary transformation that brings forth civilization.”⁹ The bulk of this scholarship, in Harrell’s edited volume and beyond, aims not so much to outline a history of the ideology of civilizing projects as to discuss actual civilizing projects and how they functioned in various instances of recent Chinese history. In this sense, much of the contemporary scholarship takes as its starting assumption the idea that the civilizing project was a Confucian, Han project with a long history.¹⁰ My article adds to this scholarship, showing that the kernel of this assumption is largely correct but the details for really early periods are lacking. This analysis attempts to show how, from some of the very earliest state and imperial contexts, the concept of educational transformation became inflected with Confucian morality and implicated in approaches to state control and civilizing projects.

There is also a plethora of scholarship from China that examines the concept of educational transformation in Chinese history. But rather than treating the concept as it developed historically, most of this scholarship takes the term as a general, watered-down heuristic, meaning something like, “moral transformation.”¹¹ In this sense, scholars discuss educational transformation in terms of the most general platform of Confucian self-cultivation: the goal of transforming one’s heart-mind, or of internalizing the right values so that one knows how to act properly in every situation.¹² Unfortunately, I think, this simplifies and reduces the concept to refer broadly and incorrectly to Confucian thought about self-cultivation, or, all of Confucian thought.¹³ By understanding the notion of “transformation” to apply at the individual, psychological level, this approach ignores its functional and social implications for the transformation—through state-funded educational programs—of the masses, as well as of various populations of ethnic others.¹⁴ It also glosses over

⁹In Stevan Harrell, “Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reaction to Them,” in *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontiers*, edited by Stevan Harrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 7–9 and 25. I think Harrell’s translation of *wenhua* is wrong here, but his basic point that it implies a civilizing process is spot on.

¹⁰The story of imperial interactions with “barbarians” in and around the frontiers of imperial states in China is indeed a long one. For studies concerning the premodern period, see especially Magnus Fiskesjö, “On the ‘Raw’ and ‘Cooked’: Barbarians of Imperial China,” *Inner China* 1–2 (1999), 135–68, as well as the huge volume of recent works by scholars Pamela Crossley, Naomi Standen, Leo Shin, Kathlene Baldanza, Mark Elliott, Erica Brindley, Nicola DiCosmo, Uffe Bergeton, Tamara Chin, Andrew Chittick, and others.

¹¹Chen Zongzhang 陈宗章 and Wei Tianjiao 尉天骄, “‘Jiaohua’: yige Ruyao chengqing de gainian” 教化：一个需要澄清的概念, *Hehai Daxue Xuebao; Zhaxue Shehui kexueban* 4 (2011); Zhan Shiyong 詹世友, “Xian Qin Rujia daode jiaohua de butong fanxing zhi fenxi” 先秦儒家道德教化的不同范型之分析, *Zhexue yanjiu* 2 (2008); Yang Fuzhang 杨福章, “Kongzi de shehui jiaohua sixiang ji qi xiandai yiyun” 孔子的社会教化思想及其现代意蕴, *Lanzhou Jiaotong Daxue xuebao* 5 (2008); Yang Zhao ming 杨朝明, “Chuyi Rujia de jiaohua wenhua” 刍议儒家的教化文化, *Kongzi yanjiu* 6 (2008).

¹²Liu Yongyan 刘永艳, “Xunzi ‘jiaohua’ lun zai daxuesheng daode shehui huazhong de jiaoshi” 荀子“教化”论在大学生道德社会化中的价值, *Hehai Daxue Xuebao; Zhaxue Shehui kexueban* 1 (2000); Zhang Desheng 张德胜, “Rujia lunli yu shehui zhixu: Shehuixue de quanshi” 儒家伦理与社会秩序：社会学的诠释, *Shanghai Renmin Publishing* 43 (2008); Tang Mingyan 唐明燕, “Lun Xian Qin Rujia jiaohua zhaxue de lilun genji” 论先秦儒家教化哲学的理论根基, *Zhongguo Shiyong Daxue Xuebao* 5 (2009); Zhang Xiqin 张锡勤, “Shilun Rujia de ‘jiaohua’ sixiang” 试论儒家的“教化”思想, *Qilu Xuekan* 2 (1998).

¹³See Chen Zongzhang 陈宗章, “Xian Qin Rujia ‘jiaohua’ sixiang de yanjiu huigu yu zhanwang” 先秦儒家“教化”思想的研究回顾与展望, *Chuan Shan Xuekan* 1 (2014), 119–26.

¹⁴While it is certainly acceptable to take a contemporary, twentieth-century concept of educational transformation as an heuristic for analysis of the past, it is highly problematic that authors tend to present this definition uncritically, as though the meanings associated with it currently had a deep past.

what distinguishes the concept from general exhortations for self-cultivation in Chinese thought, downplaying its wider political and ethnic implications.

This essay will therefore not examine educational transformation as another way of discussing Confucian moral self-cultivation and self-transformation. And, just as I do not equate educational transformation with Confucian philosophy writ large, I also do not reduce the entire Confucian moral project to a mere performance of power or politics underpinned by educational transformation. Instead, I ask: what were the contexts in which “educational transformation” as a concept was first used, and how did it develop as an ideological tool for state control in early imperial China (ca. 3rd century BCE–2nd century CE)? Is it fair to say that it was enacted in actual government policy as a civilizing process? And to what extent was there an ethnic component to this process or mission? I would hope that this analysis will help us better to appreciate early Chinese philosophy not as disembodied knowledge but as moral claims with cultural and political purchase, entangled in real-life stances and dilemmas.

The lack of historically contextualized studies of the concept of educational transformation suggests how thoroughly it has been naturalized, as something tantamount to a generic notion of “moral cultivation,” in the modern imagination. Let us begin, then, by assuming that there is not some type of eternal, Confucian orientation that can be characterized by educational transformation, but rather, that the concept meant various things to different authors at different times in history. This will allow us to take a small step towards historicizing this native concept and linking its earliest meanings to China’s long imperial history and changing sense of identity.

Civilizing Missions and the Role of Culture During the Han Empire

A main claim in this article is that the concept of educational transformation developed in early China largely to promote approaches to state control that later became infused with ethno-political and moral agendas. Xunzi served as a pivotal figure by adapting and changing the concept to fit his moral, cultural, and political goals. And because this morality was infused with a certain ethno-cultural vision of the Huaxia self, educational transformation became a perfect rhetorical tool for promoting its values. Indeed, if we examine the civilizing missions and policies aimed at bolstering centralized, imperial control during the later Han period, they appear to fit with the underlying assumptions linked with Confucian educational transformation.

The claims above fit into current debates on the topic of imperial control in early Chinese history and clarify the extent to which early Chinese empires used what we might call cultural tools or the goods of “civilization” to help manage and control the empire.¹⁵ Pamela Crossley has recently argued that early pre-modern empires across Eurasia were largely imperial only from a military and commercial perspective, and that the cultural and moral power of such regimes was severely limited if not non-existent in regions outside the capital, lying mostly in the hands of local elites.¹⁶ Her argument

¹⁵For an in-depth discussion of the linguistic development of terms defining “civilization” and the self in early China, see Uffe Bergeton, *The Emergence of Civilizational Consciousness in Early China*.

¹⁶Pamela Kyle Crossley, “The Imaginal Bond of ‘Empire’ and ‘Civilization’ in Eurasian History,” in *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, edited by eds. Erica Brindley and On-cho Ng, special volume of *Asian Empires and Imperialism* 2.2 (2016), 81–114. With respect to these points, Crossley states, “On the ground, Rome and Han as cultural or moral entities were, in all likelihood, notional outside of the capital or the cities that were the base of provincial government,” 91–92. And, “Rome and Han were, at root, corporations of conquest and commercial inducement,” 93.

rests on the notion that authors in later periods of history were invested in fabricating a cultural and moralistic, or “imaginal bond” of empire, characterized by a transformative civilizing presence—one that created the illusion of a longstanding cultural mission deep within the origins of Chinese history, when in fact there was none.¹⁷

Mark Lewis takes another view of the early Chinese empire, one that lends more power to culture and institutions that go beyond commerce and the military:

Military conquest is only part of the imperial story, however. China owes its ability to endure across time, and to re-form itself again and again after periods of disunity, to a fundamental reshaping of Chinese culture by the earliest dynasties, the Qin and the Han. Politics and military institutions were reconfigured, of course. But so were literary and religious practices, kinship structure, village life, and even city-scapes.¹⁸

Similarly, Michael Nylan, while detailing how the rhetoric of “empire” aimed at imparting a sense of “an ‘imagined community’ of supremely civilized subjects,” refers to concrete rituals and public displays that were propagated by the Han to facilitate a “fully socialized behavior” appropriate for the imperial citizen.¹⁹ In such a manner, both Lewis’ and Nylan’s views argue, contra Crossley, that culture and values played a non-negligible role in the building of empire and an imperial presence in Qin-Han China. Nylan in particular goes the furthest to demonstrate how various civilizing influences transformed the behaviors and mindsets of everyday individuals, claiming that imperial actors sought to bring populations together on the basis of shared values, behavioral norms and practices, and cultures of learning.²⁰

While it is one thing to argue that an empire made use of cultural tools for the purpose of imperial consolidation and governance, it is another to claim that imperial leadership actively and consciously propagated measures to spread certain ideals. Intriguingly, as I show below, educational transformation might be viewed as a tool for precisely this latter enterprise; that is, as a tool for civilizing the various populations of the empire according to a specific moral and religious ideology. Indeed, the emphasis on education in the phrase “educational transformation” suggests those who supported such a mission were ostensibly interested in promoting their moral and religious ideology through education or teachings, rather than more coercive means. The civilizing mission that was educational transformation, I argue, usually assumed the express goal of propagating Huaxia moral culture via an ostensibly non-coercive approach. But whether a completely soft approach was intended, or whether the reality behind any given invocation of the term “educational transformation” involved violence or the threat of force, is a different matter. In the early imperial period, it is clear that

¹⁷Crossley, “The Imaginal Bond,” 106.

¹⁸Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

¹⁹Michael Nylan, “The Rhetoric of ‘Empire’ in the Classical Era in China,” in *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, edited by Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39–64, here 61.

²⁰Other scholars working on early imperial China generally share in Nylan’s and Lewis’ beliefs. Yuri Pines, for example, argues that imperial “longevity owes as much to ideological as to geographical, military, or administrative factors,” in *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 222.

despite the “soft” rhetoric, civilizing missions involved cultural transformations rooted in military force and coercion of some kind.

The Han empire consisted in an agglomeration of a vastly diverse population. At one point in the first century BCE, its geographic expanse included most of what is now the People’s Republic of China and a long leg extending into Central Asia (minus Inner Mongolia but plus much of the Korean peninsula and the northern regions of what is now Vietnam). Most of the peoples who came under Han control in these regions belonged to very different linguistic, historical, and religious communities, even in the heart of the empire near the capital at Chang-an and in the more nearby, centralized commanderies.²¹ This means that the project of educational transformation was not meant to be applied exclusively to radically different populations on the margins of the empire; it would also have been considered relevant to the various non-Huaxia and perhaps lower-class populations within the empire. So, instead of imagining a clash of cultures at the borders of the Han, we might conceive of a situation in which civilizing missions and processes were taking place well within the empire as well.

Educational Transformation in Non-Confucian Contexts

Xunzi (ca. 310–ca. 235 BCE), appears to have been the first Confucian thinker to invoke the phrase “educational transformation” when speaking about educating the masses. Significantly, however, some of the early uses of “educational transformation” as a compound term likely predated Xunzi and did not stem exclusively from texts traditionally considered to be Confucian. Indeed, the usage of educational transformation in a variety of texts of the fourth to third centuries BCE underscores the generally pervasive adoption of the phrase by a host of thinkers to refer to state educational programs—increasingly universal in scope—aimed at effecting social change through education and influence rather than punishment and coercion.

Early uses of educational transformation speak about rulers and state-run initiatives for educating the population of one’s own country in some manner, not necessarily moral. In the “Cuo fa” chapter of the *Book of the Lord Shang* (much of the received version of this text likely dates to the third century BCE), educational transformation is used with reference to an idealized state of governance wherein laws and affairs of state acquire their appropriate measures, while the people of the state work their hardest to achieve merit so that they may be duly promoted:

When laws lack measure and number, and one’s affairs of state are confused, then laws take hold but disorder reigns. For these reasons, the enlightened ruler assigns his people tasks in such a way that they must exert their utmost effort in measuring their merit. When merit is established, wealth and nobility follow on its heels, there is no private virtue, and so educational transformation is fulfilled.

法無度數，而事日煩，則法立而治亂矣。是以明君之使其民也，使必盡力以規其功，功立而富貴隨之，無私德也，故教化成。²²

²¹For work on the southern reaches of early China and the many types of state–non-state interactions there, see Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*.

²²*Shangjun shu zhu yi* 商君書注譯, edited by Gao Heng 高亨 (Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing, 1974), 89.

Of note is the fact that in this passage, *jiaohua* is not a description of government measures themselves but of a process and goal of social transformation that results from proper governmental controls. Such a process involved viewing the population as a valuable and potential resource: the people's utmost efforts at various tasks were to be extracted, and this extraction of labor would result in an educational reform associated with the goal of a tame and orderly population that worked for the central state, not against it. Just as a tailor snips and cuts a garment to make it fit a designated, overall pattern, the enlightened ruler alters the people of his society so that they fit in accordance with administrative expectations in the centralized bureaucracy. Educational transformation in this context, therefore, is the overall pattern the keeps society together and coherent; it is the net effect of an enlightened ruler's good governance. Clearly, in this context, educational transformation lacks moral connotations, and it is not associated at all with the Confucians or their intellectual legacy concerning education.

In a military text called the *Stratagems of the Grand Marshal* (*Sima fa* 司馬法), which contains material that may date to as early as the fourth century BCE, educational transformation is mentioned as both a technique and goal for training the masses of people, which lays the foundation for the character of one's army.²³ The idea behind such broad-scale education is to provide the common people with a means of being good, getting along, and being integrated into a common culture. Consider the following statement:

It is only after one has thoroughly trained [*jiao*] the people that one might carefully command and select from among them. When government affairs are completely arranged, then higher offices can be divvied out. When instructions [*jiao*] are completely learned (literally, "internalized"), then the people will display kindness. When practices are habituated, then the people as a body become acculturated. This is the pinnacle of educational transformation.

既致教其民，然後謹選而使之。事極修則官給矣。教極省則民興良矣。習慣成則民體俗矣。教化之至也。²⁴

Here, the phrase educational transformation reflects the results of a wide range of instructional measures (*jiao* 教) that help create an obedient, well-trained army—one that coheres as a single entity according to common military habits. As a goal achieved through political and military initiatives, educational transformation in this context implicates programs that extend well beyond moral education, even though the text does extol kindness. Nonetheless, its scope is more limited to the strategic cultivation of traits among the common people—traits that are desirable for the creation of strong, effective, and cohesive military units.

If we examine all these instances of educational transformation in early non-Confucian texts, a pattern seems to emerge. Educational transformation designates an overarching program (or the effect of some program) promulgated by state leaders to unify, harmonize, and create a coherent whole out of a larger, more diverse population. These non-Confucian approaches to educational transformation that pre-date

²³This anonymous text, associated with the ancient state of Qi, is considered to be one of the "Seven Military Classics of China." Like other texts of its genre, it discusses military strategy, organization, and administration, as well as the underlying philosophy of leading a troop to military victory.

²⁴*Sima Fa* 司馬法, "Tianzi zhi yi" 天子之義.

Confucian usages give us important insight when trying to understand the philosopher, Xunzi's, role in changing the course and popularity of such a notion in the third century BCE.

Jiao (Education) and Confucian Precursors to Xunzi's "Educational Transformation"

In the pre-imperial period of China (before 221 BCE), the main paradigm for thinking about how to spread cultural influence effectively was via a cluster of concepts and practices associated with elite, Zhou culture, which were cherished and reinforced by the teachings of various Confucian groups. These included the notion of education, or teachings, (教 *jiao*), the concept of *De* (德 "virtuous power," "attractive virtue") and the emulation of good role models, and the use of a set of ceremonies and formal codes of behavior called the rites (禮 *li*). Self-cultivation was considered to be a primary means of ruling over and transforming others into moral human beings. Early Confucian educational ideals consistently emphasized how important it was for individuals to internalize moral values, and their philosophy often built elaborate socio-political objectives by starting with the singular power of individuals.

A closer look at texts from the centuries immediately before China's unification in 221 BCE reveals that "educational transformation" as a term does not appear even once in the earliest Confucian texts, such as the *Analects*, the *Human Nature Emerges from Heaven* (an excavated bamboo-slip text dating to around 300 BCE), and the *Mencius*. Instead, the authors of this era speak of *jiao* (教 "to teach," "teachings," "education") as a method of broad education and influence over the masses. At times, *jiao* represents some of the things educational transformation would stand for in later contexts: namely, the education of the masses, and not merely the self-cultivation of the individual. For example, in the *Analects* alone, *jiao* occurs in a handful of instances to refer to a general form of instruction that should be applied equally to all people (*min* 民).²⁵ Such instructions undoubtedly existed to provide people with the moral foundations for civilized behavior.²⁶ We can infer this from Confucius's multiple statements about *jiao* serving as a social regimen to be applied in cases where people were to be sent off for military service, or as a prerequisite for those poised to judge legal or criminal cases.²⁷

Throughout the *Analects*, a compilation attributed to Confucius (ca. 551–479 BCE) but most likely written by disciples spanning centuries, for example, authors eschew protocols, policies, or legal regulations in favor of a more personal, less rule-based vision of a society built on the rites (*li*) and governed by a powerful, virtuous leader.²⁸

²⁵When used to refer to the general instruction of the masses, *jiao* is used exclusively as a verb. As a noun, it is found only once in the text, referring more specifically to Confucius' four areas of teaching—confined to his own disciples—such as letters, conduct, sincerity, and trust. Whether these differences in the usages of the term are meaningful or just a consequence of the randomness of our record, we cannot know for sure. Such usages certainly give us enough reason to consider the likelihood that the notion of *jiaohua* as a binome may not have been prevalent in the discourse at the time, and that *jiao* as a verb probably refers to the simple act of instructing the population, not to a more elaborate, formalized social program of instruction. In any case, the meanings of *jiao* in the *Analects* are twofold, referring on the one hand to high-level, moral teachings that would have been appropriate for the self-cultivation of an elite, educated class of men, and on the other hand to the act of instructing the general population in some way.

²⁶See *Analects* 15.39.

²⁷In particular, *Analects* 3.29 and 3.30.

²⁸While it is true that the system of the rites could be understood as just another type of formal rule-based institution, the important distinction between the rites and laws in ancient China is based on sources

The goal of harmonizing one's inner emotional realm with one's outer responsiveness to proper duties and behaviors is not easy; for this reason, incentives and disincentives need to be grounded not in such "thin" measures of reward and punishment, but in "thicker," more long-lasting, psychological—and indeed, educational—measures of moral learning. Beyond the *Analects*, passage upon passage in the early Confucian texts provide poignant arguments for a program of deep moral education—i.e., the thoroughgoing inculcation of a belief-system—as opposed to a system of behavioral control enforced through a legalistic system of punishments and rewards.

It is important to distinguish between early conceptions of self-cultivation, which promote a more predominantly non-coercive, cultural (via the rites) and individual-based approach to culture change, and educational transformation, which was a public policy concept that implied and justified government-based civilizing missions. Self-cultivation was a self-conscious practice for individuals, especially elites and members of the ruling classes, to better themselves and society. While its social effects were thought to be real and desirable, it was not based on defined rules, laws, or policies that were to be institutionally sanctioned in any way. So, even though self-cultivation was an educational practice of utmost importance in early China, and even though it is necessary to understand how Confucian self-cultivation forms the background and basis for later, Confucian approaches to educational transformation, it cannot be conflated with this latter concept.

In the recently excavated Confucian morality text from the bamboo-slip cache at Guodian, *Human Nature Derives from Heavenly Command* (性自命出 *Xing zi ming chu*),²⁹ we find an intriguing use of the term *jiao* as a key philosophical concept representing both sagely teachings derived from the "human Dao" (*ren Dao* 人道), or, the "proper *jiao*," and, more generally, any environmental influence that gives rise to adaptive learning, such as "upbringing" or "culture." Here, the dual meanings of *jiao* seem to parallel those found in the *Analects*, referring to both specific types of Confucian teachings intended for gentlemanly cultivation as well as large-scale, cultural and moral influences that affect the masses of people.³⁰ An important difference lies in the fact that the author of this text views this broader meaning for *jiao* neither in terms of the act of instruction, nor in terms of self-conscious, educational activities undertaken by leaders for the benefit of those below. Rather, he uses the term more passively in terms of general influences in culture that shape, sway, and change us. This distinction is important because it suggests that the primary determinant of culture is *jiao*, and that different cultures can be distinguished from each other through their different forms of education.

This equation of education with what we might call "cultures" compels us to recognize the existence of multiple cultural influences and their powers over humans. It is

of human motivation. The *locus classicus* for the idea that humans will be more thoroughly and naturally motivated to do good through the implicit, cultural influences of the rites rather than through the carrot-and-stick method of legal statutes occurs in *Analects*, 2.3. Other famous examples of the ruler or nobleman leading and influencing others through charismatic, contagious virtue can be found in *Analects* passage 2.1, where the virtuous ruler is compared to the Pole Star that remains in the center with others revolving around it, and in 12.19, where the nobleman's virtue is compared to the wind that blows over grass, making it bend.

²⁹This text was published in 1993 in a volume on bamboo slips found at Guodian. It is also found among the slips purchased and published by the Shanghai Museum, under the name "Xing Qing Lun" 性情論.

³⁰"Xing zi ming chu" 性自命出. Ma Chengyuan 馬承源, ed. *Shanghai bowuguan cang Zhanguo Chu zhushu* 上海博物館藏 戰國楚竹書, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2001).

one of the first theorizations of *jiao* that explains how distinctive environments shape people's different values and ways of living. Intriguingly, this author's theory of *jiao* helps him justify the superiority of Zhou traditions, especially the rites and music, showing why they are the only *jiao* appropriate for human consumption. Given that Confucius and authors in the *Analects* clearly link Zhou cultural heritage to an ethnocentric vision of the self as "Zhuxia" (also referred to as "Huaxia" in much of the literature), this formulation of *jiao* thus implicitly endorses ethnocentric ideals for education and, essentially, ways of being human.³¹

Mencius also at times understands *jiao* as education that goes beyond self-cultivation of the individual to teachings that affect the larger population. In *Mencius* 1A3 and 3A, the author (presumed to be Mencius) carefully mentions institutions or schools of various sorts where *jiao* should be propagated.³² The implicit message is that there is a connection between the education of the elite (for whom these schools were designated) and the further edification of the masses:

Establish the various types of schools (*xiang* 庠, *xu* 序, *xue* 學, and *xiao* 校) to teach them. The *common schools* (*xiang*) focus on nurture; the *curriculum schools* (*xiao*) on teachings; and the *training schools* (*xu*) on archery. During the Xia Dynasty [ca. 2070–1600 BCE] they referred to *xiao*; during the Shang [ca. 1600–1046 BCE], to *xu*; during the Zhou [1046–221 BCE] to *xiang*; and all three Dynasties referred to *xue*. All [types of schools] were used to clarify human relationships. When human relationships are clarified by those above, then the small people will be friendly below.

設為庠序學校以教之：庠者，養也；校者，教也；序者，射也。夏曰校，殷曰序，周曰庠，學則三代共之，皆所以明人倫也。人倫明於上，小民親於下。

Here, the overarching purpose of education is to ultimately transform society via a trickle-down effect from those who attend schools. The above/below dichotomy that Mencius mentions suggests that these schools were for the elites only, but that the moral repercussions of such an education would be profound even at the lower levels of society. While he does not speak of educating the masses of people directly through educational programs, at the very least he acknowledges the value of having everyone in a given society be educated in or exposed to the same moral values and codes. In other words, Mencius acknowledges the imperative for the moral norms of a single, superior culture (specifically, the Huaxia, passed down through various educational institutions through Shang and then Zhou) to permeate throughout society and extend to peoples of all walks of life, from top to bottom.

Unlike Mencius, where education is uniquely moral, but like the author of *Human Nature Derives from Heavenly Command*, Xunzi also often uses *jiao* to refer to something larger than customs (*su* 俗), as well as something that suggests a total environment of cultural influence and adapted learning.³³ Rather than point exclusively to

³¹For more extended discussions of ethnicity in relationship to Zhou culture and civilization, see Bergeton, *The Emergence of Civilizational Consciousness in Early China*, and Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, especially 118–20.

³²*Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, edited by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1998).

³³*Xunzi jinzhuyi jinyi* 荀子今註今譯, edited by Xiong Gongzhe 熊公哲 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1990), 1.

educational programs for the masses, references to *jiao* in both the *Xunzi* and *Human Nature Derives from Heavenly Command* indicate education, culture, and environmental influences that nurture and help us grow. *Jiao*, especially as it is used in the *Human Nature Derives from Heavenly Command*, highlights what distinguishes us from our raw, inherited traits and capabilities, and as such it serves as one conceptual counterpoint to “nature” (as in “human nature”) in the emergent Chinese nature-nurture debate.³⁴ It is in this expanded notion of *jiao* that we see the beginnings of a way of thinking about education not merely in terms of an idealized moral goal for the elite, but in more mundane terms that acknowledge its large-scale role in transforming culture and human society. This subtle change in the definition and usage of *jiao* seems to reflect what we know to be occurring in China at the time: as literate, Central Plains societies expanded beyond their traditional boundaries and elites interacted with increasing numbers and varieties of peoples, the global problem of how to come to terms with competing cultural practices and norms became an issue of significant interest and debate.

As a term designating “culture” or “cultural influence” more broadly, *jiao* came to be used in some Confucian texts to explain differences between the morally superior culture of Zhou/Huaxia on the one hand, and alien cultures on the other. *Jiao* was, in these contexts, what allowed diverse customs among different peoples to develop in the first place. But the whole reason *Xunzi* and the author of *Human Nature Derives from Heavenly Command* defined *jiao* more broadly was so that they could drive home their main point: only the human Dao provides the correct *jiao* (“cultural influence”), the one that creates civilized beings fit to be called “human.”³⁵ What this “human Dao” meant was a solid education in the rites, music, and customs passed down from Xia to Zhou. This particular use of *jiao*, including Mencius’ implied sense of Huaxia superiority inherent in the Huaxia cultural and moral lineage transmitted through various schools, is concordant with the core meanings of *jiaohua* (*jiao* + *hua*, “transformation”), to be explored next.

Xunzi’s Understanding of Educational Transformation

The term “educational transformation” begins first appearing in Confucian texts in the *Xunzi*, a text written in the third century BCE that is attributed to the famous philosopher, Xunzi. Given that the renowned thinker was familiar with bureaucratic, legalistic programs and measures of the day, it seems likely that he coopted educational transformation from discourses concerned with state centralization and unification such as those just examined. Whether Xunzi was the first Confucian scholar to make the term useful for Confucian-style morality and politics, we cannot know for sure. But what is clear is that from Xunzi’s time on, educational transformation begins to appear in the literature with much more frequency, and especially associated with the writings of Confucian moralists, so that its early coinage in the realm of legalistic, political discourse was obscured.

The use of educational transformation in the *Xunzi* at first glance seems similar to its use in the *Book of the Lord Shang*, where it refers to a formal educational policy to be propagated by state officials in a top-down manner. An important and noticeable

³⁴Clearly, Xunzi takes this debate to new heights by contrasting nature with *wei* 偽, deliberate effort, and using such a concept to further develop and elaborate on the psycho-social aspects of learning.

³⁵The *Xing zi ming chu* in particular highlights the “human Dao” (人道), but the concept also appears a few times in the *Xunzi*, especially in the “Discussion of Rites” (禮論) chapter.

difference, however, is that Xunzi clearly links the concept to moral content and goals, whereas in the *Book of the Lord Shang*, it is described in terms of laws, policies, and regulations that would support an official meritocracy and set the foundations for state order and control. For Xunzi, educational transformation consists in utilizing the rites and music (*li yue* 禮樂) to uphold propriety and justice (*li yi* 禮義).³⁶ While the goals of unity and social order remain an important part of the equation, for Xunzi, the notion of educational transformation at its core must be defined in terms of a moral education and the tools that allow for such an education.³⁷

In Xunzi's discussion, programs of educational transformation are associated with both great legendary leaders of the past as well as village leaders, high ministers, and benevolent rulers in the present. Educational transformation could thus be applied at many levels of government; local leaders such as the Village Master (鄉師) are supposed to "encourage educational transformation" (勸教化) just as the Grand Duke (辟公) is to "extend educational transformation" (廣教化) over his populace.³⁸ At the ministerial level, educational transformation applies as well: "His governmental mandates and educational transformation take form among those below like a shadow to a body" (政令教化, 刑下如影).³⁹ And, finally, legendary leaders are mentioned frequently in the "Zhenglun" 正論 Chapter, where Xunzi refutes the claim that "Emperors Yao and Shun could not transform the people through education" (堯舜不能教化).⁴⁰ All of these statements show how invested Xunzi is in asserting that a proper moral education should be universally applied to all. For him, educational transformation is a governmental responsibility of both high and lower level officials throughout a state.

In the *Xunzi*, educational transformation is primarily used to indicate broad, top-down state measures to insure harmony and order below.⁴¹ Appearing to be milder than laws, educational transformation is not quite tantamount to the rites, which serve as the superior alternative to laws in the *Analects*. Xunzi's cooptation of the term for moral purposes helped re-package traditional Confucian approaches to education and moral transformation, and to fit them into the policy-driven discourses on educational transformation of the day. In other words, Xunzi helped integrate Confucian ethics and a core belief in soft power methods of governance into current political discussions on the centralized state.

³⁶Xunzi, "Wangzhi" 王制: Xiong 1990, 167; and "Yi bin": Xiong 1990, 288.

³⁷For Xunzi on culture vs. nature, see Michael J. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); for rituals and music as moral instruction, see Paul Goldin, *Rituals of the Way* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 53–81. For a comparison with Han thinkers, see Paul Goldin, "Xunzi and Early Han Philosophy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 67.1 (2007), 135–66.

³⁸*Xunzi jin zhu jin yi* 荀子今註今議, edited by Xiong Gongzhe 熊公哲 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu ying-shuguan, 1990), 167.

³⁹*Xunzi jin zhu jin yi*, 261. Translation adapted from Eric L. Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 133.

⁴⁰*Xunzi jin zhu jin yi*, 360.

⁴¹Intriguingly, there are instances in the *Xunzi* in which he uses the term *jiao* 教, and not *jiaohua*, to refer to top-down measures that educate and harmonize those below as well. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing these out. I focus on Xunzi's use of *jiaohua* in this study not to demonstrate that Xunzi used *jiaohua* distinctively from other concepts he invokes that concern education, but to show how his writings seem to be the first of the Confucian writings to adopt *jiaohua* and to and infuse it with traditional, moralistic notions of culture and civilization.

Xunzi's notion of educational transformation encompasses a universal vision, one that is appropriate for the universal scope of a Son of Heaven who rules over a centralized, multi-cultural state. The purpose of educational transformation in such statist discourses, then, is to help ensure that a unified state can act as a single body rather than a diverse medley of parts. This is apparent in the following passage: “[The work of the Enlightened Duke is] to analyze the rites and music, to correct bodily comportment, to extend educational transformation, to beautify customs, and to oversee the entire population, tuning them together into a single harmony” (論禮樂，正身行，廣教化，美風俗，兼覆而調一之).⁴² The “tuning” of the population “into a single harmony” is but a metaphorical way of saying that educational transformation helps render diverse values into a single, overarching value system. This orchestral harmony was, indeed, the goal of state unification.

In military contexts in the *Xunzi* as well, educational transformation, along with the rites and propriety, functions to unify and centralize a state. Such training creates a formidable army despite the diverse backgrounds and motivations of individual soldiers. It also fosters coordination among one's troops: “Therefore, recruiting and selecting extensively, exalting circumstances and deception, and honoring accomplishments and profit—these make them duplicitous. Training with the rites, propriety, and educational transformation—these coordinate one's troops” (故招近募選，隆執詐，尚功利，是漸之也；禮義教化，是齊之也禮義教化，是齊之也).⁴³ The passage here is interesting because it recommends Confucian forms of social transformation over and above methods that motivate soldiers through tangible incentives in a zero-sum, win-lose system.⁴⁴ The emphasis on coordination, like harmonization above, suggests properly punctuated or attuned parts coming together to form a unified whole, one that is streamlined through a single value system expressed through the rites and other types of Confucian training.

In sum, Xunzi introduces the concept of educational transformation to Confucian discourse, bringing the fundamentally moral goals of Confucian education (associated with *jiao*-education 教) into the same arena as the universalizing, statist, and bureaucratic goals of other thinkers who spoke of *jiaohua* around the same time. Xunzi articulated a clear method for the mass education of all kinds of peoples in Zhou morality and ritual practices, setting the stage for future uses of the term as a crucial component in civilizing missions. As the next section shows, the Xunzian strain of educational transformation would become the basis for a dominant, Confucian understanding of what it means to transform whole populations according to Zhou or Huaxia cultural and civilizing norms.

⁴²*Xunzi jin zhu jin yi*, 167.

⁴³*Xunzi jin zhu jin yi*, 288. I have adapted Eric Hutton's translation for *qi* 齊 here as “coordinated,” since it implies a much more complex type of unity, as opposed to terms such as “uniform” or “even.” Hutton, *Xunzi*, 150.

⁴⁴The methods criticized here were likely to have been contemporary military practices or fashionable military theories, such as those we might find in a treatise like the *Sunzi Binfa* (*Sunzi's Art of War*). To claim that a morally grounded, ethically inflected training makes troops stronger and less vulnerable certainly seems idealistic to us, especially when recommended as an alternative to more concrete, practical training. But when one considers that the Confucian ideals for education steeped in the rites and *jiao* seem to have possessed a very basic, hands-on component that prescribed rules for behavior, then perhaps such a form of socio-political reform was in Xunzi's day perceived as eminently feasible.

Educational Transformation as Civilizing Mission

I have shown that, for Xunzi, educational transformation was about spreading Confucian moral culture as a means of governing and unifying all under Heaven. I have argued elsewhere that early Confucian writings reflect an act of shaping the self into a coherent, ethnic concept—the Huaxia—defined primarily through a specific line of cultural descent.⁴⁵ The evolution of educational transformation and its cooptation by Confucian moralists also reflects Confucian attempts at shaping a Huaxia self. In this section, I show that educational transformation could be invoked as a means of borderland policy as well as a colonial tool, a civilizing mission of sorts, for controlling various types of ethnic populations within the early empire. These assimilationist goals were often associated with Confucian moral agendas for society as a whole.

It was during the Qin-Han period that educational transformation began to represent a method of imperial control that aimed at the propagation of a unified, civilized culture throughout the empire. The target audience of educational transformation shifted as well: it was not merely something to be applied to the population of the capital and its surrounding areas, or the lands under the control of a single, central court. It began to address how to unify all peoples in the kingdoms, as well as those in the borderlands of the empire. In this sense, educational transformation became a concept that helped delineate how to civilize, tame, and domesticate an unruly other, bringing the other into the ethno-cultural fold of the Huaxia imperium, without resorting to force.⁴⁶ It is in this latter sense that notions of Huaxia superiority, explicit already in early Confucian texts of the Warring States period, became associated with large-scale civilizing missions that fostered the spread of early forms of Chinese identity.⁴⁷

In the *Xinshu* of the Confucian statesman, Jia Yi (ca. 180 BCE), the author joins Xunzi in discussing educational transformation in terms of the unification of customs and morals. In fact, Jia Yi copies verbatim some of Xunzi's statements, found in the "Wangzhi" chapter mentioned above, revising phrases to emphasize different things. A brief comparison of Xunzi's and Jia Yi's statements will highlight their slightly different concerns. For example, Xunzi lists the work of an enlightened duke as comprising the following: analyzing the rites and music, correcting bodily comportment, extending educational transformation, beautifying customs, and overseeing the entire population—all while tuning them together into a single harmony. His overarching goal for educational transformation, then, is a gloriously tuned symphonic performance of social actors, master-minded by an enlightened duke. Jia Yi also stresses that the work of educational transformation must begin with high ministers who "correct their own bodily comportment, extend educational transformation, and cultivate the rites and music so as to beautify customs" (正身行，廣教化，脩禮樂，以美風俗).⁴⁸ For Jia Yi, educational transformations are undertaken with the explicit goal of

⁴⁵See Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*, 18–31. A work that links Confucianism in Tang-Song times to a specific cultural line is Peter Bol's "This Culture of Ours": *Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁶By Han times, this Huaxia realm is often referred to in the texts as *Zhongguo* 中國, or "Central States," designating a cultural, and not merely a political, sphere.

⁴⁷For more on the relationship between Confucianism and early notions of Huaxia or Zhuxia identity, especially in the *Analects*, see "Barbarians or not? Ethnicity and Changing Conceptions of the Ancient Yue (Viet) Peoples (~400–50 B.C.)," *Asia Major* 16.1 (2003), 1–32, here 19–21, and Brindley, *Ancient China and the Yue*.

⁴⁸*Jiazi xinshu* 賈子新書, edited by Lu Wenchao 盧文弨 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yin shuguan, 1968), n.p. (Juan 5, "Fuzu" 卷五, 輔佐).

beautifying the diverse customs of an imperial regime. He underscores the importance of “beautifying,” or civilizing, peoples with diverse customs to help elevate and unify the culture of an empire.

Elsewhere in the *Xinshu*, we see that Jia Yi continues to apply educational transformation more specifically to contexts in which the shaping of other cultures and their customs is of great concern. For example, he tells of the legendary Emperor Yao using educational transformation to “pacify Jiaozhi” and reach the far cultures of the “Shu-Yue peoples who engraved their foreheads” (堯教化及雕題蜀越，撫交趾)!⁴⁹ The context here implies the existence in ancient times of a unified realm ruled by Emperor Yao, who used soft power to settle or quell unrest in the culturally diverse and far-off regions of Shu 蜀 and Yue 越 in the South and Southwest. One may note that in the passage that immediately follows, in addition to educational transformation, Emperor Yao was also rigorously training (*xun* 訓) various peoples in the far corners of the world, so educational transformation was not the only way of talking about educating the masses and harnessing control over a multi-ethnic empire.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, the focus on education as a colonial tool for helping assimilate and civilize alien others is noteworthy, and it seems to distinguish Jia Yi’s use of educational transformation from that of his forebear, Xunzi.

Cross-cultural diversity is implicated in the use of educational transformation in other texts dating to the Han imperial period as well. In Wang Fu’s (ca. 79–165 CE) *Qianfu lun*, for example, Wang describes the fulfillment of *jiaohua* as something that can bring peace to “the people and vassal subjects” (成教化而安民氓).⁵¹ Here, the direct beneficiaries of educational transformation are not just the common folk, but the “vassal subjects” of a state as well. This suggests many types of citizens in a state—the people (*min* 民) being the ones most directly ruled by the court, and the “vassal subjects” (*mang* 氓) likely being the more alien ones in outlying regions. Although these vassal subjects were ruled by local leaders and only more indirectly by the Han, they, too, as subjects of educational transformation, were considered to be part of the unified, cultural sphere and expected to become civilized according to the mainstream cultural and moral standards of the day.

The goal of altering or “moving” (*yi* 移) customs through moral education is also explicit in the uses of educational transformation in the “Discourses on Salt and Iron” (81 BCE), where a specific “literati” (*wenxue* 文學) perspective is pitted against the more progressive, entrepreneurial perspective of the merchant class:

I have heard of the Way that brings order to the people, the source that blocks obscenity and idleness, measures that extend their morality, and the fostering of benevolence and propriety through suppression of the unnecessary pursuits of profit. If you do not highlight profit, then educational transformation can arise and customs can be altered.

竊聞治人之道，防淫佚之原，廣道德之端，抑末利而開仁義，毋示以利，然後教化可興，而風俗可移也。⁵²

⁴⁹Jiazi *xinshu*, n.p. (*Juan 9*, “Xiuzheng Yushang” 卷九，脩政語上).

⁵⁰The passage reads, “His training reached Bactria and the Jusou [an area associated with the western regions in early Han times] 訓及大夏渠叟. *Jiazi xinshu*, n.p. (*Juan 9*, “Xiuzheng Yushang.”)

⁵¹*Qianfulun jianjiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正, edited by Peng Duo 彭鐸 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 71.

⁵²*Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校, edited by Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 1. The “literati” perspective in this text proclaimed the importance of nourishing the fundamental, “trunk” (*ben* 本) endeavors such as agriculture over the peripheral “tip” (*mo* 末) endeavors such as trade.

In this passage, which presents the literati perspective as one of at least two prominent approaches, educational transformation stands in contrast to the pursuit of profit and non-essential, commercial enterprises in society. Its presumed superiority as a measure of bringing order to the people of a state lies in its moral underpinnings as well as its ability to unify cultures by changing them and altering certain customs fundamentally. Though the passage is not intended to apply to borderlands areas and peoples but to the population at large within an empire, it is nonetheless intriguing that educational transformation is highlighted as the tool by which one can train, or even indoctrinate, a diverse population according to a single set of moral principles. Here, the language of educational transformation as a civilizing mission within the selfsame empire, one that aimed for universal, cultural assimilation and the moral harmonization of a fundamentally diverse society, is clear.

Educational Transformation in Early Imperial History

How did the rhetoric of educational transformation in early texts translate into policies? Early histories written about the Han give us some ideas about how educational transformation was applied in actual civilizing missions dating to the early imperial period. While early formulations often do not explicitly mention the term, “educational transformation,” in the same breath as descriptions of civilizing measures enacted at the time, we can nonetheless take stock of how such measures are depicted in the literature to reflect back on the more idealized, philosophical discussions concerning educational transformation analyzed above.

An intriguing passage from the *Later Han History* (*Hou Han shu*), compiled by Fan Ye 范曄 in the fifth century CE (but containing material from earlier periods), speaks not directly of educational transformation but of ritual transformation (*lihua* 禮化) occurring as a natural result of Huaxia convicts migrating southwards into the Jiaozhi region (contemporary southwest China and northern Vietnam). It discusses how the occupied regions of Jiaozhi were inhabited by peoples speaking utterly different languages, who resembled birds and beasts, wore their hair in a topknot on the back of their head, covered it with a cloth, went barefoot, and did not distinguish between elders and the youth (凡交趾所統，雖置郡縣，而言語各異，重譯乃通。人如禽獸，長幼無別。項髻徒跣，以布貫頭而著之).⁵³ Then, the author continues to depict a scenario in which culture change occurs as a natural consequence of convicts from the Central States being sent down to live among the natives, exposing them to their languages and having them “gradually transform according to the rites” (or “allowing for ritual transformation to gradually take place”) (後頗徙中國罪人，使雜居其間，乃稍知言語，漸見禮化).⁵⁴ Here, we have an example of how convicts from the North, by virtue of their mere existence and presence in Jiaozhi Commandery, allegedly helped bring civilization to the region. The notion that culture change occurred unidirectionally from the more civilized Central States to the less civilized Jiaozhi reflects the hubris of 826 the Central States author. It assumes one-way cultural diffusion in favor of what the author thinks must be a superior, Huaxia culture, even though the bearers of such a culture were convicts—hardly paragons of virtue.

The phrase that designates culture change in the passage above is “ritual transformation,” rather than “educational transformation.” It is basically the same type of phrase as

⁵³*Hou Han shu*, “Nanman Xinanyi Liezhuan,” 2836.

⁵⁴*Hou Han shu*, “Nanman Xinanyi Liezhuan,” 2836.

educational transformation, except that it specifies the rites associated with Huaxia culture as the main vehicle of change, instead of using the more general term, *jiao*, or education. In this instance we see how the notion of transforming those who are culturally different from the Huaxia referred to actual situations of cross-cultural interaction. Ritual transformation, as a variant of educational transformation, was not an intended policy for borderland relations; it was an alleged consequence of the out-migration of Huaxia peoples to the Jiaozhi region. This shows how the concept could refer to environmental influences that shaped people and changed societies in general.

In addition to actually sending convicts into faraway regions, the Han court sent imperial administrators to troublesome regions to help civilize local inhabitants through a top-down approach to cultural change. The following passage, also from the *Later Han History*, describes the variety of ways in which Han-appointed governors from the North helped pacify the unruly border provinces in the far South:

[During Emperor Guangwu's reign], Xi Guang was responsible for Jiaozhi and Ren Yan was the governor of Jiuzhen. They thereupon taught the people to farm, set forth policies on headwear and shoes, for the first time set up matchmaking and dowry customs, introduced them to weddings and marriage procedures, established schools, and led them with the rites and propriety

錫光為交阯，任延守九真，於是教其耕稼，制為冠履，初設媒娉，始知姻娶，建立學校，導之禮義。⁵⁵

The civilizing measures that these governors engaged in ranged from regulating customs to teaching Central States farming methods as well as moral culture through the rites. Of the measures described, most of them fall under aspects of what we might label as “Huaxia” moral culture: the presence of schools and pursuit of education, the institution of the rites and proper norms of behavior; the tradition of marriage (including matchmaking and dowry customs); and the regulation of headwear and shoes. While the term educational transformation is not used, the aspects of culture that were selected to be transmitted are cultural traits associated with the ritual culture of the Huaxia peoples. Since “altering customs” to better comply with Huaxia ways was, as we saw above, one of the foremost goals of educational transformation, it seems likely that such civilizing measures would have been understood as a form of educational transformation at the time.

A look at the reforms of the famous general, Ma Yuan (14 BCE–49 CE), who first quelled the Rebellion of the Zheng/Trung Sisters in 42–43 CE and later administered the region of Jiaozhi (modern-day Guangxi and N. Vietnam) during the Eastern Han period, also provides insights into how *jiaohua* could be translated into concrete terms. His reforms included the following: 1) splitting up Xiyu County (the farthest reaches of which were over 1000 *li* away from the nearest Han court) into Fengxi and Wanghai Counties (援奏言西于縣戶有三萬二千，遠界去庭千餘里，請分為封溪、望海二縣，許之)，2) opening up new administrative territories in places that he had passed over in his quelling of the revolt (援所過輒為郡縣治城郭)，3) dredging canals and irrigation networks to benefit the people (穿渠灌溉，以利其民)，4) assimilating Yue/Viet statutes to Han statutes on more than ten divergent sorts of affairs

⁵⁵*Hou Han shu*, “Nanman Xinanyi Liezhuan,” 2836.

(條奏越律與漢律駁者十餘事), and 5) instituting and explaining erstwhile policies to the Yue peoples so as to regulate and restrain them (與越人申明舊制以約束之).⁵⁶

Ma Yuan was described in annals such as the *Later Han History* as a Han hero who helped civilize and pacify the barbarians, and who was completely deserving of all the accolades and rewards he would receive from the Han court. The measures he instituted were administrative, technological, and legalistic. Unfortunately, we are not privy to the exact nature of the “ten divergent sorts of affairs” that Ma Yuan deemed necessary for Yue/Viet legal reform. But the passage also suggests that the statutes and regulations that he amended were intended to legislate Yue/Viet cultural traditions and norms considered to be unacceptable by the Han imperial court. This, it would seem, was at once a civilizing mission and a means of governing the empire. While it is not described in the text as educational transformation, the fact it is the Yue customs and regulations that needed to be altered suggests that cultural change was a primary goal.

We might now ask ourselves how effective these Eastern Han administrators were in their attempts to institute educational transformation and civilize the Yue. Little is known about how long the reforms of Xi Guang, Ren Yan, and Ma Yuan lasted after their tenure in the South. But the fact that their reforms were documented in a *History* that was compiled centuries after the Han suggests that the reforms were substantial and considered to be laudable efforts from the Han period. Given the paucity of on-the-ground evidence for the period, it is not yet possible, without collaborating evidence from the fields of archaeology or other social sciences, to gauge the impact of civilizing initiatives undertaken by such colonialist administrators. It is probably safest to assume that the laws may have had some lasting effect, but any top-down, educational transformation measures that were not fully accepted or assimilated by a given population may have fallen by the wayside, and the people would have reverted back to traditional ways, especially during times of less centralized control.

This leads us back to our evaluation of educational transformation as a program with non-coercive elements. While Ma Yuan’s civilizing measures might fit the ancient Chinese rubric of educational transformation, some amount of force, through a punitive legal system, must have been used to hold these measures in place. So whereas the early Confucian rhetoric of education specifically argued for the superiority of non-coercive methods of spreading Confucian culture to non-Huaxia populations, the rhetoric of educational transformation, which Xunzi adopted from more legalistic circles, seems to have implied some amount of force, either as an underlying threat or via direct application of it. A good example using Ma Yuan’s case is the following description, found in the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記, a text dating to as early as the late second ca. CE. In its chapter on Ma Yuan, the author describes how the general ordered the melting down of Yue bronze drums, powerful symbols of chieftains’ authorities. These were turned into a bronze horse to present to Emperor Guangwu upon Ma Yuan’s return to Luoyang in 44 CE.⁵⁷

While the case of Ma Yuan colonizing the Yue in the Southwest occurs at the periphery of the Han Empire, educational transformation refers to an ideal for spreading Huaxia culture throughout the empire as well, and not only at the margins. This is because state control was much looser throughout the early imperial period in China; there were regions within the interior that were not fully integrated into the empire

⁵⁶Hou Han shu, “Ma Yuan Liezhuan,” 839.

⁵⁷Dongguan Hanji, “Ma Yuan.” *Siku quanshu* edition, 24.6 《欽定四庫全書》本。本書24卷，拆分成6冊，accessed through the Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=en&res=5748>.

which could have been as culturally different from Huaxia as areas along the outer margins of the empire. Indeed, since the inner regions of early Chinese empires were far from being integrated, culturally unified spaces, it makes sense that concepts like educational transformation would be appropriate for the entire empire as well as its margins.

Conclusion

Achim Mittag has shown that the “Prefaces” of the *Odes* (authored during the Han period), which gave “priority to ‘moral transformation’ (*jiaohua*),” likely “served as the prototype of the dynastic history model inaugurated by the *Han shu*.”⁵⁸ According to Mittag, the concept of *jiaohua* “became part of the emerging imperial ideology, which was paramount throughout medieval China (i.e. ca. 200–600).”⁵⁹ The claim that educational transformation as a concept was coopted by Han-era historians to support an overarching type of historiography that supported unified, imperial rule is an important claim that supports my attempt in this article to bridge ideology and imperial practice. Viewing educational transformation as a powerful form of rhetoric and imperial tool, we can see how even non-Huaxia or non-Han imperial actors could adopt and adapt such a handy rhetoric for their own, specific purposes.

This exploration of the intellectual background to educational transformation from ca. 400–100 BCE in China showed how the concept emerged out of two distinct circles. The first was a discourse stemming from military and legalistic contexts that promoted state order and control through various training and educational policies. The second was a general, Confucian discourse on non-coercive power of *jiao*-education and cultural influence—which included a menu of ritual practice and knowledge concerning military training and moral virtues—as a means of providing moral education to the self and others. Xunzi played a significant role, by adopting educational transformation as a concept from earlier contexts and infusing it with moral meaning and intent. He also helped define educational transformation as state measures that altered customs and cultural norms. In particular, these values and norms had an ethnic component linking them to articulations on the Huaxia self. Educational transformation thus came to embody an entire moral and political orientation associated with the spread of Huaxia civilization to so-called backwards cultures, as well as to peoples, often within the same state or empire, who were not of the educated, elite classes.

With the development of the Han empire in the second to first centuries BCE, thinkers built on Xunzi’s and others’ ideas on educational transformation, adapting such a concept to apply to large, multi-ethnic colonial empires. Writers from the Han era seemed especially interested in discussing educational transformation as a means not just for political control of a large population, but as a tool for civilizing the other on the fringes of empire as well. In such a way, educational transformation served to support the notion of a shared community of behavioral norms within a unified, multi-ethnic empire. We cannot overstate the degree to which foundational, early Confucian understandings of educational transformation—as a tool to spread Huaxia morality and civilization to alien others—helped inform later formulations of the concept in Chinese

⁵⁸Mittag Achim, “Forging Legacy: The Pact between Empire and Historiography in Ancient China,” in *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, edited by Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163.

⁵⁹Achim, “Forging Legacy.”

history. By implicitly justifying the spread of a particular, ethno-cultural identity throughout a universal state or empire, educational transformation lay at the core of early Chinese concepts linking the unified state with processes of cultural assimilation, or “sinicization.”⁶⁰

It would seem that the concept of educational transformation, conceived along ethno-political lines as a type of civilizing measure, translated directly into imperial policy and action vis-à-vis non-Huaxia peoples. Bringing together our discussion of educational transformation as an evolving ideology with its possible manifestations in early imperial history, I examined some cross-cultural incidents along the Han southern border in the first couple of centuries CE. These examples suggested an underlying hope or intent to spread Huaxia morality among non-Huaxia peoples. In so doing, they are basically in agreement with ideas on educational transformation that developed through Xunzi and on into the Han period.

Given the prevalence of the phrase “educational transformation” in the literature dating to the Han Empire, it is clear that such a concept had real purchase in the imperialist agenda at the time. With this in mind, we might briefly revisit Crossley’s claims presented at the beginning of this essay: that the “imaginal bond” of empire occurred only much later in Chinese history and was used retrospectively to create a more coherent sense of empire than there really was. My account shows that such a bond was not merely an ideological construction of later times. Already during the Han era, there was a strong rhetoric supporting imperial measures to spread a superior, cultural, and moral identity among the population, especially in regions that were heavily populated by peoples alien to Zhou, Huaxia cultural norms. And, although the account I presented of Ma Yuan’s civilizing mission of the Yue took place in the far South, scholars can likely find many more instances of educational transformation occurring closer to the central Han regions, wherever Han officials needed to interact with local leaders and/or populations of people who were not under the direct control of the Han imperial regime.

Understanding educational transformation as an historical concept that changed through time will help us better understand the legacy and nature of civilizing projects stemming from China today. While what I have outlined is very far from a history of “mind control,” it nonetheless reverberates with and helps us come to grips with political cultures and policies today—whether towards Uighurs, Tibetans, or other minority groups. A concept like educational transformation, like the concept of “soft power,” can be used to suggest a much milder approach than mind control. But it is clear from the few reform missions discussed in this article that, even in Han times, such educational transformation involved coercive aspects and had clear, ethnic and assimilationist goals.

⁶⁰Recent scholarship discussing educational transformation in the Song and Ming-Qing periods, and even *jiaohua* organizations, in twentieth-century China indicate that the concept had staying power throughout the millennia. See Junghwan Lee, “‘Jiaohua’ 教化, Transcendental Unity, and Morality in Ordinariness: Paradigm Shifts in the Song Dynasty Interpretation of the ‘Zhongyong,’” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 42 (2012), 151–233; Zhao Yingzhi, “Literati Use of Oral or Oral-Related Genres to Talk about History in the Late Ming and Early Qing: From Yang Shen to Jia Fuxi and Gui Zhuang, and from Education (*Jiaohua*) to Cursing the World (Mashi),” *Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature* 34.2 (2015), 81–114; and Sébastien Billioud, “Confucian Revival and the Emergence of ‘Jiaohua Organizations’: A Case Study of the Yidan Xuetang,” *Modern China* 37.3 (2011), 286–314.