

## *What is Missing in the Process of Poverty Alleviation?*

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### **Abstract**

Taking alleviating extreme poverty as the top priority, the World Bank has conducted many projects in achieving this goal, such as increasing health, promoting educational access for girls, and so on (World Bank, 2018). All these projects that invest in human capital work to boost the economy and reduce poverty. However, a close look at the World Bank projects revealed that ethics education is missing in these projects. Even though the Bank has its own Ethics Department guiding the behaviors of its employees, the projects it conducted in countries in poverty does not involve ethics education, an essential element in poverty alleviation. Other than explaining why extreme poverty exists and why certain groups of people keep returning to the poverty stage while receiving support from the government, this article takes China as an example based on scholarly publications to explain why ethics education is necessary in the World Bank poverty alleviation projects. Based on the literature review, this article argues that it is crucial to offer opportunities for those who do not have access to discover alternative lifestyles due to limited resources and low socioeconomic status and to facilitate people to determine a life goal in order to eliminate extreme poverty effectively.

Keywords: ethics education, poverty alleviation

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## **Introduction**

Taking alleviating extreme poverty as the top priority, the World Bank has conducted many projects in achieving this goal, such as increasing health, promoting educational access for girls, and so on (World Bank, 2018). All these projects that invest in human capital work to boost the economy and reduce poverty. However, ethics education is missing in its projects. Even though the Bank has its own Ethics Department guiding the behaviors of its employees, the projects it conducted helping different countries in need does not involve ethics education, an essential element in poverty alleviation. This article takes China as an example based on scholarly publications hoping to explain why ethics education is necessary in the World Bank projects hoping to start a conversation about ethics education in poverty alleviation globally. It argues that ethics education is essential not only within the context of education but also in poverty alleviation worldwide.

## **Reasons of Extreme Poverty**

First, it is essential to understand why extreme poverty exists and why certain groups of people keep returning to the poverty stage while receiving support from the government. Reasons that lead to extreme poverty varies in different parts of China (Tong, 2018). Previous statistics show that the first one is living in an extreme natural environment. Other reasons include no income and working abilities due to disabilities or diseases, disconnected with society, experienced disasters, or chronic diseases that require much financial support. Even after receiving assistance from the government, these people are the ones with high possibilities of returning to poverty after spending financial aid (Tong, 2018). According to Lv (2001), those who cannot handle the difficulties in life and those with an inferiority complex are the ones who tend to give up. Thus, most of them depend on the support of the government entirely. Besides, due to lacking educational experiences, some people consider living in a disadvantaged geomantic omen (Feng Shui, 风水) places as the only reason for poverty. Thus, they give up on working to change the situation. A glance at all these reasons, it is evident that some people do have the ability to work and improve their economic status. However, they give up mentally.

It is crucial to notice that some people have developed an inert desire to always ask for help from others rather than working to change the situation. This phenomenon could be an inevitable obstacle of alleviating poverty because the resource is limited, and the inert desire will be a black hole that could never be filled up. Besides, no one is responsible for being the donator throughout his/her life. Only when everyone works together towards the same goal can extreme poverty be alleviated entirely. Thus, ethics education is essential in the World Bank projects and countries that are in poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.

## **The Chinese Way**

To reach sustainable development, the Chinese government is resolute in eliminating poverty with various methods. For instance, besides emphasizing on helping the disadvantaged household in starting a business by providing more resources, there is also a strict responsibility inquisition system on government officials. According to the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2016), the

poverty alleviation policies are strict on government officials so that they will keep up with the fast pace of the task. Infrequent visits to the household in poverty or delays in implementation of new policies could lead to severe punishment such as circulating a notice of criticism of the individual or, even worse, dismissing from the position (The State Council, 2016). The strict responsibility inquisition system has both positive and negative effects on this campaign. On one side, it shows the determination of the government in helping those who are in need and brings hope to the beneficiaries.

On the other hand, government officials who are doing this task will become cautious and reluctant for this job to avoid possible punishment once something goes wrong. Rather than giving too much pressure on people who are helping, it is necessary to help people who are in need to develop into a whole person first. They must learn to be a giver rather than a constant receiver so that more people could benefit overall.

### **Fu Pin Xian Fu Zhi**

For people who have abilities to change their living situations but are psychologically defeated by life, ethics education might help to regain their confidence. Assisting those who are in poverty in setting a life goal could potentially help to change their lifestyle and motivate them to strive for a better life. According to Wang Yangming (2017), people will always remain a passive attitude towards life before setting at least one life goal. Setting a life goal involves two significant components. The first one is the virtue, as the one mentioned in Daoism, i.e., to be benevolent to others (Lao Zi, 2015). With virtue, the individual will think and act based on an ethical standard. Thus, goals like “I want to be a successful theft who can steal all kinds of diamonds and will never be caught by the police” can be avoided.

The other component is that the individual needs to have sufficient knowledge to assist him/her in setting a life goal. Living in extreme poverty, many people have little resources and few opportunities to learn the categories of occupations and the variety of lifestyles. This situation leads to the results that many pay great attention to the limited resource they have and continuously have disputes because of the resources, such as land, which is distributed to them by the government (Bai, 2007). That is why many scholars (Jiang & Wan, 2004; Li & Zhu, 2016; Lv, 2001) who are interested in poverty alleviation argued: “Fu Pin Xian Fu Zhi” (扶贫先扶志, meaning it is crucial to help people determine a life goal before eliminating poverty). However, this is not an easy task at all.

### **What is Ethics Education in the Context of Poverty Alleviation**

A few discussions with the students at a prestigious university in China show that some of them are reluctant to ethics education because they believe ethics education will limit their freedom of desire and behavior since it may bring new rules to their life. Most of them have a negative view of ethics education. Even though specific courses, such as A Survey of Mao Tsetung Thoughts and Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (毛泽东思想和中国特色社会主义理论体系概论) are classified as the formal ethics education curriculum, it is not favored by most students although they have to show up in class. Some students mentioned that they usually utilized the lecture time to work on assignments from other courses while the instructor was teaching in front of the classroom. Students indicated that this course

does not expand students' views towards life, nor does it help students to set a life goal even though it is classified as an ethics education course.

My interactions with these students provide an insight into the priority of Fu Pin Xian Fu Zhi, which is to have a correct understanding of ethics education. The misunderstanding that ethics education will only bring more rules and limit people's freedom does not only exist among students but also presents in other populations, such as the Communist Party members. Since they are the officials who will get involved in the marketing of ethics education, a correct understanding is essential. Ethics education, which is different from the common perception, is the education that develops students' ethical awareness and supports people's decision making whenever an individual come across any ethical circumstances. It is not merely about telling people what is right and what is wrong. It facilitates human beings to find the meaning of life with sufficient knowledge and to become a person who is benevolent to the society so that everyone works together to promote sustainable development. The development will never become sustainable if specific populations keep receiving financial support from the public without giving back to society.

### **More to be Discussed**

How to deliver ethics education remains a question that needs further research. According to a few scholars (Jin, 2017; Huang, 2018), one of the challenges in current ethics education in higher education institutions is that the course materials are not closely related to students' daily life; another reason is that the instruction methods is singular that the courses are always dull and unaccepted by students. Thus, in order to successfully bring ethics education to those who are in poverty, especially for those who are at around 50 years old and have their view of ethics, the approach of introducing ethics education has to be innovative and does not aim at controlling people's minds in order to avoid reluctance of participation. One suggestion is to design shows or performances that incorporate case studies to let people know that there are alternative ways of living a life rather than giving up on themselves and waiting for government assistance. These activities should be hosted by scholars with correct understandings of ethics and are not eager to brainwash the innocent receivers. Overall, it should offer opportunities for those who do not have access to discover alternative lifestyles due to limited resources and low socioeconomic status.

### **Conclusion**

It is necessary to mention that "the meaning of life" is an abstract and complicated concept. No one in the world has a clear answer to it yet. Thus, there is no reason to force people in poverty to think about it clearly and find a solution at once. However, it can be replaced by another question, as suggested by Anthony Kronman (2007), which is what one should care about ultimately in life. Thinking about this question may arouse people's interest in finding more joyful possibilities rather than living a miserable life with limited resources to survive. Even though this article might be limited since it is built upon literature instead of practical experience in poverty alleviation, the author still wants to promote a discussion on ethics education and poverty alleviation not only limited to any specific country but also globally.

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