

# STRENGTHENING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKFORCE

*Editors*

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## THE PHILOSOPHY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

*Aldila Isahak*

### Introduction

The philosophy of higher education is about the empowerment of human beings so as to fully realise their potentials as rational beings. The reason is because the contributions which these individuals can give towards the development of the society are invaluable for the stability and progress of a country. The reason is simply because a nation that is heterogeneous can only be progressive and live in harmony if it has a society that shares common goals and aspirations. This leads one to conclude that a state can achieve its goal when its four components; territory, government, population and sovereignty reinforce one another. This in turn would mean that the government and the people understand their responsibilities in ensuring their territory and sovereignty are properly guarded hence the honour of their countries will be protected. On the other hand, if these four components of a state are in conflict with one another then social unrests will take place and the state will be stagnant. Since it is said that the philosophy of higher education is to empower human beings, one can make an assumption that the importance of having a philosophy of higher education will determine the behaviours of the people of a state.

Malaysia sees its people as a nation that can stand on its own two feet, hence, while inheriting some of the British education legacy Malaysia has improvised its education system. This is achieved after having learnt from its experience of having been independent for fifty years. The belief and the confidence it has in building its own human capital saw Malaysia investing heavily into its education system, developing different curricula for its primary and secondary school as well as ensuring the quality of education at tertiary level will contribute to the formation of well rounded citizens of the state. The Malaysian philosophy of education of developing the physical, spiritual, intellectual

and emotional wellbeing of its people aims to educate its people to be culturally, religiously, economically and socially balanced. This is to ensure Malaysians as a whole will contribute to the development of the country as well as being part of the workforce of the global community. Notwithstanding this scenario the objective of this chapter is to make a comparative analysis of the philosophy of higher education of the past and the present. The aim is to see if there is a direct or indirect relationship between the state and higher education, and to some extent to see if institutions of higher learning are created to only empower human beings to fulfil their potentials or to be one of the means for a government to create a nation that will protect its sovereignty and interests.

This chapter is therefore primarily divided into two sections; the first looks at the philosophy of education in general whereupon two assumptions are made, and they are, knowledge-based and economic-based philosophy of higher education, whereby both contribute to strengthen the workforce of the society. The second part will be a survey in history beginning with 21<sup>st</sup> century; postmodern philosophy of higher education, and then in retrospect retracing the steps from Confucius to al-Farabi.

## Philosophy of Education

An educational system can never be organised along Utopian lines. It is constrained by the possibilities that exist within the socio-politico and economic infrastructure from where it springs and whose benevolence it feeds and nurtures on. An educational system is viable as long as it retains its legitimacy and contributes to the overall growth and harmony of the socio-politico and economic environment. Should the system, for any reason, become dysfunctional, it ceases to retain its legitimacy, becomes inadequate and demands change.<sup>1</sup>

The above statement reflects the general idea of how education evolves. The realism of the philosophy of education *vis-à-vis* socio-politico-economic context within which it exists gives rise to its objective of providing an opportunity to better understand and cope with life in general. The basic skills and knowledge acquired throughout primary and secondary education should have fully prepared the students to enter the world of higher education at tertiary level. The reason is to

be further equipped to deal with the world at large and be part of the workforce contributing to political stability and economic development of a country.

The question of what is the philosophy of higher education should lead us to its purpose and the aim which it seeks to fulfil that is, by providing opportunities for further learning. The aim of training students to become professionals, administrators, academicians, consultants and scholars that becomes the cornerstone of excellence gave higher education its shape. In other words, higher education aims at producing marketable and employable graduates. The efforts to ensure comprehensive excellence and be involved in lifelong learning in one's life has given rise to the synthesis of extra-curricular and academic activities as graduation requirement. The integrated personality which the philosophy of higher education seeks to produce involves not only the integration of soft skills within the academic curricula, but also its systematisation through the 'codification' of learning outcome matrixes. In wanting to not lose out in this new economic-based knowledge production, higher learning institutions world over look into ways of attracting students and harnessing new talents that are not only knowledgeable in theoretical knowledge but also practical knowledge in order to be marketable and employable. The reason for this harmonisation is to meet the demands of the government and the industries of this globalised age. Hence, higher learning institutions began to steer into a seemingly new direction, charting the way from what was once a knowledge-based philosophy of higher education to an economic-based philosophy of higher education.

Thereon, two assumptions are made. First, the philosophy of higher education of this post-modern age is economic-based and secondly, the philosophy of higher education of the great civilisations of yesteryears was knowledge-based. From these two assumptions, the hypothesis formed is that there is a shift in the worldview of higher education from that of creating a well rounded, knowledgeable, ethical moral person to that of producing marketable and employable graduates. It must be noted as well that this philosophy of higher education of post-modern age is not limited to only producing materialistic graduates but it has also made an impact upon the academicians as well, particularly with regard to their contributions in research areas which are taken to be one of the major criteria for promotion rather than for the purpose of the propagation of knowledge.

In order to address this hypothesis, a survey in the history of the philosophy of higher education will be done. Beginning with postmodernism, this paper will trace the thoughts of Confucius, Plato, St. Augustine, and al-Farabi, representing great civilisations of yesteryears, namely, Chinese, Greeks, Medieval Europe and the Muslims. The purpose of this survey is to put into perspective the philosophy of higher education from 5<sup>th</sup> century BC till the 21<sup>st</sup> century AD. After having completed this survey, an analysis on the worldviews of these civilisations will be done since the final analysis of testing the hypothesis can only be made after investigating the premises found in the survey. Thereafter one can ascertain the assumption that there is a shift in the philosophy of higher education of postmodernism.

## **A Survey in History**

### **Post-modern Scenario (20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

Rational being; the human race is characterised as distinctive from other living species due to its rational and spiritual faculties<sup>2</sup>. The instinctive urge to improvise one's living conditions prompted human being to find ways and means of improving its living conditions. Through self development and self realisation human beings discovered the meaning and merit of virtue. Its origin started from small study circles attended by the privilege few and became institutionalised in its present form since early eleventh century in Bologna<sup>3</sup>. Its philosophy then was to discover the meaning of knowledge, thereon true meaning of existence can be deciphered.

The philosophy of higher education of the twentieth century turns toward globalised mercantilism as capitalism became firmly ingrained in world economy. From trading industrial goods and transfer of technologies, this globalised mercantilism finds new products that are more lucrative, namely, arms trade, currency trading and the latest higher education. As a result of the material benefits that come together after having obtained higher education degrees, people turn toward tertiary education. The involvement of the people in twentieth-century higher learning institutions shifted from an "elite system of higher education, involving only a small minority of the population, to mass systems (Scott, 1995), in which the assumption is becoming that most

people will participate and on more than one occasion".<sup>4</sup> More and more people demand access to higher education, and as the demand increases people are inundated with the liberty to pick and choose the best higher learning institutions at competitive rate. Hence, the traditional selection based on curriculum to enhance one's knowledge and to fine tune one's skills is not the only criterion which people select their universities. The demands for branded, world ranking higher learning institutions are sought after. This has created a race among higher learning institutions to improvise their services in terms of providing the most updated-marketable courses, academicians, research activities and facilities. The race to be a world class university based on educational excellence has driven higher education sector to be a new business centre; a business centre where knowledge becomes a commodity traded across borders.

This newfound trade capitalises in giving of degree certificates, offerings of popular courses, training of academicians, producing employable graduates and churning up of academic writings. For the purpose of societal recognition, students' achievements, administrative, academic and scholarly contributions are condensed to statistics that are quantified as yardsticks for purposes of honours and academic promotions. For those left out in the race of getting societal recognition, their contributions are reduced to another set of statistics to impregnate, thus, illustrate the success of higher learning institutions. Post-modern philosophy of higher education therefore, reduces knowledge to the status of goods and services. In other words, higher education qualifications have become commodities that are traded and paraded.

As mentioned, the present institutionalised form of higher education took its shape during the medieval period. Though this took place in the eleventh century, it does not mean that there was no higher education during the time of Ancient China, classical Greek and medieval periods. Academies were set up by Confucius in Ancient China and Plato in classical Greek, churches became the centre of higher learning for the church fathers during the Patristic age and the library *bayt al-hikmah* was established by al-Ma'mun during the Abbasid caliphate instrumental in creating the first wave of translation period in the world of learning. All these were done in order to address the chronic need for education in Ancient China, the enlightenment of the Classical Greek about the true nature of knowledge, the attempt

by the church fathers to integrate religion, namely, Christianity with politics, and the attempts by the Muslims to fulfil the obligations of pursuing knowledge for the sake of Allah for the development of the society. Towards the end of Zhou dynasty in Ancient China, Confucius set a new pace of learning for the people marking a new era of learning that helped to develop feudalism of Ancient China<sup>5</sup>. What was done is that Confucius opened an academy that offered higher learning opportunities to people from all walks of life. This was a revolution in learning during his time, because during Zhou dynasty, learning was the privilege of the elite and the aristocrats.

### Confucius (551-479 BC)

Confucius' thought and teaching matured at the time when Zhou dynasty was dying<sup>6</sup>. Civil service during this time was monopolised by aristocrats whose privileges include the right to education in general and pursuing higher education in particular. At latter stage, the aristocrats studied the art of governance and skills that enabled them to secure the much coveted career in civil service. The learning took place within government offices and at this time the commoners had no access to knowledge and education<sup>7</sup>. Confucius attributed the decline of Zhou dynasty to the corrupted and unqualified civil service officials. This is because, Confucius stated, the promotions of state officials were based on lineage rather than merit. In lieu of this Confucius attempted to reform and to establish a more ethical and efficient civil service so as to ensure the government carries out its duty in not only administering the state but most importantly ensure its people are well developed as well. Hence, his idea of nurturing anyone, regardless of their family background, interested in learning who at the same time vying for the posts of state officials. The idea of educating the commoners from among the farmers and others transforming them into state officials led Confucius to develop the concept of a 'superior man' or *jen/ren* whose worldview is based on ethics.

Confucius' philosophy of higher education was to develop a civil servant that is virtuous and ethical. He thus developed the philosophy of *jen*, to produce a benevolent, loyal, respectful, magnanimous, kind, wise, courageous, diligent, tolerant, filial piety who respects the elderly<sup>8</sup>. Confucius believed only with civil servant who became a *jen* or

benevolent person, "there would be order in family affairs, the country would be well governed, the people would live in security and peace would everywhere prevail".<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the philosophy of higher education of Confucius was to produce knowledgeable and moral civil servants for the purpose of governing the state.

### Plato (428-347 BC)

About one century after higher education was reformed by Confucius in China, on the other side of the world, Plato's academy was set up in Athens. The reason why Plato established this academy of higher learning was to expunge the teachings of the Sophists.

The Sophists treated education as a business and teaching profession which was a commodity rather than a profession responsible for disseminating knowledge. In addition to this they also propagated the idea of relativity of truth. One of the implications for the absent of universal truth, is the wrong conception of justice. According to the Sophist, justice, which is supposed to be the foundation which a government is built upon, has no universal meaning and application. According to Plato, such a conception of justice will not bring peace and harmony into the society, and thus, developed his thought on the real meaning of justice in his book the *Republic*. Justice, therefore, became the pillar of Plato's philosophy of higher education. By defining justice to mean 'giving every man his due', Plato divided his society into three classes, the philosopher-king, guardians and the artisans after the people underwent several stages of education, and whoever obtained the highest level of education will become the philosopher-king.

The philosopher-king, a ruler of a city-state, is a personification of philosophy at the application level. Plato believes that only through the attainment of higher education that the rational being will understand the realities of existence. Thus, for Plato, the philosophy of higher education is to produce a knowledgeable ruler, who because of the correct understanding of justice, will be the only qualified person to lead the city-state, since governance will be based on justice. In this case the philosopher-king is not only the wisest and the most virtuous ruler, but also the most able statesman. This is because, Plato argues, he is not only an expert in theoretical sciences since he embodies

philosophy as his way of life, but most importantly, he is also the only person, who can apply justice properly. Hence, he will be able to fulfil the aim of the state by ensuring the society plays its role in developing the city-state according to the classes which were divided as above.

### **St. Augustine (354-430 AD)**

Medieval Europe from fourth century to fourteenth century experienced a violent feudal system. It was tainted by the clash of the 'two swords'. This was the period when the power of the church under the Pope wanted to exert its divinely ordained spiritual power as the highest political authority over the state led by the king. The pursuit of higher education was in the hands of the privileged few, who were the church fathers. The philosophy of higher education of this patristic age was the Christianisation of politics<sup>10</sup>. During this period, the purpose of pursuing higher education was to understand Christian theology.

St. Augustine, who discussed politics as a means to obtain the salvation of the soul, developed the concepts of the City of God and the City of Man. Since it was established that the purpose of living is to achieve the salvation of the soul, the primary role of the leader of the state is to ensure this is fulfilled. Hence, the church fathers defended the legitimacy of having the Pope as the ultimate ruler of a state, and the king served as the vassal.

### **Al-Farabi (872-950 AD/259-339 AH)**

While in the western hemisphere, medieval Europe was in the dark ages, in the eastern hemisphere, medieval orient experienced a burst of scientific development. Al-Farabi, a Muslim peripatetic philosopher, unified Greek philosophy and Islamic thought. With regard to education he "believed the first aim of knowledge was knowledge of God and his attributes, a knowledge that has a profound effect on an individuals' moral conduct helping him to find the way to the ultimate aim of his existence, while indirectly arousing the intellect so that is should achieve wisdom..."<sup>11</sup>

The philosophy of higher education of al-Farabi is the unity of *tawhid* and mundane life. By describing four types of cities, the virtuous city, the ignorant city, the immoral city and the erring city, represented

by their knowledge and the pursuance of ultimate happiness or lack thereof, he says, the ruler of the state must be a philosopher as well. This is to achieve the ultimate happiness which he says is found in the teachings of Islam. The confluence of philosophy and religion, in this case Islam, will lead to the creation of the perfect state led by the caliph. Hence, for al-Farabi moral virtue that is learned and practiced through the understanding of the unity of *tawhid* and life will ensure a proper running of a state, as well as the development of the community that is based on the religion of Islam.

## **The Philosophy of Higher Education: An Appraisal**

From the surveys above, one can say that the philosophy of higher education from 4<sup>th</sup> century BC till the 21<sup>st</sup> century AD is not really different from one another. The purpose of obtaining higher education has also been for the purpose of producing and providing able man to administer the state.

The development of human capital in these four civilisations shows that higher education has been treated as a means to an end, and that is to ensure the state is administered properly by qualified people. One might want to argue however, that there is one main difference between the philosophies of post-modern higher education with the rest of its predecessors, in the fact that education in this post-modern age is treated as a business enterprise rather than the inculcation of moral virtue and moral excellence. In addition to this, it is found that there really is no shift in the worldviews of the philosophies of higher education of the great civilisations above. What is found to have taken place was the transformation of the usage of higher education as a means for effective administration to a profit making venture which benefits both the institutions and the people at large.

In conclusion, the challenge of national unity is not really about imparting skills, knowledge and experiences to the students. Instead, the challenge is to ensure economic based philosophy of higher education does not clash with the inculcation of moral values in order to achieve comprehensive excellence which rational being is capable of achieving. At the end of the day, the very reason why higher learning institutions aim at producing marketable graduates is to ensure the

political stability and economic prosperity is found in the country. Thus it is found that there is a direct relationship between the state and the institutions of higher learning, whereby these institutions are tools used by the state in order to ensure a marketable workforce is produced so to ensure the development of the state does take place.

Though this chapter is rather brief in its analysis, it is meant as an introduction rather than an in depth analysis, hence, the surveys of the philosophy of higher education of the four major civilisations of the world were done as overviews. It is proposed that further detailed analysis be done in order to substantiate the assumptions that post-modern philosophy of higher education is economic-based and the philosophy of higher education of great civilisations of yesteryears is knowledge-based. It is proposed that case studies of selected higher learning institutions be developed and a comparative study of different states be done in the near future. This is to further substantiate the above finding.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Zainul Ariff b. Hj. Hussain. (1986, 4–5 January). *Higher education in Malaysia objective and implementation*. Paper presented at the Seminar on Higher Education: A Re-evaluation, organised by the International Islamic University Student Association, International Islamic University, Malaysia, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the views of the secularists, the assumption about these two faculties inherent in a human being is based on Islamic worldview.
- <sup>3</sup> Ronald Barnett. (1990). *The idea of higher education*. The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, p. 18.
- <sup>4</sup> Malcolm Tight. (2003). *Researching higher education*. Berkshire: Society for research into higher education and Open University Press, p. 4. This 'elite system of higher education' was inherited from the fourth-century European medieval period and this will be discussed later.
- <sup>5</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*. In Zaghoul Morsy (Ed.), *Thinkers on education*, p. 211. UNESCO.

- <sup>6</sup> According to Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall of a civilisation, Zhou dynasty can be classified as the fifth and the last stage of a civilisation that marked the fall of the civilisation. The significant of this stage is that according to Ibn Khaldun, this civilisation will be replaced by a new, vibrant civilisation to establish a new dynasty. As for the time of Confucius when he began his teachings, it can be classified to be the second; which is the building stage of a civilisation.
- <sup>7</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*, p. 211.
- <sup>8</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*, p. 214.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> During this time, the philosophy of higher learning education was to establish Christian theology as a relevant contributing factor to politics. It was during this period feudalism was practiced and the idea of the Two Swords was created. It idea of introduced by St. Anselm and later its legitimacy was defended by the subsequent church fathers. Hence, because of the attempts to incorporate religion into politics clashes between church and state dominated the entire medieval politics of Europe.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Ammar al-Talbi. (1997). "al-Farabi". In Zaghoul Morsy (Ed.), *Thinkers on education*, UNESCO, p. 354.

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Rational being; the human race is characterised as distinctive from other living species due to its rational and spiritual faculties<sup>2</sup>. The instinctive urge to improvise one's living conditions prompted human being to find ways and means of improving its living conditions. Through self development and self realisation human beings discovered the meaning and merit of virtue. Its origin started from small study circles attended by the privilege few and became institutionalised in its present form since early eleventh century in Bologna<sup>3</sup>. Its philosophy then was to discover the meaning of knowledge, thereon true meaning of existence can be deciphered.

The philosophy of higher education of the twentieth century turns toward globalised mercantilism as capitalism became firmly ingrained in world economy. From trading industrial goods and transfer of technologies, this globalised mercantilism finds new products that are more lucrative, namely, arms trade, currency trading and the latest higher education. As a result of the material benefits that come together after having obtained higher education degrees, people turn toward tertiary education. The involvement of the people in twentieth-century higher learning institutions shifted from an "elite system of higher education, involving only a small minority of the population, to mass systems (Scott, 1995), in which the assumption is becoming that most

people will participate and on more than one occasion".<sup>4</sup> More and more people demand access to higher education, and as the demand increases people are inundated with the liberty to pick and choose the best higher learning institutions at competitive rate. Hence, the traditional selection based on curriculum to enhance one's knowledge and to fine tune one's skills is not the only criterion which people select their universities. The demands for branded, world ranking higher learning institutions are sought after. This has created a race among higher learning institutions to improvise their services in terms of providing the most updated-marketable courses, academicians, research activities and facilities. The race to be a world class university based on educational excellence has driven higher education sector to be a new business centre; a business centre where knowledge becomes a commodity traded across borders.

This newfound trade capitalises in giving of degree certificates, offerings of popular courses, training of academicians, producing employable graduates and churning up of academic writings. For the purpose of societal recognition, students' achievements, administrative, academic and scholarly contributions are condensed to statistics that are quantified as yardsticks for purposes of honours and academic promotions. For those left out in the race of getting societal recognition, their contributions are reduced to another set of statistics to impregnate, thus, illustrate the success of higher learning institutions. Post-modern philosophy of higher education therefore, reduces knowledge to the status of goods and services. In other words, higher education qualifications have become commodities that are traded and paraded.

As mentioned, the present institutionalised form of higher education took its shape during the medieval period. Though this took place in the eleventh century, it does not mean that there was no higher education during the time of Ancient China, classical Greek and medieval periods. Academies were set up by Confucius in Ancient China and Plato in classical Greek, churches became the centre of higher learning for the church fathers during the Patristic age and the library *bayt al-hikmah* was established by al-Ma'mun during the Abbasid caliphate instrumental in creating the first wave of translation period in the world of learning. All these were done in order to address the chronic need for education in Ancient China, the enlightenment of the Classical Greek about the true nature of knowledge, the attempt

by the church fathers to integrate religion, namely, Christianity with politics, and the attempts by the Muslims to fulfil the obligations of pursuing knowledge for the sake of Allah for the development of the society. Towards the end of Zhou dynasty in Ancient China, Confucius set a new pace of learning for the people marking a new era of learning that helped to develop feudalism of Ancient China<sup>5</sup>. What was done is that Confucius opened an academy that offered higher learning opportunities to people from all walks of life. This was a revolution in learning during his time, because during Zhou dynasty, learning was the privilege of the elite and the aristocrats.

### Confucius (551-479 BC)

Confucius' thought and teaching matured at the time when Zhou dynasty was dying<sup>6</sup>. Civil service during this time was monopolised by aristocrats whose privileges include the right to education in general and pursuing higher education in particular. At latter stage, the aristocrats studied the art of governance and skills that enabled them to secure the much coveted career in civil service. The learning took place within government offices and at this time the commoners had no access to knowledge and education<sup>7</sup>. Confucius attributed the decline of Zhou dynasty to the corrupted and unqualified civil service officials. This is because, Confucius stated, the promotions of state officials were based on lineage rather than merit. In lieu of this Confucius attempted to reform and to establish a more ethical and efficient civil service so as to ensure the government carries out its duty in not only administering the state but most importantly ensure its people are well developed as well. Hence, his idea of nurturing anyone, regardless of their family background, interested in learning who at the same time vying for the posts of state officials. The idea of educating the commoners from among the farmers and others transforming them into state officials led Confucius to develop the concept of a 'superior man' or *jen/ren* whose worldview is based on ethics.

Confucius' philosophy of higher education was to develop a civil servant that is virtuous and ethical. He thus developed the philosophy of *jen*, to produce a benevolent, loyal, respectful, magnanimous, kind, wise, courageous, diligent, tolerant, filial piety who respects the elderly<sup>8</sup>. Confucius believed only with civil servant who became a *jen* or

benevolent person, "there would be order in family affairs, the country would be well governed, the people would live in security and peace would everywhere prevail".<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the philosophy of higher education of Confucius was to produce knowledgeable and moral civil servants for the purpose of governing the state.

### Plato (428-347 BC)

About one century after higher education was reformed by Confucius in China, on the other side of the world, Plato's academy was set up in Athens. The reason why Plato established this academy of higher learning was to expunge the teachings of the Sophists.

The Sophists treated education as a business and teaching profession which was a commodity rather than a profession responsible for disseminating knowledge. In addition to this they also propagated the idea of relativity of truth. One of the implications for the absent of universal truth, is the wrong conception of justice. According to the Sophist, justice, which is supposed to be the foundation which a government is built upon, has no universal meaning and application. According to Plato, such a conception of justice will not bring peace and harmony into the society, and thus, developed his thought on the real meaning of justice in his book the *Republic*. Justice, therefore, became the pillar of Plato's philosophy of higher education. By defining justice to mean 'giving every man his due', Plato divided his society into three classes, the philosopher-king, guardians and the artisans after the people underwent several stages of education, and whoever obtained the highest level of education will become the philosopher-king.

The philosopher-king, a ruler of a city-state, is a personification of philosophy at the application level. Plato believes that only through the attainment of higher education that the rational being will understand the realities of existence. Thus, for Plato, the philosophy of higher education is to produce a knowledgeable ruler, who because of the correct understanding of justice, will be the only qualified person to lead the city-state, since governance will be based on justice. In this case the philosopher-king is not only the wisest and the most virtuous ruler, but also the most able statesman. This is because, Plato argues, he is not only an expert in theoretical sciences since he embodies

philosophy as his way of life, but most importantly, he is also the only person, who can apply justice properly. Hence, he will be able to fulfil the aim of the state by ensuring the society plays its role in developing the city-state according to the classes which were divided as above.

### **St. Augustine (354-430 AD)**

Medieval Europe from fourth century to fourteenth century experienced a violent feudal system. It was tainted by the clash of the 'two swords'. This was the period when the power of the church under the Pope wanted to exert its divinely ordained spiritual power as the highest political authority over the state led by the king. The pursuit of higher education was in the hands of the privileged few, who were the church fathers. The philosophy of higher education of this patristic age was the Christianisation of politics<sup>10</sup>. During this period, the purpose of pursuing higher education was to understand Christian theology.

St. Augustine, who discussed politics as a means to obtain the salvation of the soul, developed the concepts of the City of God and the City of Man. Since it was established that the purpose of living is to achieve the salvation of the soul, the primary role of the leader of the state is to ensure this is fulfilled. Hence, the church fathers defended the legitimacy of having the Pope as the ultimate ruler of a state, and the king served as the vassal.

### **Al-Farabi (872-950 AD/259-339 AH)**

While in the western hemisphere, medieval Europe was in the dark ages, in the eastern hemisphere, medieval orient experienced a burst of scientific development. Al-Farabi, a Muslim peripatetic philosopher, unified Greek philosophy and Islamic thought. With regard to education he "believed the first aim of knowledge was knowledge of God and his attributes, a knowledge that has a profound effect on an individuals' moral conduct helping him to find the way to the ultimate aim of his existence, while indirectly arousing the intellect so that is should achieve wisdom..."<sup>11</sup>

The philosophy of higher education of al-Farabi is the unity of *tawhid* and mundane life. By describing four types of cities, the virtuous city, the ignorant city, the immoral city and the erring city, represented

by their knowledge and the pursuance of ultimate happiness or lack thereof, he says, the ruler of the state must be a philosopher as well. This is to achieve the ultimate happiness which he says is found in the teachings of Islam. The confluence of philosophy and religion, in this case Islam, will lead to the creation of the perfect state led by the caliph. Hence, for al-Farabi moral virtue that is learned and practiced through the understanding of the unity of *tawhid* and life will ensure a proper running of a state, as well as the development of the community that is based on the religion of Islam.

## **The Philosophy of Higher Education: An Appraisal**

From the surveys above, one can say that the philosophy of higher education from 4<sup>th</sup> century BC till the 21<sup>st</sup> century AD is not really different from one another. The purpose of obtaining higher education has also been for the purpose of producing and providing able man to administer the state.

The development of human capital in these four civilisations shows that higher education has been treated as a means to an end, and that is to ensure the state is administered properly by qualified people. One might want to argue however, that there is one main difference between the philosophies of post-modern higher education with the rest of its predecessors, in the fact that education in this post-modern age is treated as a business enterprise rather than the inculcation of moral virtue and moral excellence. In addition to this, it is found that there really is no shift in the worldviews of the philosophies of higher education of the great civilisations above. What is found to have taken place was the transformation of the usage of higher education as a means for effective administration to a profit making venture which benefits both the institutions and the people at large.

In conclusion, the challenge of national unity is not really about imparting skills, knowledge and experiences to the students. Instead, the challenge is to ensure economic based philosophy of higher education does not clash with the inculcation of moral values in order to achieve comprehensive excellence which rational being is capable of achieving. At the end of the day, the very reason why higher learning institutions aim at producing marketable graduates is to ensure the

political stability and economic prosperity is found in the country. Thus it is found that there is a direct relationship between the state and the institutions of higher learning, whereby these institutions are tools used by the state in order to ensure a marketable workforce is produced so to ensure the development of the state does take place.

Though this chapter is rather brief in its analysis, it is meant as an introduction rather than an in depth analysis, hence, the surveys of the philosophy of higher education of the four major civilisations of the world were done as overviews. It is proposed that further detailed analysis be done in order to substantiate the assumptions that post-modern philosophy of higher education is economic-based and the philosophy of higher education of great civilisations of yesteryears is knowledge-based. It is proposed that case studies of selected higher learning institutions be developed and a comparative study of different states be done in the near future. This is to further substantiate the above finding.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Zainul Ariff b. Hj. Hussain. (1986, 4–5 January). *Higher education in Malaysia objective and implementation*. Paper presented at the Seminar on Higher Education: A Re-evaluation, organised by the International Islamic University Student Association, International Islamic University, Malaysia, p. 2.
- <sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding the views of the secularists, the assumption about these two faculties inherent in a human being is based on Islamic worldview.
- <sup>3</sup> Ronald Barnett. (1990). *The idea of higher education*. The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, p. 18.
- <sup>4</sup> Malcolm Tight. (2003). *Researching higher education*. Berkshire: Society for research into higher education and Open University Press, p. 4. This 'elite system of higher education' was inherited from the fourth-century European medieval period and this will be discussed later.
- <sup>5</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*. In Zaghoul Morsy (Ed.), *Thinkers on education*, p. 211. UNESCO.

- <sup>6</sup> According to Ibn Khaldun's theory of the rise and fall of a civilisation, Zhou dynasty can be classified as the fifth and the last stage of a civilisation that marked the fall of the civilisation. The significant of this stage is that according to Ibn Khaldun, this civilisation will be replaced by a new, vibrant civilisation to establish a new dynasty. As for the time of Confucius when he began his teachings, it can be classified to be the second; which is the building stage of a civilisation.
- <sup>7</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*, p. 211.
- <sup>8</sup> Yang Huanyin. (1997). *Confucius (K'ung Tzu)*, p. 214.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> During this time, the philosophy of higher learning education was to establish Christian theology as a relevant contributing factor to politics. It was during this period feudalism was practiced and the idea of the Two Swords was created. It idea of introduced by St. Anselm and later its legitimacy was defended by the subsequent church fathers. Hence, because of the attempts to incorporate religion into politics clashes between church and state dominated the entire medieval politics of Europe.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Ammar al-Talbi. (1997). "al-Farabi". In Zaghoul Morsy (Ed.), *Thinkers on education*, UNESCO, p. 354.

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