

## Editorial The Economic Benefits of A Humanities Education

摘要  
人文教育的經濟效益

香港向來並不重視人文教育。在向“知識型經濟”轉型的呼聲下香港人更益相信只有工程醫學科技財務會計法律等才有經濟效益，以為人文教育甚至社會科學只堪作消閒清談，談不上經濟效益。然而，人文教育足以使我們明白一切經濟活動均應以提高人民生活的素質和文明為目標。否則，縱使我們有呼風喚雨的能力，人與人之間只知爭做龍頭、做第一，爭建全球最高的大廈、最宏偉的“地標”，我們還不是浪費資源破壞社會凝聚力、破壞社會資本？人文教育成功，就不會有安龍事件，也不會出現短樁事件。其經濟效益決不亞於科技和商貿金融的教育。

A humanities education, properly delivered, is probably the economically most productive education one can ever acquire. When I say economically most productive, I mean two things: that it can result in more economical utilization of our resources thus avoiding waste, and that it can enhance the quality of the human life, which should be the objective of all productive activities.

This of course is a most provocative proposition in Hong Kong, where it is traditionally and widely believed that humanities is at most a past time and at worst a waste of money. It is traditionally assumed that what make the "knowledge based society" tick are engineering, medical, and professional education, and science and technology, while literature, drama, music, religion, cultural studies, philosophy etc. do not really contribute to the knowledge based society. A humanities education, it is pointed out, will never deliver a human being to the moon. It will not do much good in helping us fight cancer, and or helping us erect bridges or high rise buildings. So how can a humanities education be economically productive?

Paradoxically, a humanities education is productive exactly because it tells us that there are far more urgent matters than delivering a human being to the moon, that the race for space supremacy and for military supremacy is wasteful of our precious resources, that building taller and taller buildings is nothing to be proud of, and that the world can be much more wonderful and enjoyable if people devote their time and energy more to improving the quality of the human life for everybody than if they set their

minds just on cutting costs and lifting profits. Still, a humanities education is, let it be made totally clear, not anti-capitalism or anti-globalization. It is about a mind set that puts the human life above everything else and that capitalism, profits, globalization, laws, culture, entertainment, politics, bridges, buildings—and indeed everything—mean nothing except when they enhance the quality of the human life.

A humanities education puts things in perspective, rather than letting the ego take over our lives. Everything, from religion to music to science to politics to law, should enrich and improve our lives. In contrast, someone who has never been exposed to humanities education keeps pursuing elusive goals without knowing why they are doing what they are doing. In pursuing their elusive goals they also flight with one another and they spend valuable resources fighting one another. Without knowing it they are wasting resources even as they earn profits. In minimizing costs they instead often end up unloading costs upon others. In striving for higher productivity they instead sacrifice the interests of fellow workers.

Many of us have been used to the idea that education is either a “consumption good” or an “investment good.” According to this commonly shared view, as a consumption good, education brings “utility” to the consumer when the “education good” is consumed. As an investment good, it benefits the investor through higher future incomes. But a humanities education belongs to neither of these categories. It is not consumed like food is eaten and then gone. It also may not necessarily bring higher future incomes. A good humanities education would have us assess the joys and sorrows of the human experience through history, so we can learn from our ancestors. It allows us to find meaning in what we do. It knits us together and cultivate social capital thus enabling us to tackle problems together. It takes us away from elusive and even silly pursuits and refocuses our minds to the quality of the human life. It makes us into more responsible individuals and allows us to become masters of our own lives.

A humanities education allows us to appreciate why Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Mother Theresa did what they did. The former spent his life helping the poor and the sick in Africa, The latter spent her life taking care of the old and orphans in India, Their work did not make them millionaires or billionaires, But they have made our world immensely more livable and more beautiful, A quality humanities education makes us humble and more sensitive to the needs and aspirations of others. If it reduces conflicts between human beings and nations and enables us to

achieve peace, the economic benefits would be huge. We would have avoided so much destruction and saved so many lives and so much medical costs. Is it "consumption"? Is it "investment"? If it is both or either, it is certainly not in the traditional sense as we understand it.