



Civic Education and Communication in Aristotle

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Abstract

This study is the first step of a wider research plan to improve the democratic citizenship in South Korea through communication education, and to find a better method of civic education, which means the education for students to be good citizens. After examining the context of extensive issues on social communication and education in the history of ancient Greece, it aims to find the source of the concept of ‘communicating citizen’ (*civis communicans*) in Aristotle’s ethics, political science, and rhetoric, in which Aristotle deals with the citizens and the state.

What should be the civic education with the keyword of communication? A clue to find a solution of this question in Aristotle comes from a phrase that defines man as a political animal and at the same time defines it as the only animal with *logos*. This passage is important because, when Aristotle says here the difference of human from all the other animals is ‘*logos*,’ he describes *logos* as not only the ability to ‘think and to discern’ but also the ability to ‘talk and communicate’.

According to these thoughts of Aristotle, a man does not think alone or speak alone, but grows up combining these two abilities while being educated in the home and society. Then, he lives not only thinking and discerning, but also participating in public affairs as a citizen by communicating with others in the state. It is a life to practice being a good citizen as a member of the community of *Polis* while pursuing personally to be a good person. And this is the image of ‘good man, good citizen’, which is the ideal goal of civic education pursued by this research.

Keywords: citizen in Aristotle, citizenship, civic education, communication, good man-good citizen

1. Introduction

Today, the world is pursuing democracy as basic and universal value.¹ Under democracy, the issue of civic education and communication is one of the most important factors. It is because participation of citizens is essential in democracy, and communication is a necessary condition

¹ Even in countries that have not adopted a democratic constitution, e.g. kingdoms, procedural democracy is pursued as a social justice.

for participation, but all these depend on education. According to Aristotle, democracy is a system in which citizens equal in citizenship alternate between ruling and being ruled by each other. This is a cyclical process in which citizens exercise their right to public office and suffrage in the democracy of ancient Greece, but today's representative democracy is not much different. Democracy is an imperfect system, in which the participation of citizens is essential, whether they are in public service or not. Until now, if the education for the formation of personality has focused on 'the good man', we should now focus on 'good citizen'. It is an education that allows students to become aware of themselves as 'master of the nation and democratic citizen'.²

2. Citizen and communication in ancient Athens

In ancient Athens, there is a historical experience in which the citizen participated as the leader of the national community. It is meaningful to go back to that era and seek answers to the problems of our time, since the operation of the state through citizen participation under the democracy of Athens in the 5th century BC is still a model of society in which persuasion and communication operate. I will pay particular attention to the rhetoric, which Aristotle has established as an academic discipline from the skills of speech and debate, and to the ideology of civic education, for which he emphasizes the need for state to provide a common education. Specifically, I will capture the concept of 'communicating citizen' (*civis communicans*) in the democracy of Athens, which is formed by participation of citizens. And I will note that when Aristotle regards man as a unique animal with logos,³ he understands the logos as two aspects: reason, which means discernment, and language, which means communication ability.

3. The 'politēs'(citizen) in Aristotle

The Aristotle is the person who opened in ancient Greece the ideology of civic education that the state educates citizens and educated citizens lead the country to a better community through communication and participation. And he established it in academic level such as ethics, politics, and rhetoric. It is true that Aristotle embraced Isocrates's position in rhetoric and practical philosophy. But Isocrates has emphasized the nature and training of the speaker rather than the rules of rhetoric, and he has educated students with his own speeches to be good speakers rather than finding the principle of persuasion with a textbook of theory.

² For the criticism of meritocracy and the competitive society, and for the direction of civic education, see R. Reich(2012), *Beyond Outrage: What Has Gone Wrong with Our Economy and Our Democracy, and How to Fix It*, Vintage; A. Kohn(1992), *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, Houghton Mifflin; M. Sandel(2010), *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

³ Differently from the tradition of Greek myths, in which a man had been regarded as 'ephemeros'(lasting one day), Plato identified human as having *logos*(reason). In this respect, Aristotle inherits Plato's thoughts.

Derek Heater, who wrote *A History of Education for Citizenship*, starts his book with this words: “It is always good to start with Aristotle's saying. In his *Politics*, let's look at the phrase, ‘Citizens of a nation should always be educated to fit their political system.’”⁴ The phrase pointed out here is the beginning of Book 8 in Aristotle's *Politics* advocating general education for all citizens. It is precisely the sentence that “education must always conform to its political system(*politeia*)”, followed by “the democratic character creates and maintains democratic identity, and the oligarchic character creates and maintains the oligarchy. And in either case, a better personality leads to a better *politeia*.”⁵ Here, the idea of public education was first introduced, and the evidence seems to be very realistic. In other words, Aristotle advocates general education for all citizens, and based on the fact that good education creates better *politeia*, he suggests 'education in accordance with the *politeia* of the state' as a methodology. Public education as a general education for all citizens attracts the active community participation of educated citizens, which is carried out through communication education based on rhetoric.

In the history of communication education Aristotle has rescued rhetoric(*rhetorikē*) between the Sophist's skill of debate(*eristikē*) and the philosopher's knowledge of dialogue(*dialectikē*). In the beginning of *Rhetoric*, he emphasizes that “the unique function of rhetoric is not in persuasion, but in knowing the methods of persuasion that each theme contains.”⁶ As a result, he establishes rhetoric in an area of academic discipline from 'speaking', which was a technique of speech. In this sense, the purpose of rhetoric and rhetoric education is not only to persuade the audience, but to enable the citizen to perform his functions in the state, to understand the major issues in it, and to know the methods of persuasion and communication in each issue.

The difference between Aristotle and Plato is manifested in ethics. Aristotle thought that the ‘good’(*agathon*) and ‘virtue’(*aretē*) that the Greeks pursued in life and education were not just knowledge, but matter of act and practice. In this respect, Aristotle, unlike Plato, could associate rhetoric with civic education. Aristotle understands logos and the formation of a state as human nature.⁷ And he emphasizes that persuasion in the rhetoric of human and civic education is based on the character(*ēthos*) of the speaker. The issue of human character

⁴ D. Heater(2004), *A History of Education for Citizenship*, Routledge, p. 1.

⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1337a13-20.

⁶ *Rhetoric*, 1354a1.

⁷ *Politics*, Book 1, ch. 1.

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and act is treated in *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the issue of education in *Politics*.⁸ In fact, all books belonging to his ethics and politics are about personality education and civic education, with the objective of good man and good citizen. In other words, Aristotle's lectures on ethics with a goal of 'good man, living with reason and acting with virtues', and lectures on politics with a goal of 'good citizen, obeying the law and participating in public affairs', are all about humanity education and civic education.⁹ So what is the 'citizen' (*politēs*) in Aristotle? Who is a citizen? Aristotle argues in Book 3 of *Politics* that the study of the state and political system should first address the question of how to define 'citizen'.¹⁰

Aristotle first examines who can be called a citizen, and eventually defines a citizen of full right, who has no reason for disqualification. The most distinctive feature of a full citizen is seen as 'participating in trial and public service'. This is a comprehensive definition of 'citizen'. Citizens who are defined in this way are best suited to democracy, and in a word "everyone who has the right to vote and to participate in the trial is a citizen of that country."¹¹ Then he finds a practical definition of 'citizen', which is defined as 'a citizen of both parents'.¹² It is not easy in the case of acquisition of citizenship with the change of political system (*metabolē politeias*). In Athens, at the reform of Cleisthenes in 508 BC many foreigners and slaves were put on the tribe (*phylē*) list. But Aristotle concludes that those who have obtained citizenship through this change will be called citizens as long as they participate in public office.

Therefore, the answer to what is citizen in Aristotle is 'the man who has the citizenship'. This means an adult man of a state who participates in public services such as vote and trial. Public service is a public affair of the state, then if a person living in a state does not participate in the public affairs, he is not a citizen or a citizen in a limited sense.

4. Philosophy of human things

This study is a work to locate the rhetoric of Aristotle in the framework of the existing research concentrated on his ethics and politics, and to find the natural place of his "philosophy on human things", which is the name that Aristotle gave to his practical philosophy. Aristotle says in the end of Book 10 of *Nicomachean Ethics*, "Let's make complete the philosophy about human things (*ta anthrōpheia*)."¹² He then asks to look at legislation and

⁸ Discussions on education come from the 7th and 8th Books of *Politics*, especially in the context of an ideal political system.

⁹ As for this discussion, see Y. R. Sohn(2012), "Character and Education of Virtue in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*", and Y. R. Sohn(2015) "Civic Education and its Disciples in Aristotle".

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1274b32-41.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275b19. ¹² *Politics*, 1275b22.

¹² *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1181b15.
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politeia, and the whole book ends with the sentence: “Let's start discussing now.” The content of the discussion is in his other book, *Politics*. So, the content of *Nicomachean Ethics* is linked to *Politics*. This shows that ethics, which deals with the behavior of individuals in Aristotle's system of knowledge, is on the horizon of politics related to various problems in the state. A. W. H. Adkins says that Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* are intended to be read together and can only be understood correctly when read together. According to him, there are differences in emphasis between the two texts, but for an understanding of ethics-political thought of Aristotle, similarity and continuity are much more important.¹³

Aristotle said at the very beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the purpose of political science is ‘human good’ (*anthrōpinon agathon*).¹⁴ Here, the term ‘human’ can be said to mean something totally about all aspects of human life. Theoretical disciplines require logical rigidity in exploring the world of object and pursue universal laws that apply in all cases. However, in the case of practical studies, it is difficult to demand such rigor because it deals with the variable human things. So Aristotle defines practical studies as knowledges of how to do with the ‘things in most cases’ (*peri tōn hōs epi to poly*).¹⁵ Therefore, the contents covered in *Politics* are also ‘human things’ in this sense.

5. *Logos* in Aristotle - ability of communication and discernment

However, shortly after defining “human being as political animal” (*zōion politikon*) in Book 1 of *Politics*, Aristotle holds *logos* as a unique ability to human beings, and defines it in two aspects. This is especially noteworthy. At the beginning of *Politics* Aristotle declared that “the state is a kind of community (*koinōnia*) and that all communities are made up for good things (*agathon*)”¹⁶ and also that “man is by nature the animal that forms the state”.¹⁸ He begins with the fact that humans by nature pursue good things, and takes the nature of man as forming a home and a village and eventually forming a state. The state is the largest unit of community in which the citizen is not only member but also owner of a community in so far as he participates in public affairs. Aristotle says in the following passage of *Politics* Book 1, “Man is the only animal with *logos* (*logon de monon anthrōpos echei tōn zōōn*)”¹⁷ and explains that “*logos* is used to tell us what is good and bad and what is right and wrong”. This means that he defines man as having *logos*, and considers that man has reason and discernment with

¹³ A. W. H. Adkins(1991). p. 75.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b7.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b21.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1251a1. ¹⁸

Politics, 1253a1.

¹⁷ *Politics*, 1253a10.

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language ability. So, given this text, human logos are two levels of abilities. It means (1) ability to discern between good and harmful, between right and wrong, and (2) ability to communicate in language.

Originally in Greek traditional thought, logos means not only the principle of nature and things but also the human reason, so human beings recognize and communicate through these 'logos'. In fact, this is the most cited definition of human being, "man is *zoion logikon*," that is, 'animal with logos'. First, logos means human reason, so man can construct a state (*polis*) that is the perfect and self-sufficient community of the greatest level by calculating and discerning through logos. Also, logos means language, so man can live as a being with communication ability, communicate as citizen in a state, and live as a citizen in so far as he communicates. Here we capture the origin of the concept of 'communicating citizens'. Communication is the human nature that Aristotle seeks to find in the democracy of Athens, which was formed by the participation of citizens in the 5th century BC, but broken as they fell into the ignorant masses. And this is what Aristotle tries to revive in his ideal *politeia*. The concept of '*civis communicans*' begins here.

James Crosswhite developed a rhetorical framework based on his understanding of logos in Aristotle as communication ability and created a new method in teaching of writing. He was once a representative who has understood logos as a "communication ability" rather than a traditional "reason ability" among modern rhetorical scholars.¹⁸ However, now he interprets logos in terms of discernment and insight, and attempts to make a philosophical plan in order to overcome modern violence and oppression by rhetoric education including logos of this concept.²¹ In this article, I interpret Aristotle's logos as both discernment and language ability, which is similar to the view of Crosswhite.

This discussion is linked to a big picture of Aristotle's thought. The definition of "man as a being with logos" in Book 1 of *Politics* can be extended to a larger topic in relation to the topic of "communication". That is, this definition can be linked to the two dimensions of Aristotle's expression of '*logikon*'.

The adverb '*logikōs*', literally meaning 'with words', often appears in Aristotle's logical and theoretical texts, and it is used when one cannot explain with real examples but he is able to do it with words. For example, a discipline that deals with gods, numbers, or other immaterial things is called a '*logikon*' inquiry. However, Aristotle does not use the word '*logikon*' about rhetoric (*rhetorikē*). Aristotle's attitude is surprising given that rhetoric is a discipline that deals with techniques that use words to persuade people. Why did Aristotle not say rhetoric '*logikon*'?

¹⁸ J. Crosswhite(1996), *Rhetoric of Reason*. ²¹
J. Crosswhite(2013), *Deep Rhetoric*.



We can recall that Aristotle's use of the term "*logikon*" is limited to logical and theoretical disciplines(*epistemē theoretikē*). He does not use this expression for a discipline of making something(*poietikē*) or practical studies of doing(*praktikē*). A practical study is not a study which deals with what is always true, as is the case with rigorous studies. In human reality, in most cases, such things are commonly used as truths, and this is the social common sense, which is the realm of ethics and politics. Rhetoric seems to belong to the practical field because it is about the technique of persuading people by using words. However, it is difficult

to say that rhetoric belongs to a completely practical field, as Aristotle says that the purpose of rhetoric is not to persuade anyone but to explore the mechanism of persuasion. It is in the field of production to write a speech and to analyze the mechanisms of persuasion is in the domain of theory. Therefore, it is a scanty explanation to say that Aristotle does not use the expression ‘*logikon*’ about rhetoric because this is in the practical domain.

To tell the truth, Aristotle does not use the term ‘*logikon*’ for rhetoric because rhetoric does not stop at verbal level. We find this fact in the relation between *logos*(the logical part of the content), *pathos*(the emotional part of audience), and *ethos*(the personality part of speaker) in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, where *logos* accounts for the greatest part. But nevertheless Aristotle emphasizes *ethos*, not *logos*, as the most important factor to persuade the audience.¹⁹ According to Aristotle, the old speeches have had such a tendency to depend on persuasion with *pathos*, but now it is the first step of ‘rhetoric as an academic discipline’ to pursue a persuasion with *logos*. But that is not all. If there is no logic in the speech, it will not be persuasive, but no matter how logical the content is, there is no persuasion if the speaker’s *ethos* is in doubt. Then, *ethos* is the foundation of persuasion and communication. In this context, this study suggests that citizenship education is needed through communication education. It is also shown here that this communication education is based on the *ethos* but is oriented to the *ethos* as a citizen.

The aim of this study is in line with the position of J. Crosswhite, who has recently responded to the question of “what to do with rhetoric”. Using rhetoric, he created a new method of teaching writing and argumentation, and he was recognized for his contributions to education, culture, and literacy. For him, rhetoric has been understood as a methodology of communication education for citizens. In his recent book, he once again focuses on the concept of rhetoric itself. Here he argues that rhetoric should be understood as a philosophical project linked to a practical project to defeat violence and pursue wisdom, by developing strong rhetorical capabilities for individuals and by increasing conditions of communicative justice in society.²⁰ Crosswhite, in his *Rhetoric of Reason*, led rhetoric from theoretical study to practical teaching by understanding the *logos* as ‘communication ability’ instead of ‘reason’ as a traditional understanding. Now, in *Deep Rhetoric*, he tries to interpret the *logos* again in terms of human reason or discernment and the ability to communicate through words. From this perspective, he seems to be expanding the meaning of ‘rhetoric’, from the basic level of cultivating civic character through communication, to the practicality applied to the immediate social problems.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1. 1356a13 etc.

²⁰ J. Crosswhite(2013), *Deep Rhetoric*.

6. Conclusion

If I summarize the issues about civic education and communication in Aristotle, I think I have caught a clue to answer the question that this research has aimed at. As we have seen, it comes from the passage that Aristotle defines man as the animal that constitutes the state by nature, and, at the same time, as the only animal with *logos*. This passage is important because Aristotle argues here that man is different from other animals, not only in their ability to ‘think and discern’ but also in their ability to ‘speak and communicate’. A man do not think alone or speak alone, but educated in the home and society, he grows up combining these two abilities, lives as citizen in a state participating in public affairs. It is a life in which, while seeking personally to be a good man (*agathos aner*), he practices to become a good citizen (*spoudaios politēs*) in the state. And this is the image of ‘good man, good citizen’, which is the ideal goal of civic education pursued by this research.

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