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**Kushnerova T.**

*Student of Master's Degree Course*

*Kyiv National Economic University named after Vadym Hetman*

## **CONFUCIAN EDUCATION IDEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON CHINESE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

**Abstract.** *Culture is of paramount importance in affecting students and their learning styles and its impact cannot be underestimated. This article contains the explanation of a gap in students' learning in China. It is also included information about individualism and collectivism transition in Chinese college students. It highlights the information about Confucianism embeddedness in Chinese culture and places value on education at societal, familial, and individual level. Additionally, the meaning of educational success and efforts involved in the educational process associated with Confucianism are discussed. The author also focuses on the hierarchical relationships in Chinese educational system.*

**Key words:** *China, cultural values, Confucianism, collectivism, education, learning styles, teaching styles.*

**Statement of the problem.** With the growth of globalization, cultural sensitivity in dealing with global complexities involved in conducting business countries has been expanding. Confucius regarded education as an important component of social development. He believed that education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world. China as one of the most ancient Confucian civilizations in the world attaches great importance to education. At present, it would be interesting to raise the question about historical, philosophical, and cultural roots of modern approaches to education in China.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** The importance of cultural influences on students' learning styles cannot be underestimated. R.F. Litrell (2015) stated that learning styles are often culturally based and students from different cultures would therefore have different ways or patterns of learning, thinking and behaviour. Social change in countries such as China and Korea, for example, including globalisation and neoliberalism, and their enthusiasm for high education are resulting in changes to ideas of good education and desirable teacher and student roles and identities [1].

Similar views were also shared by Kim and Bonk (2002), Ramburuth and McCormick, (2001), Teng (2007). Furthermore, Ward (2006) identified variety of factors that influence the learning styles such as prior learning experiences, assessment methods, values and religion amongst others. Hofstede's (see his 1980, 1991, 1994, and 1997 studies and revised and extended study of 2005) seminal study is one of the most cited study on how cultural values influence various types of learning behavior. Most cultural models developed after Hofstede clarify and support his dimensions and could relate back to Hofstede's dimensions [2].

**Purpose of the research.** The purpose of the present work is to analyze historical, philosophical, and cultural roots of modern approaches to education in China.

**The key findings.** Confucianism plays a vital role in shaping student’s development in China, and most students are influenced by it during their school years. Education is considered a tool to achieve personal perfection under Confucianism, and the society views education as a path to a person’s success and an honor to the family. As a result, much pressure is poured upon the student’s shoulders. The educational system in China is examination-oriented, and the typical example for that is the National College Entrance Examination (*gaokao* exams in Chinese).

Looking at Chart, we may conclude that among Confucian Asian cultures China is unique.

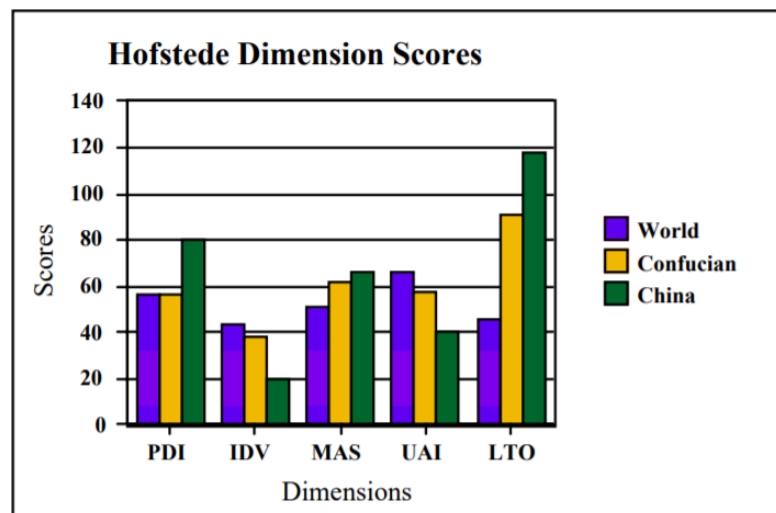


Chart. Confucian: China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea [2]

China’s significant *Power Distance (PDI)* ranking of 80, compared to the other Far East Asian countries’ and the world average of 55, is indicative of a high level of inequality of power within the society.

China’s low *Individualism (IDV)* ranking, at 15, reflects close and committed member groups, be that a family, extended family, or extended relationships. Loyalty in a collectivist culture is paramount. The society fosters strong relationships where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members of their group. *Long-term Orientation (LTO)*, China’s highest-ranking factor (114), indicates a society’s time perspective and an attitude of persevering; that is, overcoming obstacles with time and patience, if not with will and strength. The long-term versus short-term orientation dimension was derived in a study of students in 23 countries around the world, using a questionnaire designed by Chinese scholars. Values associated with Long Term Orientation are thrift and perseverance; respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one’s face.

Summing up the above mentioned, Confucianism is considered at the heart of Chinese cultural values. One of the principles within this value system is its emphasis on social order where each individual should be conscious of his/her position in the society. In such a society, boundaries between self and others are unclear therefore; the challenge becomes more of a collective effort rather than a personal goal effort.

Collectivism reflects harmonious, conflict-free group-based system of social relations of cooperation, loyalty, and reciprocity.

Chinese tradition views work more important than leisure and as contributing to family's well-being rather than competing with it. Another important Chinese cultural value reflecting the Confucianism philosophy is the principal of *guanxi*, which means *good connection*. The principal of *guanxi* requires friends and associate to do what they can for each other when needed. To violate *guanxi* is to «lose face» meaning to lose reputation or honor and means avoiding embarrassment, failure, defeat, or contradiction [3].

For Chinese achieving long-term goals is more important than specific current objectives. People in China respect harmony. They do not like to be threatened by uncertainties in life. They rely more on accumulated wisdom, precedent, and intuition than on reasons and objectivity. There is more holistic thinking and synthesis than linear thinking and analysis.

In trying to examine and comprehend the learning styles of Asian students, Wong considered few factors that may influence a learners' learning style. These include culture, Confucian heritage an integrated part of Chinese culture, type of assessment method use and prior learning experiences. Culture plays a fundamental role in influencing the way Chinese learners learn particularly that of Confucian values. As Bush and Qiang pointed out, Chinese educational philosophy has been shaped by Confucianism. In Confucian ethic, strict discipline, proper behavior and filial piety provides explanation why students in class seldom asked questions on what teachers taught leading to the unquestioning acceptance of teachers' knowledge [4].

Consequently, asking questions is considered challenging the authority of teachers. Students are therefore quiet and passive in class as questioning in class is not encouraged and would not challenge or question the teachers in open. Asking questions in class is also considered to be wasting other students' time as fellow students want to gain as much knowledge as possible. In some instances, due to Chinese modesty and self-conscious, students do not considered asking questions in public as good habit. Students therefore display passive role in class where they are not encouraged to speak out for fear of being incorrect and are «face conscious» or feel embarrassed especially when questions posed may reveal knowledge gap. However, by not asking questions do not mean students are not paying attention or mentally active. Moreover, in a collective-oriented culture, students find comfort and security by engaging in discussion in small group rather than asking questions or voicing one's opinion openly in class.

Biggs and Watkins pointed that in Chinese culture, teachers are well respected with wisdom, as a guide with knowledge and wisdom of teachers are taken-for-granted and not to be questioned. Respect for age, rank, hierarchy and maintenance of harmonious relationship are the values upheld by Hong Kong students while selfassertive are discouraged. In terms of learning, Chinese students prefer a teacher-centred style, expecting teachers to be well prepared for lessons, mastery of knowledge, and present content knowledge in coherent, systematic structural manner and competent to answer questions posed by students [5].

Teachers are not only expected to provide detail course materials to enhance learning but a role model as well, cultivate good morals to transform students into

person with highly developed social conscious and also guide students in their learning. Teachers controlled much of the learning environment and are expected to provide students with clear outline and knowledge is arranged in systematic and consolidated manner. Since the main form of assessment is examination, acquiring as much knowledge as possible in class places higher priority than questioning the content.

As it was mentioned at the beginning, Chinese college students still towards *collectivism value orientation*. However, the degree of the collective value orientation must be changed along with the time. After the reform and opening up in 1978, great changes have taken place in Chinese traditional culture. Thereafter, factors of individualism such as material resources, market competition, and western culture insinuated into the daily life of Chinese people, and changed their traditional value system. Today, however, more students showed a challenge to authority, more adept at self-expression. This can also be considered a gradual weakening among Chinese college students in the vertical collectivism of organization, while the willing of pursuing equality, expressing the enhancement of horizontal collectivism.

It should be noted that in old China, one needed to attend and pass a centralized national examination to become successful in education and reach high social status. As one passed the exam, he (women were not allowed) would be awarded a special «scholarly» hat and received an official position. The educational system was clearly structured and well-established in the old time. Today, the system continues to be hierarchical in many Chinese societies, such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The educational achievement is visible and measurable. It is clearly defined by one's test performance; school entered, and degree received. It is widely believed that earning higher grades, attending higher-ranking schools, and receiving higher degrees are indisputable routes to success in the society. The system is hierarchical. Since the educational ladder is well structured, it is unnecessary to design one's own educational course. The «successful» educational path is already laid out for the person. Placing a high value on education and academic success continues to exist in Chinese American culture in general as well [6].

**Conclusion.** Confucianism is currently enjoying a revival in China, due in no small part to the Chinese government's appropriation and recasting of neo-Confucian doctrine as a formal state ideological position. An evidence of the official endorsement of Confucianism was a speech made by Chinese President Xi Jinping at an international symposium to commemorate the 2,565<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Confucius in which he supports the transmission of Confucian tenets (Xinhuashe, 2014). On the one hand, the renewed interest in Confucianism has led to greater attention and resources being directed to the learning of Confucian teachings through various avenues. However, we should not be overly optimistic about the prospect of a comprehensive and integrated promotion of Confucian principles and procedures in schools and society.

It remains to be seen whether the present reinvention of Confucianism as a state ideology and the public popularization of Confucianism in China will lead to a renaissance of Confucianism that adheres to the desired outcomes, principles, and lifestyles as explicated in *Analects* and *Xueji* (texts within Confucian canon) [7].

A Confucian curriculum is essentially holistic, comprehensive, and integrated. A holistic curriculum emphasizes students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral

domains. Learners are called to internalize and apply the contents learned through self-cultivation and social interaction. The curriculum is also broad-based; students learn the six arts of rituals, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics. Furthermore, the curriculum is designed in such a way that the students learn systematically and progressively by constantly building upon, synthesizing, and putting into practice what they have studied. Teaching and learning are learner-focused, and the teacher responds empathetically to the individual needs of students. In the recommended «enlightening approach», the teacher encourages independent thinking and guides students using the questioning technique and peer learning. Confucian education also fosters critical and creative thinking, as modeled by Confucius himself; he challenged the political leaders and convention of his time as well as strove to transform his society through a return to and continual (re)creation of dao. An open tradition ensures that Confucian education is not essentialized, static, and fossilized. Instead, it is diverse, fluid, and evolving, offering an educational paradigm that is rounded, ethical, universal, and ultimately enduring.

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