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Pathways to Different Worldviews

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Abstract: This paper reveals differences in primary school education practices experienced by selected university students in China and Australia. This research utilised a case study approach and found the education experiences differed greatly between Chinese and Australian students. In addition, the paper analyses how these vastly diverse experiences on the part of students contribute to different worldviews in the context of collective and individualist cultures. An enriched in-depth understanding as to how education is served as a tool for preserving cultural and societal values may be an outcome of this research.

Keywords: Primary School Education Practice, Chinese Students, Australian Students, Collective and Individualist Cultures

Introduction

GLOBALISATION AND COLONIZATION have introduced European and North American school systems to the rest of the world over the last two centuries. The impact of globalisation on education systems in different countries has been significant. However, schools around the world inevitably come to reflect their own national culture and local people transform them to serve for local realities (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). In contemporary societies, education has been utilised to train the younger generation for continuity of their societal and cultural values despite Western influence on the system. Education practices in different cultures largely reflect their predominant cultural values. For example, in collective orientated societies, the purpose of education is learning how to do and children's individual initiatives are discouraged. However, in individualist societies, education predominantly teaches children how to learn and children's individual initiatives are encouraged (Hofstede, 2001).

The current Chinese educational system has been heavily influenced by the West. However, educators in China endeavor to adopt Western education to achieve Chinese goals (Kelley, 2000). As a result, there are distinct differences in Chinese education in terms of its curriculum, content, teaching methods, assessment approaches etc. In addition, the number of people required to be educated in China is the largest in the world (Cheng, 2000). This has further

put pressure on education that needs to differ from that of the West.

It has been noted that Chinese children in elementary schools spend a large amount of time rote learning. Teaching is conducted in a formal and controlled manner. This style of teaching is rooted in the long history of Confucian educational thought. There has been an over-riding importance of preparation of students for examinations, particularly the one students take in the final year of their elementary school (Hawkins, 1991). Shangguan (1999) further points out the external control through strict discipline in Chinese schools and the intense competition between children. It is believed that the style of teaching in China does not foster children's creativity and critical thinking skills (Hawkins, 1991). However, according to Chinese scholars Cheng and Wong (1996) there have been common observations of remarkable achievements, hardworking ethics and orderly behaviour among students in East Asian education, including China. It appears that observers outside East Asia have adopted very positive views and perceive East Asian schools as effective.

In contrast, education in individualist cultures such as America and Australia embraces a very different notion. As early as the second half of the nineteenth century in Australia, the prime emphasis of the curriculum in elementary schools included: the training of mental powers, the development of moral values, and the communication of useful knowledge (Barcan, 2004). In recent years, the pursuit of personal development has become dominant in Australian schools. Under the influence of economic



rationalism and neo liberalism, liberal education has advocated children centered learning. For many years Australian primary and secondary education have focused on process rather than content, formulation of concepts rather than rote learning and acquisition of facts (Barcan, 2004). This clearly is a compatible approach with a highly individualist Australian culture. It is designed to intrinsically motivate children, develop children's confidence and nurture their individual self-esteem. However, these styles of teaching and learning are not without their critics. It has been revealed that the popularity of activity methods sometimes reduced the intensity of learning. 'Pupil research' and problem-solving often deteriorated into answering a string of questions and copying paragraphs from books. There is a view that state schools sought minimum rather than maximum standards (Barcan, 2004).

Culture relevance is interwoven into a country's education system. Strengths and weaknesses coexist in each system. People are educated to be compatible to their respective societies. However, in this globalising world international education has become one of the fastest growing industries in the world. International students travel from many developing countries, particularly Asia, to the developed world, especially the English speaking countries such as the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. In 2005, there were 344,815 international student enrolments onshore in Australia. China was the top source country with 81,814 students, 23.73% of the total onshore international students (IDP Education Australia, 2006). In the United Kingdom higher education and further education sectors, there were 392,005 international students studying during the 2004/2005 academic year; 59,550 (15.19%) were from China (The Council for International Education, UK, 2006). In 2004, 620,210 international students were admitted in the United States, 63,940 (10.31%) were from China (Homeland Security, USA, 2006). With the ever increasing number of Chinese international students, culture differences in their learning style and related difficulties have become more pronounced. It is apparent that the great divide is deeply rooted in differences between Chinese and Western cultures and their approaches to education (Zhang, 2005).

In the past, many Western and Chinese educators and researchers have published their observations of the Chinese education system and practices (Cleverley, 1985; Hawkins, 1991). Comparisons have also been made with that of America and Australia (Hui, 2005; Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Lummis, Stigler, Fan & Ge, 1990; Yao, 2001). However, very little research has been conducted to understand the actual experiences and views of children who studied in the Chinese education system and then comparing

these experiences with that of children in a Western education system. This research has sought to uncover some of the individual experiences in primary school both in China and Australia. These experiences will be analysed in the respective collective and individual culture contexts. It was hoped that this qualitative research will bring a greater insight into the lives of primary school children in two culturally different countries. A greater understanding of the people who are educated through these systems may be achieved. Some of the difficulties of Chinese international students in English speaking host countries may be better understood. More appropriate support to suit their culture needs could be identified.

Methods

This research is part of a major study which involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this part of the research, qualitative interviews were employed to investigate primary school experiences of selected Australian and Chinese interviewees.

Participants

Thirty-six undergraduate students were interviewed, eighteen from a polytechnic in China and eighteen from a regional university in Australia. Nine males and nine females were involved in each ethnic group. The Chinese interviewees were aged between 19 and 24 with an average of 20.78 years. The Australian interviewees were aged between 18 and 47 with an average age of 24.61 years. One Australian interviewee was not included in the result due to schooling not being completed in Australia.

Procedures

The participants were asked semi-structured, open-ended questions regarding a number of categories of experiences at primary school during their childhood. The interviews regarding this period of their lives lasted 10-15 minutes. These experiences were predominantly during the period of 1989 to 1995, particularly for the Chinese. For the Australian students 80% experienced their primary schooling at a similar time. However, for three mature age Australian students, their experiences dated back between 1965 and 1970.

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Themes regarding interviewees' school curriculum, school hours, class size, activities during recess and lunch times, extra curriculum activities and weekend activities, homework, test and examinations, school disciplines and teachers' attitudes towards students were collated and analysed.

Results and Discussions

A Comparison of Curriculum between China and Australia

All Australian interviewees studied mathematics, English reading and writing in their primary schools. Most had sports, physical education, art and music as a part of their schooling. Many of the interviewees also studied history, geography, social studies and science. Three students did one foreign language – Japanese or Italian. Two students went to Catholic schools. As a result, they had religion in their curriculum. Several students also had library and project as their school subjects. Most of the students had outdoor education such as camping or excursion at least once a year. They went to many places in the state of Victoria such as Melbourne, Ballarat, Queenscliff, the Otways and the Grampians National Park. One student's school also travelled interstate to Canberra, the capital of Australia. It would appear that apart from the subjects of mathematics, English, sports, physical education, art, music and outdoor education, the individual Australian schools had the self autonomy to offer a diverse range of subjects in the school's curriculum.

In contrast, Chinese primary education offered more unified curriculum content. All students studied mathematics, Chinese language, moral education, physical education, music, art or handcrafts. Fourteen of the eighteen interviewees also did English starting from grade 3 or 4 or 5. A few students did nature and geography. These subjects appear to be mainstream subjects with very few variations amongst the schools. Only one student did library and cooking at primary school. It would appear that the education authority in China identified the main areas that primary school children need to study. A unified curriculum was enforced by the Ministry of Education in the central government. It demonstrated strong centrally controlled curriculum content. This phenomenon is part of a collective culture with a strong central government.

Compared to Australian schools, moral education in China plays a very important part in the curriculum. Every interviewee supported this notion. In China, schooling is responsible for fostering the all-around development of Chinese children (Hawkins, 1991). According to Mao, education should foster moral, intellectual and physical development and cultivate workers imbued with a socialist consciousness (Ministry of Education, PR China, 1984). For many years, moral education has been regarded as the first priority of the Chinese education. It is reflected in the content of all phases of the primary school curriculum. Moral lessons often involve learning role models. Elementary texts detail descriptions of lives of exemplary and heroic

figures (Hawkins, 1991). In Australia, by comparison, academics and politicians are still debating the public and private values that should be included in school education, such as being a good citizen or a good person (Ozolins, 2004). There is no special subject in moral education in primary school curriculum. Moral values are largely taught in daily life and schooling. These vast differences may be interpreted in the context of more perceived control on the part of Chinese government. It is certainly the case, the government would like to develop the younger generation who would obey the Chinese law, socialist values, ideologies and become good citizens of the country (Wang & Wang, 1987). The special emphasis on moral education reflects the exercise of this control.

One distinguishing characteristic in the Australian interviewees' curriculum was many of their school subjects were blended together. One student described: "we did art, story-telling, many creative classroom activities: a blend of art and academia subjects such as calculation, maths and English." Another put it as "we had English, maths and did other things in between such as geography or history, work it in with other things". One girl also volunteered: "our maths and science were built into everything, such as English, Japanese, music, art and sport."

This type of teaching and learning is considered to be integrated studies. It became popular in Australian school curriculums in the 1970s and 80s (Barcan, 2004). Integrated learning helps students learn about relationships among ideas, events, and people (Pogue, 1996). It develops students' ability to see the links among different areas of learning and enables them to use the knowledge and skills developed in one field to learn in another and to relate their learning to real-life situations. The rationale for this is: students need the ability to apply existing knowledge in new situations in order to function effectively in an environment of continuous change (Ministry of Education and Training of Ontario, 1995). Further, combining a few subjects together can be fun and makes learning more interesting, for example, learning mathematics can be quite enjoyable when it is taught in art, music and sport activities.

The integrated studies were a result of academic debates and development in pedagogy in school education in the Western developed world. This type of curriculum is favoured by progressives (Barcan, 2004). However, with a sound understanding of integrated studies, Chinese education policy makers still advocated the traditional non integrated approach between different school subjects (Wang & Wang, 1987). The teaching and learning in urban primary schools in China in the early 1990s, the time when

most of the interviewees experienced their primary school education, was largely a 'traditional teacher centred' approach simply based on practicality. Each subject was taught by a specialist teacher. The positive sides of this approach perceived by the Chinese educators are: the knowledge is taught in a logical and systematic manner; the text books are better organised and training value of the subject is high (Wang & Wang, 1987). In addition, the teachers are familiar with the teaching content and methods. Less preparation and pressure on teachers may result. The limitations of the non integrated approach are: the knowledge in different subjects may not be integrated and therefore not relate learning to real-life situations, and learning can be boring.

Most students in Chinese schools studied English as a second language. By comparison, very few Australian interviewees did a foreign language. Chinese are very aware of the dominant nature of the English language in the world (Pennycook, 1994). For the Chinese leaders who support the Western-style of modernisation, the study of English is regarded as necessary for acquiring modern technologies and fostering international trade (Adamson & Morris, 1997). Most world organisations use English as their communication language. Because English is Australia's first language and can be used in many parts of the world, there is less government emphasis on learning one designated foreign language. The choice of a foreign language to be taught in primary school curriculum is largely left to the school to decide.

School Hours

All Australians had their school hours between 9:00 am to 3:30 pm. Only one school finished at 3:15. All students had a long lunch break at school. Therefore the total time in classes excluding lunch and recess was approximately 5 hours.

In contrast, most Chinese interviewees started primary school at 7:30am everyday for their morning reading. This time could vary. One girl started at 6:30am for her morning exercises, 5 students started between 7:00am and 7:15am. Many had breakfast at school, supplied by the school and paid by the students. 8:00am was the time for their classes. Every school had 4 classes in the morning and finished around 11:30am. Most students went home for lunch and had a nap. They returned to school at 2:30pm for two or three afternoon classes. The total class time was between 5 to 5 hours 45 minutes. The students who started at 6:30 or 7:00am would have more than 6 hours work at school during most school days. Most schools had two classes on Wednesday afternoons, three classes in the afternoons on most of the other school days.

The Chinese timetable initially appeared to have a very early start and long day. However, when taken into account the long lunch break and the nap, the real time in studying was not much greater than that of the Australian schools. It would appear the long lunch break and the nap was an important compensation for the early start. It provided students with a good rest and enabled them to concentrate on their afternoon studies. Culturally Chinese believe that an early start and early sleep can maintain good health. Memory and learning effectiveness peak after a good sleep, particularly in the morning. These cultural beliefs help explain the school timetable.

Interestingly, there is almost no variation in Australia in terms of the time to start and finish school. However, greater differences appeared in China. Some of the schools extended their hours to provide students with more time for study. Some Chinese educators believed that this practice produced better academic achievement in students. It would appear achievement oriented schooling in China places great pressure on students and their teachers.

Class Size

The class sizes were very different in Australian and Chinese schools. Fourteen of the 17 Australian students had 20 to 30 students in their classes. Two interviewees had 15 in their respective classes. The smaller class size was a result of small country schools. Their schools had approximately 30 students each. Only one student had 32 students in her class. However, that was during the late 1970s.

In contrast, the Chinese students had much larger class sizes. Among the 18 interviewees, half studied in a class with 40–50 students, 4 had a class size of nearly 60 students, one had 64 and another had over 70. It would appear that the very large class sizes were attributed to their key schools' reputation. More people wanted to enter these schools, putting pressure on the class size to accommodate the need.

Three interviewees had approximately 30 students in their classes. One was in an expensive private school that very few Chinese could afford. The other two were in underdeveloped regions. The schools were small because the villages were not large.

The smaller class sizes in Australia are due to education philosophy, government regulation and a smaller population. It is believed that smaller class sizes allow teachers to cater for individual student needs (Blatchford & Martin, 1998); an individualist culture is also nurtured.

The large classes in Chinese schools were a result of the large population and a demand for education. This apparently placed pressure on the teacher to discipline students in their daily management of the

classes. Teachers had less time for each individual student. Students' opportunities to answer questions and to be involved in discussions were far fewer than their Australian counterparts. There was also less attention paid to individual students. Their individuality would not be actively nurtured. However, discipline and collective values were developed. Students learned to think about other people before acting in the class. A collective culture was fostered in this environment.

Recess and Lunch Break

During the interviews, it became apparent that differences in timetabling resulted in different student activities during recess and lunch break. For the Australians, these times were children's time to play. Children had two 20 minute recesses and a 1 hour lunch break at school. During these times, most boys played sports such as Australian rules football, cricket, tennis, soccer, poison ball, or played on the climbing apparatus. The girls played chasing games, netball, skipping, some played on monkey bars or other playground equipment or ran around and played different types of games, such as British bulldog. A small number of girls sometimes sat around and chatted with their friends or went to the art room to paint.

For the Chinese students it was very different. There was a 10 minute recess between each class and a 20 minute main break in the morning after the second class. The 10 minute break served as a toilet and drink break. The children played and ran around the school yard, however, did not have a lot of time to play any substantial games. During the 20 minute main break, all students needed to line up in their playground to do the nationally designed exercises to music. The exercises normally have 8 sections and are designed to engage the whole body in physical activities. This lasted for approximately 10-12 minutes and was compulsory for all students. There was very little time remaining for students to play any self-organised games during the limited recess time.

There was also 'massage for healthy eyes' to be conducted by every student normally after the third class in the morning. Some schools had the eye massage in the afternoon. It is designed according to Chinese traditional medicine of acupuncture points. It is a common belief in China that massage of certain points on the face and head everyday will improve eye function and reduce the possibility of shortsightedness in children.

At lunch time all students went home and most had a short sleep. Two out of the 18 schools required students to go back to school at 1:00pm. The midday nap was implemented in their classrooms. All

students were required to put their heads on their desks and sleep in a well organised way. No one was allowed to move while sleeping, and everyone had to face the same direction.

The Chinese style of recess and lunch break effectively reduced opportunities for games and sports among their classmates when compared with Australian schools. Playing self-organised sports were not important parts of a young Chinese student's life during their recess and lunch breaks. The Chinese school curriculum only mentioned school organised sports, stating it is there to retain and improve students' physical health (Wang & Wang, 1987). Further, the lunch nap is a Chinese tradition at school and work. It is believed that intense mental work straight after lunch could reduce the effectiveness of study or work, even causing a health hazard (Clinical Centre of Chinese Medicine, 2006).

It would also appear more organised activities were implemented during these times on the part of Chinese schools such as compulsory morning exercises and the eye massage. These would assist to develop a collective culture in Chinese students. By comparison, the recess and lunch-time activities in Australian schools are largely not organised by the schools, only supervised by the teachers. Students had much more time and freedom to do their own things and play their own games. This freedom nurtures individual preferences. Children selected activities according to their own interests and skills.

Extra Curriculum Activities and Homework

Extra Curriculum Activities

In Australia school finishes at 3:30pm. After school students normally do their own preferred extra curriculum activities. Thirteen of the 17 interviewees (76.5%) were playing sport for at least one club, or involved in dancing or Girl Guide activities. These activities happened either in the afternoon or in the evening. However, they were not daily activities. Normally if the interviewee played one sport, he/she would participate in training and a game each week. If he/she played more than one sport, there would be training and games in most days of the week. Sports played by the interviewees were tennis, netball, basketball, soccer, Australian Rules football, cricket, karate, athletics and swimming. For the interviewees who did not play sports after school, their activities included watching TV, playing computer games and video games, riding skateboards or bike, climbing a tree house, jumping on trampoline, swimming in a home pool, walking their dogs etc. Several interviewees lived in regional areas and their parents had some acreage land. These

children normally helped their parents with the animals as part of their recreation. One boy described that as: "I chased cows and sheep, climbed the tree house, no TV because it is not healthy." Many children also played with their siblings on their properties such as "make believe games and skipping" or played with their friends via going to a friend's place or invite friends to visit their home.

During the weekend, most of the interviewees played competition games for their club sports. Many of the parents drove them to Melbourne to watch Australian Rules football, or visit grandmother's or a friend's place. Some went to church with their parents on Sundays. A few remembered their good old days' Sunday roast with 3 vegetables as "a very nice dinner." Some interviewees' parents were divorced; therefore they travelled to their father's new family for some of the weekend.

For the Chinese interviewees, most had two or three classes in the afternoon starting from 2:30pm. Each class was 45 minutes with a 10 minute break. The day would finish at 4:10pm if there were two classes, 5:05pm if there were three classes. On Wednesdays, the schools normally had two classes. Most of the afternoon classes were music, art, physical education, handcrafts and self-studies. The self-studies allowed students to do their homework. In some schools the third class in the afternoon was sports or interest groups organised by the school.

Eleven out of the eighteen Chinese interviewees went straight home after school. Four of them watched TV, five did homework and then watched TV; three often played with friends such as basketball, game of hide and seek or climbed trees or buildings. Two of the eleven interviewees also did house chores, one did her favorite readings. The remaining seven interviewees stayed at school. More than half (4 out of 7) utilised the school facilities to play sports such as table tennis, basketball or soccer with classmates. The other three participated in special interest groups organised by the school because of their talent in the relevant areas such as music, painting and running. These activities normally lasted for an hour, however, not on every day.

At the time when the Chinese interviewees were studying at primary school, the working week in China started to make the transition from 6 working days to 5 working days. There were 5 and half days of working day in every second week and 6 working days in the other. The 5 working days came in at around grade 3 or 4 of most interviewees' childhood. For most Chinese interviewees, they watched TV during the weekends because some were not allowed to watch during the week; it was viewed as a distraction from their studies. Many also visited relatives such as their grandparents, uncles or aunts

and played with their cousins. Other weekend activities included shopping or window shopping, going to gardens or theme parks, playing ball games such as basketball, table tennis or soccer with friends in the neighbourhood. Two interviewees often climbed nearby mountains and trees to get bird nests. One did a lot of fishing, roller skating, kite flying and played badminton due to her father's passion for these activities. Another had a lot of fun on the nearby farm catching snails. Grandma cooked them for dinner. When the interviewees talked about their adventures in nature, all expressed great happiness. "I went to field or to the river running and playing, very happy!" "At weekends I would climb mountains near our home. There were flowers, trees and grass, very beautiful and pleasant."

Two Chinese interviewees also played video games in their street shops; one had a BBQ with friends on a mountain nearby. There were no BBQ facilities available. The children did BBQ by lighting up their own camp fire. Playing video games at school age and lighting camp fires for a BBQ were seen as bad behaviours and were strictly forbidden. The two interviewees who played video games were caught by their parents. The girl involved in the BBQ was caught by her teacher. All were subjected to severe criticism.

Homework

In terms of homework, 13 out of 17 Australian interviewees remembered some homework during their primary school time. However the amount was "very little" and "not everyday". The answers to the question "did you have any homework during your primary school time?" were "a little bit of homework, would not take too long and not everyday." "Little bits, maybe reading a book with your mum" "not too much, a little bit, that I had to do from time to time" or "sometimes we'd have projects from school that we might work on." Some teachers did not set any homework for their students. One student simply refused to do it. "I was supposed to do homework, but did not do any. I used to do reading with my parents in earlier grades, but after that I avoided it all the time. I did not get punished, although the teacher asked whether I did my homework. I felt bad but could not be bothered, just too boring."

Homework appeared to be a major activity for the Chinese students during their after school time. 10 out 18 interviewees did homework every evening during school days, the other 7 needed to do homework both in the afternoons and in the evenings. One student did most of his homework at school, and finished at home in the afternoon. Consequently he was the only student who had free evenings. It would appear some teachers give much more work

than others. Three interviewees needed to do homework until 10 or 11 o'clock in most evenings. One boy described his experiences: "There was a lot of homework. I did homework after lunch and in the evenings, also on Sundays. I remember, it was very strict from the teachers. If you answered one question wrong in the whole test paper, you needed to copy the whole thing again 100 times. I had to write with my both hands and still worried that I could not finish. If I could not finish on time I had to double the copying times. So if we had homework in the morning, I would not go home for lunch, stayed at school and consumed 2 minutes noodles, did the work in class, during class breaks, after school and in the evening. Then I would be able to submit the homework the next day. That was in grade 3. We all needed to do supplementary work on Saturdays and Sundays."

A girl talked about how she did homework in the evenings and how her mother disciplined her at the time: "From 7:00 to 10:00 at night I did my homework. Because my concentration was not very good, after answering a couple of questions I would open a drawer or cabinet and look around or just play. My writing was very messy. Mum tore the messy work up and asked me to repeat the work. Sometime I needed to do it three times. She was very hard and said 'How could your teacher read this?' Sometimes I cried, but still had to do the work even though I cried."

Six interviewees mentioned that they needed to do homework every weekend. One needed to do one whole day. The rest did a half day. It would appear there were great differences in extra curriculum activities between the Australian and Chinese interviewees during their primary school years. The Australians were sports orientated, interest orientated and less school related work. The time after school was separated from the time at school. The Chinese were school orientated. Homework occupied large amounts of after school hours. Some organised extra curriculum activities were resourced by the school. Chinese children did far less sports, especially organised sports, than the Australians. One of the main reasons for this is the intense competition in Chinese schools. The heavy emphasis on evaluation and examination results meant much of their leisure time was consumed in study for better marks in examinations. Playing sports and recreation was a lower priority. This appears to be in Chinese culture not only in China but also amongst Chinese communities overseas. Woodrow and Sham (2001) identified that more than 80.7% of British-Chinese pupils were often told by their parents that play and leisure were a waste of time. This was in complete contrast with the British-European pupils' parents,

where only 8.5% reported that play and leisure were a waste of time.

Further, sports clubs for children in China were rare. This may also be a result of a view that playing sports is a waste of time and interrupting studies, a cultural value in many Chinese minds.

However, a number of Chinese interviewees expressed enjoyment of the beauty of nature and farm fields. This demonstrates that children have an inclination to enjoy nature and play in beautiful environments. Although outdoor recreation is lacking in China due to its large population and limited space, the importance of these activities and impact on children should not be underestimated. According to Ibrahim and Cordes (1993), outdoor recreation theories and practice came from an understanding of human nature and our tendency to play. This tendency is innate universal amongst humans regardless of their social or cultural background. The quality of the natural environment during leisure is vitally important to produce satisfaction for the people involved. It is believed that an aesthetic experience is a major source of intrinsic motivation (Ibrahim & Cordes, 1993). It is understandable why the Chinese interviewees vividly articulated their childhood engagement with nature as those experiences are rare in China.

Further, many previous non Chinese researchers believed the Chinese had compulsory extra curriculum activities organised by the school (Cleverley, 1985; Hawkins, 1991). This would appear to be only partly true. Some of the afternoon classes of physical education, art or handcraft may have been interpreted as extra curriculum activities organised by the school. According to this study, those activities were part of the school curriculum. Only a very small number of students participated in very limited extra curriculum activities organised by their schools. These activities were only for the students who had some talent and interest in the area.

Tests and Examinations

Eleven out of the 17 Australian interviewees reported that they experienced some tests in their primary school years. However, no examinations took place. Although some of the test results were sent home to parents, no results were published. All tests were casual and minor. Some interviewees described them as "we might have had a spelling test every Friday and maybe a maths test as well. After the test, we wouldn't have to hand them in for marking. The teacher would go through the results and then afterwards it would be 'hands up if you achieved a certain score' so you always had some idea of how well you were doing." "I think they tested us in lots of ways that we didn't know they were testing us.

They showed the results to parents.” “Every term you received both an interim report and an end of term report.” Five interviewees did not have any tests during their primary school time. The interviewees described this as: “no tests, just little activity work sheets and they just corrected them and you’d get an indication. Otherwise you’d just wait for your reports”. “No tests, but little maths competitions in grades 5 & 6. We had interviews and reports.”

For the Chinese students tests and examinations were important parts of their schooling. Student achievements were measured mainly by their examination outcomes. All students had mid and end semester examinations plus frequent tests. The examination results were ranked and published in 16 out of 18 interviewees’ schools. At the end of each semester, parents normally were called in for a meeting to see the published results. Students with good results were praised. The ones with poor results were criticized. Interviewees talked about their experiences and feelings: “We had mid and end semester exams and tests all the time. The students were ranked according to their marks. Then we had the parents meeting - every parent had a piece of paper in his/her hand with the ranking and marks for the whole grade, around 300-400 people. How miserable that was. Then the teacher read out the names of top 10 and bottom 10 students. She gave praise to the top 10 and encouraged people to learn from them. She also talked about how hard they had worked and how conscientious they were. There was some exaggeration. In fact, the top students were normally quicker, more intelligent and did not necessarily work harder. The teacher exaggerated the bad parts of the bottom 10 students and said that they were no good. That was incorrect. When you meet people who have made a contribution to the society, you realise that they didn’t always have good marks in their study.”

Another interviewee described: “Results were read out one by one according to ranking. It was quite embarrassing if you did not have good marks. The exam marks were on the wall. Students would think by themselves as clever or stupid. The teacher gave praise to the good ones, and criticized the poor ones.”

Feelings of pressure for achieving good results in examinations were expressed by a male Chinese interviewee: “Examination results were ranked for the parents meeting each semester. It made me feel quite nervous when the results were due. There was pressure due to the fact that mum and dad paid money for me to go to school. I needed to study well to pay them back. If not, I certainly did not feel comfortable psychologically.”

The results of this study demonstrate that children's academic achievement was given a more central role in Chinese schools than in Australian

schools. The Chinese interviewees experienced substantial competition for greater academic achievements reflected via marks in tests and examinations. Little consideration was given to children's self-esteem among the low academic achievers. According to Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, Lee, Hsu and Kitamura, (1990) in China, personal advancement is closely linked to academic achievement. Watkins (2000) further pointed out that Chinese students may be stimulated by a head of mixed motivational steam: personal ambition, family face, peer support, material reward and possibly even interest. Better examination results were a powerful motivation factor for their hard work according to interviewees.

Continual criticism of low ranking students will no doubt damage their self-esteem and create stress at school. Chinese educators endeavour to bring the best out of all students. To many Chinese teachers, the competition and public criticism are designed to motivate all students via positive and negative feelings or shame. Protection and enhancing of every child's self-esteem did not appear to be a major issue in the collective orientated school culture. Research has revealed that people from collective societies are bound by their relationships with the community. Individuals are encouraged to put other people's and the group's interests before their own. (Triandis, 1995). The public criticism of low achievers at school may be interpreted as an expression of a culture that places an individual's interest as a lower priority when compared to group performance. According to past cross-cultural research, in Asian collective cultures, the individual was evaluated in the form of a lower self versus a higher self which is set up according to the social role, group and family expectations (Heine, 2001; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994). This study has provided clear evidence as to how this evaluation was fostered at school settings. Therefore it is understandable that children educated in the Chinese education system would learn from a very young age to adopt group views and be prepared to sacrifice their own rights and privacy for the group. Being publicly humiliated due to lower academic achievement is a matter of life that the students have to cope with.

In contrast, in Australian schools, no examinations were administrated. Tests appeared to be casual and results were identified by students themselves via self-marking. Competition was not obvious and tests were not used as the major way of motivating students. More intrinsic motivation was utilised. It would appear Australian education values experiences that stimulate children to think and build up a broad base of knowledge, regardless of whether such experiences result in higher school grades.

Western education also stresses the importance of children developing a sense of selfworth. The goal of education in these societies is not only the acquisition of specific types of knowledge but also the development of children who feel good about themselves and their capabilities. It is believed that selfconfidence can facilitate later learning. (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, Lee, Hsu & Kitamura, 1990)

In addition, in Western individualist societies, the individual has undeniable rights and privacy. Theoretically, these rights cannot be compromised. The individual is socialised to be more self-sufficient and independent. The self is developed towards uniqueness, autonomy, freedom and intrinsic worth of the individual (Heine, 2001; Triandis, 1995). It is perhaps because of these culture values that no student's marks were ever disclosed to the public in Australian schools. The children educated in this culture will develop into individuals who are aware of their rights, seek freedom and self-autonomy. It is probable they would not compromise their own interests for the sake of their group as much as the Chinese children.

Some educators from both West and East give great praise to Chinese education, seeing Chinese achievements in international competitions and their knowledge in maths and science. However, in terms of individual development, this research paper has found that Chinese educators focus on the collective 'good' over individual interests and needs.

School Discipline and Teachers' Attitudes towards Students

Interviewees were asked about discipline at their primary school and how their teachers treated them. The Australians had a diversity of experiences, influenced by the type of school and individual teachers.

Some interviewees reflected positively on their school rules and teachers as: "Pretty easy, no dress code, you could not fight or swear, teachers demanded a bit of respect, but most of them were pretty good. Allowed to challenge the teachers and they would like to hear what you had to say."

"Not a lot of discipline at school, just got told off a few times for talking while the teacher was, but there wasn't really any discipline at school. We had detention and things like that but I never really got any detentions. You have to do something pretty bad to get a detention. Some kids swore at the teachers, just doing things pretty bad, to get a detention."

"You got a demerit point for being late or not wearing the school uniform, 5 points for a detention at lunch time. But we were allowed to point to teacher's mistakes and ask questions." "It wasn't

strict, there were no straps or rulers or anything. You could challenge the teachers."

Only two students related the negative part of their school experiences, one in relation to certain teachers: "Teachers yelled at the students and got angry at the class in general so you wouldn't want to go and talk to them. In primary school we used to be kept in at recess and write lines, yeah stay in class and just write sentences. If we talked too much in class we'd have to write on the blackboard twenty times, 'I shall not talk in class'". Another was in a Catholic school in a regional area in the early 1980s and she "had nuns at school... we used to get strapped on our hands in primary school."

In general the students were positive about their school discipline and their teachers. Most did not think there was excessive discipline at school. Individual variations among the teachers certainly played an important role in students' experiences.

By comparison, the Chinese interviewees experienced a more controlled school environment. In general they felt that school discipline was excessive. One third of the interviewees (6 out of 18) reported that there were corporal punishments at their primary schools. Corporal punishments were predominately hitting students' hands. For example, one interviewee recalled: "Teachers hit children's hands if they were disobedient or too noisy or did not submit homework." Another remembered: "We must sit up straight, not allowed to move around. The teachers were very hard, a lot of discipline re hygiene e.g. not allowed to throw rubbish or spit. If we did not finish our homework, the teacher hit our hands with a ruler. It was quite hurtful. I got hit several times."

One interviewee also witnessed and experienced the following events: "We had a female art teacher, very violent. One day in class, after she went out and returned, a student reported another student had stood up and walked a few steps during her absence. She got very angry and used a leather belt to chase the child around the classroom and hit him. Once, my ear was pulled by her and it hurt badly. That was because I did not bring my painting brush. I cried. In our PE class, if children violate the rules e.g. too slow in their action or not concentrating or did not do the body movement required, our PE teacher punished them by making them run two laps."

In addition to one third experiencing corporal punishment, another three interviewees recalled verbal abuses or being forced to stand up for a while or sit for 1-2 hours after school.

One interviewee told her story: "It was very strict. You must put your hand up before talking, not allowed to talk in class, no food, and do a lot of homework... You were verbally abused if you were naughty such as talking in class, not following the

rules, not finishing homework or not respecting the teacher, such as calling the teacher by his/her full name, not putting the “teacher” title in front of his/her sir name. Once our teacher asked us to copy a very long Chinese text for 12 times. It was impossible to finish. I copied until midnight, still could not finish. Mum helped me too. Mum later talked to the teacher and told him this was not the right way to teach. When he came back from the meeting with my mum he told the whole class that he would not teach me anymore. He just ignored me the whole time after that.”

Certainly there were other relatively gentle ways to manage Chinese students’ behaviour. One of the major ways was the use of scores. A couple of interviewees talked about how the scores worked with discontentment: “The rules at school were inhuman. If you did not submit your work, your name was recorded and marks were deducted. If people got into more serious problems such as smoking, drinking or fighting there would be disciplinary action. This would be recorded in your personal file and stay there for life. There are also moral marks. Teachers would normally have their favourites. People with good academic scores would get good moral marks, even though they ate and talked in class. Other students, even if they did not do anything wrong, only received 100 marks (full marks were more than 100, between 105 and 120). Students with bad academic scores would receive low moral marks.”

“A lot of discipline. Marks were for everything. If children were late for the morning reading or morning exercise or eye exercises, or did not wear the red scarf their marks were deducted. Students who lost the most cumulative marks were criticized in the class meeting at the end of the week. The marks for the whole class were deducted as a result of one student’s bad record. There were weekly competitions between classes and the results were published on the blackboard. The class that scored the lowest was criticized in front of the whole school, very boring. During the morning exercises, if we did not have very neat or synchronised actions, our marks were deducted. There was a discipline department at the school. Everyday staff and student leaders did inspections and gave marks on everything.”

Occasionally some schools and teachers were more positive and democratic. For example, two interviewees volunteered: “No physical punishment. Not allowed to talk in class but can make suggestions or point out mistakes if the teacher got things wrong.” “Teachers were normally good. I was a little afraid of my classroom teacher. We were not allowed to answer back. Any questions or suggestions needed to be said after class, not during class.”

The Chinese interviewees all expressed a desire to be less controlled. It would appear that positive school experiences had a close connection with more relaxed discipline measures. Similar to adults, these children desired to have freedom and self-autonomy. Taylor, Peplau and Sears (1997) stated that people value a strong sense of internal control. They become distressed when they feel they have no control. External control in an excessive manner over children may cause their feeling of lost control.

In general, the Chinese schools and teachers appear to have used a range of control measures to discipline students. Despite the Chinese government’s long standing regulations to ban corporal punishment in schools, this form of discipline was still in use by some individual teachers. Verbal and other types of punishment, together with marks and competition, were used to control students. When compared with the experiences of Australian interviewees, these control measures were much stricter. Group orientated control measures were a feature of the education experiences by the Chinese interviewees. According to Shangguan’s research (1999), the emphasis on external control through external standards and strict discipline in Chinese early education sought to develop children into people who are used to being controlled by others rather than by themselves. Further, the many measures used in Chinese education such as constant comparisons among children, intense competition, bad behaviours corrected by comparison with good behaviours on the part of others, would encourage children to learn to evaluate themselves by using external standards and adopting strong group values.

However, consideration also needs to be given to the management of large numbers of students in Chinese classes. From a teacher’s perspective, effective discipline measures are a necessity. It should be further noted, since 1949, the Chinese Communist Government has established a policy in education that forbids corporal punishment. Teachers would be disciplined or demoted should they openly commit physical punishment.

Conclusions

According to Hofstede (2001), culture is mental programming. A child’s culture programming is initially started by parents and other significant others. In school, the mental programming process is further developed. Teachers and classmates inculcate additional values honored in the culture. This study demonstrated that the Chinese and Australian schools have different ways to mentally program children. In Australian schools, curriculum, recess, extra curriculum activities, homework, tests

and examinations as well as teachers' management approaches all appeared to program the children into individuals who were compatible with the individualism orientated Australian society. The schools and teachers used less control measures in their practices than their Chinese counterparts. The Chinese system appeared to use more controlling measures with an aim to bring the best out of the children regardless how the children felt. As a result, interdependency, succour, nurturance, common fate, and compliance are important aspects of Chinese collectivism (Kim, et al, 1994)

The two education systems have trained dissimilar individuals. It would appear the Chinese are highly competitive, hardworking, disciplined, less assertive on individual rights and privacy, more group orientated and compliant with orders from authority. Chinese appear to be more willing to sacrifice themselves for their group, easier to control, think more in terms of "we", opinion pre-determined by in-groups, display more conformity and other directed behaviours and their self-concept is more in terms of groups (Hofsted, 2001). The Chinese education system has much to contribute to a very competitive younger generation of Chinese who are driving the economy forward at an amazing pace. This generation of Chinese enjoys unprecedented wealth and prosperity. They are patriotic and eager to achieve high national esteem on the world stage.

On the other hand, the Australian children were freer at school. Their rights and privacy were more protected. Their academic scores were not an evaluation standard. Each individual's self-esteem was protected regardless of their academic performances. It would appear the Australian system has nurtured a nation of highly individualistic people who are more assertive regarding their individual rights and responsibilities. The children appear to be equipped with more critical thinking and creative

skills. They also appear to be more independent and relaxed, enjoy individual achievements, democracy, equality and high standard of living.

Based on this study, it would appear different childhood school experiences provide diverse pathways to children's world views as part of their mental programming by the dominant culture values of the society. With this insight in mind, it is understandable that considerable time is required for the Chinese international students to adapt to changes when they study at Western educational institutions. Their quiet nature in classes, difficulties in critical thinking and development of arguments in essay writing are not out of character. However, given time and understanding, they normally flourish due to their strong work ethic developed during their schooling.

There are limitations in this study. The study only revealed some of the school experiences based on interviewees past experiences and from their personal perspective. The time of their experiences was dated back to the early 1990s. Since that time it is probable there would have been changes to education in both countries. Interviewing current school children is suggested to capture and compare the current practices between the two countries.

Further, this study has no intention to praise or downgrade either education system. The authors understand that by nature an education system is normally compatible with the cultural values of the nation and economic conditions. The educational approaches judged as harsh or soft according to one cultural value may be considered as reasonable according to another. Some of the practices revealed were individual teacher's acts and did not represent the education policy and guidelines of the country. In both countries, corporal punishment is not allowed as a form of discipline.

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