

Chinese cultural schema of Education: Implications for communication between Chinese students and Australian educators

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Education in China, in its various forms and levels, is widely conceptualised as integrating the cultivation of 'human souls' with the provision of students with knowledge. The English word 'education' is *jiao yu* (教育) in Chinese, which means 'teaching [and] cultivating'. The analogy *shi nian shu mu, bai nian shu ren* (十年树木, 百年树人 - it takes ten years to grow trees, but a hundred years to cultivate a person) may illustrate the cultivating responsibilities laid on Chinese schools or other institutions engaged in educating people. A Chinese metaphor equating teachers with *ren lei ling hun gong cheng shi* (人类灵魂工程师 - the engineers of 'human souls') also reveals the cultural knowledge that teachers play a crucial role in cultivating the soul of Chinese people. The cultural knowledge embodied in the Chinese cultural schema of Education exerts profound influence on teachers, students (regardless of their ages) and their parents.

Making use of common idioms, proverbs and popular quotes from Chinese classics on education, this paper provides an introduction to the Chinese Education schema of *jiao shu yu ren* (教书育人 - teaching books and cultivating people) and explores the influence of the schema on Chinese education in terms of issues such as moral education, teacher roles and status, student beliefs about books and learning and the significance of examinations in Chinese education. Discussion of the influence of the Chinese Education schema on intercultural communication between mainland Chinese students and their Australian educators is also provided. It is concluded that, despite some experience of living in Australia, mainland Chinese students overseas are likely to draw on their embedded cultural schema of Education when studying in the context of Australian education systems. An understanding of the Chinese Education schema may help Australian educators to bridge the educational gaps that many overseas Chinese students encounter, and it may contribute to reducing the chances of intercultural miscommunication between Chinese students and Australian educationists.

"My [Australian] lecturer doesn't care if I pass or fail," she said. "I came from China at my own expense because I want to learn. But he treats me as a nuisance when I try to ask questions in class. He avoids me. I try to catch him after the class and he is always in a hurry... and he won't help me!" [An account by a tearful Chinese student (Malcolm, 1995, ii)]

Jiao shu yu ren. The Chinese cultural schema of Education¹

In cognitive sciences, a schema theory is basically “a theory about knowledge” (Rumelhart, 1980: 34). Sir Frederick Charles Bartlett (1886 – 1969) was credited as the first psychologist who used the term in its cognitive sense for studying long-term memory in the 1920s (Brewer, 2000). Schema theories study how knowledge is represented and how their representation facilitates the use of knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980: 34). Schemas are viewed by Rumelhart (1980: 33) as building blocks of cognition. Conversely, schemas are abstract cognitive constructs where knowledge is processed, stored and activated. In the discipline of cognitive anthropology, cultural schemas, which are interchangeably called cultural models, are schematic representations of generic concepts distributed among cultural members. Despite the fact that not every cultural member has the same amount of the distributed knowledge or the same degree of schematisation of the distributed knowledge, due to the varied accessibility to and intensity of their exposure to knowledge systems (Sharifian, 2003), cultural schemas are used by cognitive anthropologists to study the foundations upon which people of one culture are able to identify each other as cultural members and are able to communicate successfully with each other (e.g. Holland & Quinn, 1987). In other words, cultural schemas, though subject to ongoing modification, have the property of being stable and consistent on the whole (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Anthropologist Gary Palmer (2001b, p.1) posits that cultural schemas are derived from social structure, salient rituals and a host of other cultural phenomena. Moreover cultural schemas can be instantiated in various cultural artefacts, such as painting, rituals and narratives (Sharifian, 2003). Idioms, proverbs or popular sayings are another instantiation of cultural schemas as they are packaged with cultural wisdoms and express culturally constituted understandings (White, 1987).

The Chinese cultural schema of Education is the abstract knowledge of the nature of education that is distributed among Chinese cultural members. This cultural knowledge emerges from thousands of years of interaction among the Chinese social need for developing harmony in a collective and stratified society, the Confucian philosophy of education and the political utilitarianism of education (Zhu, 1992, p.4). The appeal for national and interpersonal peace, which is represented in *guo tai min an* (国泰民安 - the country being prosperous and the people living in

¹ The paper reserves a Capital letter “E” for Chinese cultural schema of Education, due to the subtle and different connotations when the word “education” is used in Chinese and English.

peace), *an ju le ye* (安居乐业 - [of people] living and working in peace and contentment), *tai ping sheng shi* (太平盛世 - times of peace and prosperity), (和衷共济 - work together with harmony and faithfulness in the time of difficulty), *jia he wen shi xing* (家和万事兴 - harmony between family members prospers everything), gives rise to the Chinese conceptualisation which stresses harmony between people of different social hierarchical orders, and that the existence of the individual is for the purpose of living harmoniously with 'others' in a family or in society.

Confucian teachings accord strongly with the social need for harmony. The core content of Confucianism lies in the five virtues that Confucius believed fundamental for harmonious hierarchical societies. The five virtues are *ren* (仁 - benevolence), *yi* (义 - righteousness), *li* (礼 - propriety), *zhi* (智 - intelligence), *xin* (信 - honesty). Except for the virtue of intelligence, which might be interpreted as neutral in its denotation, the virtues are oriented towards the cultivation of social morals for living within and maintaining appropriate hierarchical societies. The persistence and prevalence of Confucianism reinforces the cultural understanding that moral virtues are the prerequisite of social harmony. Moreover, a myriad of rituals held for commemorating Confucius (551 - 479 B.C.) as *zhi sheng xian shi* (至圣先师 - China's greatest sage and teacher) strengthen the cultural knowledge that teaching and learning is for the ultimate cultivation of people with moral virtues and for the maintenance of social harmony.

Another source from which the Chinese cultural schema of Education is derived is the political utilitarianism of Chinese education. This is explicated by Zhu (1992: 4) as "its usefulness to those in power". To a large extent, the political utilitarianism of Chinese education is in agreement with the social need for harmony because social violence is likely to bring instability to those in power and to disrupt the peace that common people value. Confucianism also conforms to the political utilitarianism because Confucian moral virtues are geared towards the cultivation of an 'ideal' benevolent seniority and complying inferiority, so that both of them can act appropriately according to their right positions in the hierarchical society.

In the context of the constant interplay over time of the social need for harmony, Confucianism and the political utilitarianism of Chinese education, the Chinese cultural schema of Education has come to be described as *jiao shu yu ren* (教书育人 - teaching books and cultivating people). This culturally distributed and culturally accepted abstract and idealised representation of Chinese education prescribes that imparting knowledge is not conceptualised as the only goal of education. Imparting knowledge is seen, to a large extent, as a means to cultivate people and

“to transform the young into people with a highly developed social conscience and to inculcate in them the code for living already accepted by their elders” (Hu & Grove, 1991, p.79). The *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema is instantiated in the doctrine of *shi zhe, chuan dao, shou ye, jie huo ye* (师者, 传道, 授业, 解惑也 - Teachers [are responsible for] transmitting *dao* (or *Tao*) (道 - Confucian morals), imparting knowledge and resolving doubts). This doctrine was put forward by the Tang Dynasty scholar Han Yu (768 - 824) and is still frequently referred to in teacher-training. The essence of Chinese teaching is, thus, not confined to professionalism, that is to the professional knowledge requested by industries, but hinges on the notion that moral cultivation is the paramount means to shape students to become appropriate members of the established society. The Chinese Education schema functions like a blueprint, governing nationwide educational activities and organising individual teacher’s teaching agendas. It is likely that in most Chinese schools, the goal of ‘cultivating’ takes precedence over the goal of imparting knowledge.

The *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema has remained practically intact in Chinese history, despite Chinese education having gone through some transformation due to social changes. The Chinese Education schema has exerted pervasive and profound influence on Chinese education which can be revealed in the consistent emphasis on moral education in schooling, paying high respect to teachers in society, some learning strategies common to Chinese students and the significance of examinations which sustains and survives thousands of years.

Moral education as the major content in traditional Chinese education

Moral education was the major education content in traditional Chinese education. In the first documented education institution in China, the Imperial College which was founded in the Zhou Dynasty (11th century BC to 221 BC) to teach young children of the royal families, the education curriculum was composed of virtue cultivation content. This is illustrated in *Bao shi ... yang guo zi yi dao, nai jiao zhi liu yi: yi yue wu li; er yue liu yue; san yue wu she; si yue wu yu; wu yue liu shu; liu yue jiu shu* (保氏...养国子以道, 乃教之六事: 一曰五礼; 二曰六射; 三曰五御; 四曰五御; 五曰六艺; 六曰九数 - Master Bao ... reared the princes with Tao and then taught them with six arts: rites, music, archery, charioteering, reading and writing, and arithmetic) (*Zhou Li, Di Guan, Bao Shi* 周礼·地官·保氏). Numeracy was included in the curriculum, but primary attention was given to the first five arts because they served the purpose of cultivating virtues and morals. The virtue cultivating function of rites,

music, and reading and writing is stated in the Analects, the collection of Confucius' thoughts, which records that *Zi yue: xin yu shi, li yu li, cheng yu yue* (子曰: 兴于诗, 立于礼, 成于乐 - Confucius said: It [the cultivation of moral virtues] begins with poetry, is strengthened through proper conduct and consummated through music).

All the five moral virtues of *ren* (仁 - benevolence), *yi* (义 - righteousness), *li* (礼 - propriety), *zhi* (智 - intelligence), *xin* (信 - honesty) were adhered to in Chinese education from the Zhou Dynasty through to modern China. For instance, one of Confucius' followers, Xun Zi (310-230 BC) of the late Warring States (475-221 BC), stressed that education should be for the cultivation of moral virtues. In the first Chapter of *Quan Xue* (劝学 - *Exhortation to Learning*), Xun Zi wrote about *ji shan cheng de* (积善成德 - accumulating kindness so that kindness can be added to become a moral virtue) to urge people to learn about Confucian virtues. Zhu Xi held that it was Confucian virtues that distinguished a gentleman from a petty man, for example, he stated that *wei li yi zhe wei xiao ren* (违礼义者为小人 - those who disregard rituals and moral virtues are to be petty men, Chapter 23).

In the Han Dynasty (221-206 BC), Confucianism reached its peak as the only orthodox state philosophy and content for education at the expense of other knowledge and other schools of thought. In history, this is known as *fei chu bai jia, du zun ru zhu* (废黜百家, 独尊儒术 - suppression of the hundred schools and the exclusive recognition of Confucianism). The theorist Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) maintained that *sheng ren suo yu shuo, zai yu shuo ren yi er li zhi* (圣人所欲说, 在于说仁义而理之 - what the sage [Confucius] says lies in benevolence and uprightness which are rationalised to be principles) appealed to the Confucian moral virtues in education (*Chun Qiu Fan Lu* (春秋繁露: 重政 - *The Luxuriant Dew from the Spring and Autumn Annals: Zhong zheng*). Dong was also remembered as the first to propose the famed Chinese civil service examination system and insisted upon Confucian classics being the core content of this examination.

The Confucianism of education has also been adopted by neo-Confucianism. Neo-Confucianism has evolved from the synthesis of Confucianism, Taoist cosmology and Buddhist spirituality and has developed into two schools. However, it is *li xue* (理学 - the School of Principles/Laws), initiated by Cheng Yi (1033-1108) and developed by Zhu Xi (1130-1200) of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), that has "remained the most influential single system of philosophy until the introduction of Western philosophy in China in recent decades" (Fung, 1948, p.294).

Neo-Confucianism strongly recommends the book *Da Xue* (大学 - *The Great Learning*), by Zeng Zi (505-437 BC) as one the four classics, with the other three being *Zhong Yong* (中庸 - *The Doctrine of the Mean*), *Lun Yu* (论语 - *The Analects*), *Meng Zi* (孟子 - *The Mencius*). The *Great Learning* emphasises Confucian virtues, which were justified by Wang Yangming (1472-1528), Zhu Xi's keen follower, as the eternal *li* (理 - the principle) of the universe. The very beginning of *The Great Learning* states that *da xue zhi dao, zai ming ming de, zai qin min, zai zhi yu zhi shan* (大学之道在明明德, 在亲民, 在止于至善 - the teaching of *The Great Learning* is to manifest one's illustrious virtue, love the people, and rest in the highest good). The notes provided by Zhu Xi on the Four Classics were the compulsory syllabus for preparation for the civil service examination from the Song Dynasty until the beginning of the 20th century.

Yang wu yun dong (洋务运动 - the Westernisation Movement) was launched after the mid of the 19th Century by Chinese intellectuals when China was defeated in the Opium War (1839-1842) by 'western cannons and well-equipped fleets'. Western victory was understood by Chinese intellectuals as resulting from the development of science and technology. The aim of the Westernisation Movement was thus "to modernise in order to preserve the rule of the Qing government" (Wang, 1996, p.1). The working principle of the Westernisation Movement emphasised *zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong* (中学为体, 西学为用 - Chinese learning as a fundamental structure; Western learning for practical use). Thus, Confucian education continued, despite the extension of traditional Chinese education to include science and technology.

In brief, traditional Chinese education adopted Confucian teachings on morals and virtues as its core content. Knowledge embodied in Confucian teachings was equated with the wisdom of sages. Conversely, in traditional Chinese education, the knowledge teaching aspect of Chinese Education was conducted through and for the cultivation of ideological unity, which did not encourage innovation from individual students. The ultimate goal of developing social harmony and national stability through teaching Confucian ideology in traditional Chinese education still influences contemporary Chinese education.

Moral education as a major concern in contemporary Chinese education

The *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema influences contemporary Chinese education to the extent that it transforms the Confucian education of morals and virtues into moral-political education. The transformed moral-political education is supported by the contemporary Chinese

government (Price, 1992, p.211) and has remained a major concern of contemporary Chinese education since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Moral-political education in Mao's era (1949 - 1976) was for the purpose of defending the achievement of Chinese socialism, although imparting knowledge to students was given primary attention. It was understood by the whole nation that constructing a socialistic China needed people with skills in literacy and numeracy and knowledge of science and technology. Chinese education during Mao's era followed Mao's idea of political revolution, and the national education policy in 1958 stated that *jiao yu wei wu chan jie ji zheng zhi fu wu, jiao yu yu sheng chan lao dong xiang jie he* (教育·无·政治服, 教育与生·相·合 - education should be for the purpose of serving proletarian politics, and education should integrate with productive labour) (Chinese State Council, 1958). The over-emphasis on cultivating a socialist China eventually led Mao to initiate the so-called Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). However, during the 10-year revolution, the imparting of knowledge was practically destroyed, and moral cultivation was deformed. Nonetheless, Mao Zedong's idea on education was observed by Price as largely congruent with the Chinese tradition in the sense that "his concept of education as fundamentally moral-political, and as something which goes on throughout life and involved all that man does" (Price, 1979: 66).

Chinese education after Mao's era was restored by Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who reiterated that education should serve the purpose of realising the four modernisations of agriculture, industry, science and technology and the military. Deng, known as the designer of the open, reformed and modernised China, did not overlook moral-political education. He stated in his *Speech at the National Educational Work Conference* that *xue xiao yao da li jia qiang ge ming zhi xu he ge ming ji lu, zao jiu yu you she hu zhu yi jue wu de yi dai xin ren, cu jin zheng ge she hui feng qi de ge ming hua* (学校要大力加·革命秩序和革命·律, 造就具有社会主··悟的一代新人, 促·整个社会·气的革命化 - greater efforts must be made in schools to strengthen revolutionary order and discipline, to bring up a new generation with socialistic consciousness and thus to help revolutionise the general mood of society) (Deng, 1978, p.8). In fact, Deng spoke highly of the role that moral-political education has in the modernised China.

More recently, quality education as a major component of Chinese education reform has been implemented among all schools in China. The education reform is to rectify the prevalent examination-oriented schooling to quality-oriented schooling, so as to prepare Chinese students with the qualities necessary for globalisation. The Chinese State

Council (1999, p.1) proposed that “*shi shi su zhi jiao yu jiu shi ... zaojiu 'you li xiang, you dao de, you wen hua, you ji lu' de, de zhi ti mei deng quan mian fa zhan de she hui zhu yi shi ye jian she zhe he jie ban ren*” (实施素质教育就是 ... 造就‘有理想,有道德,有文化,有纪律’的,德智体美等全面发展的社会主义事业建设者和接班人 - to implement quality education is ... to cultivate the socialist career constructors and successors with ‘ideals, morals, culture/knowledge and discipline’ and who are fully-developed in morals, intelligence, physics and aesthetics”.

In the context of the market economy and globalisation, Chinese moral-political education loses the predominant significance that it has had for thousands of years. However, remedial measures are being taken in schools and society to preserve Confucian moral virtues and to inculcate in students Chinese socialistic morals. The teaching of morals and virtues is embedded in subject materials, and by reading the materials which are subtly loaded with either Confucian moral virtues or socialistic morals, students are influenced imperceptibly. A plethora of extra-curriculum activities are also designed to achieve the same moral education effects. For instance, primary school students in a Yangzhou city were encouraged to write letters in their spare time to the then Chinese Chairman Jiang Zemin, who was a graduate of that school decades before. Jiang wrote a letter (18 Nov 2000) in reply to one of the students, encouraging her and all the students in his childhood school to have the aspiration to study for the prosperity of the country. Jiang’s letter was published openly and used as a text to promote moral education for Chinese adolescents (Xinhua New Agency, 18 March 2004).

Emphasis on moral education both in traditional and contemporary Chinese education gives rise to the Chinese cultural conceptualisation that Chinese teachers are indispensable moral cultivators and models in the process of transmitting knowledge. This cultural conceptualisation leads to another Chinese cultural phenomenon which is the high respect paid to teachers in the Chinese society.

Roles and status of Chinese teachers

It must be pointed out at the beginning of this section that the English word ‘teacher’ is not equivalent to ‘*jiao shi*’ (教师 - teaching master) in Chinese characters. Firstly, *jiao shi*, alternatively used as ‘*lao shi*’ (老师 - old master), or *xian sheng* (先生 - early born: master, teacher) in the traditional fashion, is a term used to refer to all the teachers collectively in China from kindergartens to universities. The hierarchical nature of the Chinese teaching society is not reflected by this term. University professors and mentors are more commonly referred to as teachers than as professors. Secondly, in Chinese pragmatics, ‘teacher’ is a term of

address. Surname + *lao shi*, or simply *lao shi*, in Chinese is a term of address appropriate and acceptable to any teacher. For instance, such greetings are made by Chinese students to their English teachers as "Good morning, Teacher!", "Good afternoon, Teacher Wang!". Thirdly, as a term of address, *lao shi* is an honorific used to express respect from the speaker. This honorific can be extended to established writers, directors, TV or radio program hosts and hostesses or other artists and scientists who are well-known. The professional titles of these artists and scientists may not have the same honorific effect as *lao shi* has.

The *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema assigns Chinese teachers with a primary role as moral cultivators, which leads to teachers having high status in society. In traditional Chinese education, teachers were given a status paralleling nature (天地 - heaven-earth), ancestors and sovereignty and were regarded as one of the roots of *li* (礼 - propriety). This is recorded in *Xun Zi* (荀子 Chapter 19): "*Li you san ben: tian di zhe, sheng zhi ben ye; xian zu zhe, lei zhi ben ye; jun shi zhe, zhi zhi ben ye*" (礼有三本: 天地者, 生之本也; 先祖者, 类之本也; 君师者, 治之本也 - there are three roots of *li*: Heaven and earth are the root of birth. Ancestors are the root of human beings. Sovereignty and teachers are the root of disciplines). Teachers were so indispensable due to their contribution to the cultivation of moral virtues that *Xun Zi* claimed that *guo jiang xing, bi gui shi er zhong fu, gui shi er zhong fu, ze fa du chun* (国将兴, 必贵师而重傅, 贵师而重傅, 则法度存 - if the country will prosper, it will value teachers and stress instructors. If it values teachers and stresses instructors, then the laws and regulations survive) (*Xun Zi*, Chapter 27). *Xun Zi* also maintains that *shi zhe, suo yi zheng li ye* (师者, 所以正礼也 - teachers exist for the regulation of *li*) (*Xun Zi*, Chapter 2).

In contemporary Chinese education, teachers who collectively are regarded as intellectuals by society, have the role of cultivating the souls of Chinese students who are conceptualised as *zu guo de wei lai* (祖国的未来 - the future of the nation). Teachers gain their respect and high social status with the subject knowledge that they possess as well as their social responsibilities. For example in 1985, as a reward for their contribution to Chinese culture and society, the government designated September 10 as Teachers' Day. Teachers' Day is celebrated annually by the Ministry of Education (now the State Education Commission), by various local governments and by schools, teachers, students and parents.

Due to their primary role as moral cultivators and high social status, Chinese teachers are conceptualised as authoritative in class and are responsible for initiating interactions in class. A popular teaching principle *bu fen bu qi, bu fei bu fa* (不愤不启, 不悱不发 - I will not instruct

my students until they have really thought hard but failed to understand) which is recounted in *The Analects, Shu Er* 论语: 述而 reveals the authority that Chinese teachers have over their students, who are not supposed to interact freely with teachers on the basis of equal status. This explains the genesis of the renowned Chinese teacher-centred approach and accounts for Chinese students frequently being seen as followers and not asking many questions in class (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin, 2002).

The high respect paid to teachers is accelerated by the Chinese conceptualisation that teachers are moral models. The four-character saying *wei ren shi biao* (为人师表 - teachers are the paragons of virtues and learning) instantiates their conceptualisation. Accordingly, most teachers are able to *yi shen zuo ze* (以身作则 - set a good example for students with his/her own conduct). The role of moral models leads to a teaching approach which asserts that effecting teaching should be *yan chuan shen jiao* (言传身教 - teaching by personal example as well as verbal instructions). This approach is also known as *xiao zhi yi li, dong zhi yi qing, dao zhi yi xing* (晓之以理, 动之以情, 导之以行 - to instruct with principles, move with emotions, and guide with teachers' own actions). This personalised approach is believed to be more effective than mere verbal instructions which is instantiated as *shen jiao shen yu yan jiao* (身教胜于言教 - personal examples are better than precepts). The personalised approach also enjoins Chinese teachers to play the comprehensive roles of moral guardians, congenial patrons and moral models, in addition to being knowledge holders and knowledge transmitters. Chinese teachers are thus expected to be *xue er bu yan, hui ren bu juan* (学而不厌, 诲人不倦 - never growing tired of learning nor weary of teaching) (*The Analects, Shu Er* 论语: 述而).

In accordance with the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema, Chinese teachers are also conceptualised as caring, self-sacrificing, moral-modelling, and deserving of high respect. Caring teachers are often instantiated in Chinese sayings which portray them as mothers, sisters, brothers or fathers, for instance, the saying *yi ri wei shi, zhong shen wei fu* (一日为师, 终身为父 - a teacher for one day [equals/is] a father for the whole life). The 'self-sacrifice' of a candle is also mapped onto teachers in the saying that *ran shao zi ji, zhao lian bie ren* (燃烧自己, 照亮别人 - [teachers] are burning themselves and giving light to others). Teachers are respected for their moral teachings, as in *zun shi zhong jiao* (尊师重教 - respect teachers and revere their moral teachings), and they have life-long impact on students as expressed in *en shi nan wang* (恩师难忘 - benefactor teachers are unforgettable). Teachers are also respected for their diligence and are equated with *xin qin de yuan ding* (辛勤的园丁 -

diligent gardeners). They should be rewarded by their students' achievement who are 'the fruits of their labour' - *tao li man tian xia* (桃李满天下 - students are teachers' peaches and plums growing all over the world).

By and large, the roles and status assigned to Chinese teachers as relative to the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema become an internal motivation to most Chinese teachers. One of the effects of this motivation is that most Chinese teachers are willing to give extra instructions to students in their spare time to fulfil their roles and to live up to their status. The willingness of most Chinese teachers to help their students makes them available for personal help whenever it is needed. Many Chinese teachers even augment their level of help and care by predicting students' learning difficulties, (although the predication may not necessarily always reflect the actual learning situation in students), and are willing to help solve those predicted problems. By solving students' problems frequently, Chinese teachers reinforce their roles and consolidate their respectable status. The impact of this availability on mainland Chinese students when overseas will be discussed later in relation to these students' perceptions of Australian lecturers.

Student beliefs about books and their common learning strategies

Under the influence of the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema, Chinese students are expected not only to pay respect to teachers in class, but also to the material that teachers have taught them. Chinese students are expected to be attentive to and memorise the material, and being able to demonstrate good memorisation whenever needed. This deference for teachings is largely underpinned by student beliefs about books. Books are conceptualised as sacred and most Chinese students, for example, will be familiar with the maxim of *wan ban jie xia pin, wei you du shu gao* (万般皆下品, 惟有书高 - the worth of other pursuits is small, and the study of books excels them all) (Wang Zhu of the North Song Dynasty: 960 - 1127). Books are believed to contain *dao li* (道理 - *dao* principles: Confucian moral virtues) and through reading books, students can *zhi shu da li* (知书达理 - understand books and know moral principles). Most Chinese students also have the beliefs of *kai juan you yi* (开卷有益 - opening books is beneficial) and *du shi po wan juan, xia bi ru you shen* (读书破万卷, 下笔如有神 - after reading ten thousand books, your writing will be guided with inspiration) (Du Fu of the Tang Dynasty: 618 - 907). To achieve effective reading and learning, Chinese students prefer teachers who are strict with them, as represented in the expression *yan*

shi chu gao tu (严师出高徒 - an outstanding apprentice/student is produced by a strict teacher).

Relative to beliefs about books, re-reading is a recommended learning strategy as represented in *xue er shi xi zhi* (学而时习之 - learning by re-reading regularly) and *wen gu er zhi xin* (温故而知新 - re-reading old knowledge is the prerequisite of gaining new knowledge). Thinking or self-reflection is another learning strategy as in *xue er bu si ze wang* (学而不思则罔 - it is confusing to read without thinking for oneself) (*The Analects*, Wei Zheng 论语: 为政). For example, one of Confucius' favourite disciples Zeng Zi, author of *The Great Learning*, learned his master's teaching through additional self-reflection - *Wu ri san xing wu shen* (吾日三省吾身 - every day, I self-reflect three times).

However, re-reading and self-reflection are not sufficient to produce ideal students. Students should also be determined, since *dao li* contained in books is vast and requires diligence as expressed in the motto *shu shan you lu qin wei jing, xue hai wu ya kuo zuo zhou* (书山有路勤为径, 学海无涯苦作舟 - diligence is the path to the book mountain, and pain is the boat for the knowledge ocean). Accordingly, most Chinese students believe in diligence, that is, *zhi yao gong fu shen, tie chu mo cheng zhen* (只要功夫深, 铁杵磨成针 - if you work at it hard enough, you can grind an iron rod into a needle), and they know the stories of *tou xuan liang, zhui ci gu* (头悬梁, 锥刺骨 - hanging one's hair up to the ceiling and piercing one's leg [to prevent oneself from falling into sleep when studying]). Thus study demands perseverance. Besides being determined, diligent and persistent, most Chinese students also have the belief that *quan shen guan zhu* (全神贯注 - putting one's whole heart) into the process of *jing yi qiu jing* (精益求精 - constant improvement) is an effective learning strategy.

In the context of believing in determination, diligence and perseverance, most Chinese students tend to be self-critical if failure occurs in their learning. They are not ready to attribute their learning failure to teachers, but see failure as their own responsibility. Moreover, any open discussion with a teacher for a solution may suggest that the teacher has failed to teach effectively and the student would want to 'save' the teacher's 'face'. This belief is represented in *shi fu ling jin men, xiu xing zai ge ren* (师傅领进门, 修行在个人 - after the master/teacher has initiated the apprentice/students, the development of skills depends on their own efforts).

Chinese students' beliefs about books and their acquired learning strategies have a strong impact on their overseas learning experience. Most try to deal with the large amount of reading for units or projects in

Australia with the same strategies that they use with Chinese teaching for examinations which are largely based on factual questions. Misunderstandings between Australian lecturers and Chinese students overseas may well be attributed to the transferring learning strategies which might not be suitable to the Australian education system.

Significance of examinations in Chinese education

Examinations at various levels are an important aspect of Chinese education. This educational tradition is derived from the Confucian philosophy which held that government officials should be recruited on the basis of merit rather than family background. Confucius maintained that the governance of the state required administrative staff who, not only understood the rituals and ceremonies of public and private life, but who also had moral virtues and possessed constructive and rational approaches to interpersonal, relational and moral problems. Confucius himself was an example of being ambitious and attempting to make a career in the then governments through his own learning, although he was not adequately accepted by governments of the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) nor the governments of Warring States period (475-221 BC) due to wars and turmoil. In his life time Confucius was never promoted to an official position that could acknowledge and reward him for his knowledge.

The examination system (known as the Civil Service Examination) started in the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220) and lasted until 1905 when it was abolished by the Qing Dynasty under pressure from some leading Chinese intellectuals who were influenced by the Western science and technology. The examination system served to maintain cultural unity and consensus on Confucian values. The civil service examination meant that, through uniformity of content, the local elite and the ambitious would-be elite across China were indoctrinated with the same Confucian virtues and morals.

There were four levels of the examination system ranging from the lowest level of *Tong Sheng* 童生 to the highest of *Jin Shi* 晋士, with *Xiu Cai* 秀才 and *Ju Ren* 举人 ranked as the second and the third. Immersed in the Chinese educational context, for seven centuries Chinese students of all ages could spend 20 to 30 years memorising Confucian classics and Zhu Xi's commentaries when preparing for examinations of different levels. As far as the common people in China were concerned, success in the examination system was the only path to changing one's social status, and education was thus the only key to social mobility. Many Chinese men who were determined to succeed regardless of their age would for years *liang er bu wen chuang wai shi, yi xin zhi du sheng xian shu* (两耳不

闻窗外事，一心只读圣贤书 - ‘Close two ears to things outside the window, whole-heartedly read books by sages and men of virtue’: Devote themselves fully to the rote-memorisation of the Confucian classics, isolating themselves from other activities). If a family member passed the provincial examination (*Ju Ren*), his entire family would be elevated to social status of the scholar gentry and have prestige and privilege. Success in the examinations thus “created a class of degree holders whose status gave them positions of influence in their home communities ...” (Cohen, 1994: 91).

The Chinese civil service examination system also paved the way to *guang zong yao zu* (光宗耀祖 - glorify the ancestors) and to gain “face” (meaning “dignity” in Yu, 2001, p.15) for family and ancestors. When the examination was over, the list of successful candidates was sung out and posted on golden paper. Titles were granted immediately. Winners would be escorted in a parade by people pouring out into the streets to admire the successful candidates. One of the happiest moments for Chinese men in historic times was *jin bang ti ming* (金榜题名 - when one's name appeared on the golden list), and his family would share the joy and the future power as in *yi ren de dao, ji quan shen tian* (一人得道, 鸡犬升天 - ‘A man attains the Tao, his chickens and dogs ascend to heaven’: When a man gets the power, all his families, relatives and friends benefit from it).

Although the Chinese civil service examination was abolished about a hundred years ago, the weight of examinations in the Chinese curriculum has not reduced. The present national entrance examination which has taken place every July since 1977 serves nearly the same function as the traditional Chinese civil service examination. The intense competition for the national examination gives rise to a metaphor of *qian jun wan ma guo du mu qiao* (千军万马过独木桥 - thousands of cavalymen and infantrymen crossing a single-plank bridge). The successful students are conceptualised as persons with morals and virtues, and as the fruits of the Chinese *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema. Therefore, the cultural schema functions as a goal and motivates most students to study diligently not only for themselves, but also for their parents and for their teachers. This supports research which shows that schemas “have the potential of instigating action” (D’Andrade, 1992, p.29).

Relative to the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema, Chinese examinations are therefore conceptualised as a yardstick measuring not only directly the knowledge that students possess, but also indirectly their morals and virtues. Those who are able to pass examinations are conceptualised as having *ren cai* (人才 - talents with social values). The higher the level of the examination that students can pass, the higher social values they are conceptualised to have and the more respect that they will gain from

society. The impact of the conceptualised significance of examinations on mainland Chinese students overseas will be discussed in next section.

Influence of the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema on communication with Australian educators

The deeply-rooted *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema is likely to be activated by many mainland Chinese students studying in Australia as the foundation for their perceptions of the Australian education system when they do not have the corresponding Australian education schema. However, the activated Chinese Education schema in the Australian context frequently leads a large number of mainland Chinese students to a situation where they “are not always capable of integrating themselves with the local academic ... communities in Australia” (Wang & Webster, 2004, p.2).

The difficulties that many mainland Chinese students have in integrating themselves with Australian academic communities might be accounted for by their lack of communication, or sometimes by their miscommunication, with their Australian lecturers. Their lack of intercultural communication is attributed by Wang and Webster to “the effects of cultural and life experience factors”, because “[e]ven with good English, many [mainland Chinese] students still find difficulties in fluent and enjoyable communication with local or other international students” (2004, p.12). In other words, Chinese schema driven perceptions of the Australian education system can cause some mainland Chinese students to experience difficulty and discomfort in communication with their local lecturers, and may even lead to intercultural miscommunication as in the case of the tearful Chinese student in Malcolm (1995).

Miscommunication between the tearful Chinese student and her lecturer might be attributed to gaps between perceptions of roles of teachers and students, learning strategies, attitudes towards examinations and conceptualisations of open student-lecturer communication. Firstly, like most mainland Chinese students, the tearful student might have thought that her lecturer’s role was as a knowledge transmitter and moral cultivator, and thus took the teacher’s accessibility to help inside and outside classroom for granted. When she found that the Australian lecturer was always in a hurry, she mistook the lecturer’s busy timetable as avoiding her, as ignoring her desire for learning and even as not caring that she had come all the way to Australia to study at her own expense. Her situation was not unique. Many mainland Chinese students reported that their Australian lecturers “seem always busy and are just available on some certain days” (Wang & Webster, 2004, p.10). The ‘busy’ Australian lecturer, on the other hand, might have conceptualised a

different role for the student, which was to “construct and facilitate a conceptual and investigative world in which learners can increasingly take responsibility for their own learning” (Lovat, 2003, p.25). Fostering autonomy among learners in the Australian context also requires lecturers “to instil in ... students feelings of self-worth premised on the value of what these students already [know] and the value of what they [want] to learn” (Tsolidis, 2001, p.99). The Australian lecturer, like many other Australian teachers and lecturers, did not have the Chinese *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema, and consequently was liable to be unaware of the patron-like role that he was expected to play.

Further, the tearful student, like most mainland Chinese students, was not familiar with the student centred approach and was likely to transfer her own teacher centred learning strategies to the Australian context. Clearly, the transferral of learning strategies did not work to her satisfaction.

Many independent study strategies used in Australia are unfamiliar to most Chinese students. For instance, many mainland Chinese students find it hard to deal with the large amount of reading recommended by lecturers. Growing up with the cultural knowledge that the teachers' recommendations should be interpreted as the teachers' requests given the authoritative status of Chinese teachers and that the best way to pay the respect to teachers is by listening to their words and attending well to their teaching, Chinese students find themselves in a dilemma “To read them all or just to read some?” (Gao, 1998). “To read them all is too difficult; but to read some means making selections which is also difficult. In China the teacher or someone will tell you what to do and what not to do” (Gao, 1998). When the tearful student was left on her own to make certain decisions on her study or to solve some problems in her assignment, she would have felt a conflict between the ‘freedom’ assigned to her and her former beliefs of persistence, diligence and determination. This would have contributed to her anxiety. The first person she expected to get help from was her Australian lecturer, who, according her Chinese Education schema, should either be receptive to her inquiries or should offer his help to show his care. The Australian lecturer, however, might not have realised that the student could have difficulties with her learning strategies. According to his experience, students should be immersed in a student centred approach and should have the strategies to tackle their learning difficulties before entering tertiary education.

The tearful student might have given her examination a significance that her lecturer did not appreciate. Like most mainland Chinese students, passing or failing is conceptualised as a mark not only of academic achievement, but also of familial and social achievement. A mark in the

examination “is a strong indication of ... gaining face in the eyes of others” (Liu, 2002, p.45). As far as mainland Chinese students overseas are concerned, an examination mark is frequently associated with their parents’ expectations of them or disappointment with them. Parents’ involvement in their children’s passing or failing is seen as one of the instantiations of the Chinese Family schema (Leng, 2004). In other words, the tearful student might have wanted to excel in her examinations to prove to her parents, lecturers and classmates that she had both the knowledge and the virtues to enable her to “gain public face” through her academic achievement (Liu, 2002, p.42) . The Australian lecturer, however, might have treated examinations as just one part of the learning process, rather than a fundamental measurement of the student’s knowledge and character. Like many other Australian lecturers, he might have the view “that any score is open to interpretation, that is, that it is not an absolute” (Maley, 1986: 104).

Finally, the exemplified miscommunication from Malcolm (1995) might relate to different conceptualisations of open student-lecturer communication. Like most mainland Chinese students, the tearful student might have activated the *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema and have regarded her Australian lecturer as an authority. Consequently, she would not consider open and frank communication with the Australian lecturer as polite, because it may suggest that he failed to teach her effectively. As Liu (2002, p.45) maintains, “being polite to teachers as a moral principle in Chinese culture is still a widely held belief and behaviour”. The student might have suppressed her doubts and anxieties for some time before she burst into tears and explained to Malcolm (1995). The Australian lecturer, on the other hand, might not have realised this accumulated frustration because there was no request for open communication. To the Australian lecturer, asking questions in class and after class does not necessarily mean a request for help nor for an appointment for a meeting. He might even have considered it inappropriate to offer extra help to an adult female student who did not ask for it explicitly or officially according to professional ethics.

Conclusion

Enrolling international students to generate additional income is now perceived as one of the primary functions of Australian schools and universities in the new era of market economy and educational restructuring and the reform (Dudley & Vidovich, 1995, p.2; Poole, 2004). The 34,000 mainland Chinese students now studying in Australia (Howard, 2003) contribute to the Australian education industry. Due to the embedded *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema, most mainland Chinese students bring with them their cultural expectations on what education

should be and how they should be educated in Australia. Thus their expectations of Australian teachers, their learning strategies, attitudes towards examinations and their conceptualisation of open communication are likely to baffle Australian educators whose educational schema will be significantly different.

In a conclusion, an understanding of Chinese *jiao shu yu ren* Education schema may help Australian educators bridge the educational gaps that many mainland Chinese students may encounter, and it may contribute to reducing the chances of intercultural miscommunication between these students and their Australian educators.

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