

*Jin Li*

**Inexhaustible Source of Water: The Enduring Confucian Learning Model (有本之水難涸也: 百折不衰的儒家學習模式)**

JIN LI

*Brown University*

In press with *Education Research Journal* (教育学术月刊)

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jin Li, Brown University, Education Department, Box 1938, 340 Brook Street, Providence, RI 02912. Phone: 401-863-9326, email: [Jin\\_Li@Brown.edu](mailto:Jin_Li@Brown.edu).

Jin Li's short bio:

Dr. Jin Li is Professor of Education and Human Development at Brown University. She studies different cultural learning models and how such models shape children's learning beliefs and achievement. She is the author of *Cultural Foundations of Learning: East and West*.

**Abstract**

The Confucian learning tradition has not perished even after deliberate attempts to eliminate it and concerted efforts to westernize education in recent history. This learning model appears to reincarnate across time and space, demonstrating its lasting vitality. The core components of this model are described based on decades of empirical research. The question of why the Confucian model appears to be steadfast no matter what kind of assault directed at it is entertained. The author argues that it is time for Confucian heritage cultures to reflect deeply about why they have been trying to be rid of this learning model, especially in light of perplexing consequences. How to uphold the Confucian model and at the same time to learn well from other cultures is explored.

Keywords: Confucian learning model, enduring tradition, cross-cultural learning

*Hsü Tze said “More than once Confucius expressed his admiration for water by saying, ‘Water! Oh, water!’ What was it he saw in water?”*

*‘Water from an ample source,’ said Mencius, ‘comes tumbling down, day and night without ceasing, going forward.... draining into the sea. Anything that has ample source is like this.*

*What Confucius saw in water is just this and nothing more. If a thing has no source..., we can stand and wait for it to dry up. ~Mencius (pp. 130-131).*

If we lived in East Asia a century ago, few would want to talk about the old-fashioned Confucian way of life. Instead, most people, even those without the luxury of education, would hold Confucianism in contempt. With intellectual spearheads such as the Chinese writer Lu Xun calling Confucianism a ‘human devouring’ culture and generations of thinkers, politicians, and educators determined to eradicate Confucianism, we would assume that such a cultural tradition would have perished by now. However, all signs indicate that after nearly two centuries of attack, Confucianism is not only not dead, but surprisingly alive and well, even in the once most hostile land: China.

In this article, I describe the enduring Confucian learning model based on available research, followed by empirical findings regarding how children develop their learning beliefs and how parents socialize them at home. I entertain the question of why the Confucian learning model appears to be steadfast no matter how it has been assaulted. I argue that the Confucian learning values have never been eradicated although they might have become an undercurrent: one which kept running in families. Now the undercurrent is surfacing again. Mencius’s words epitomized the most important foundation of the millennia long Confucian strength: when a child is nurtured with the right moral origin at home and guided onto its life path, that child will

become a person with an inexhaustible source of moral power, just like a continuous running river with its inexhaustible source of water. If each family produces only a few drops, then they may constitute such a source and preserve it. A culture made of like families will generate hope and renew community. In this regard, it is indeed time for Confucian heritage cultures (CHCs) to reflect deeply about why they have been trying to shed off this learning model, especially in light of perplexing consequences. I conclude by exploring how this learning outlook should and can be upheld while remaining open to learning from other cultures.

### **Research on the Confucian Learning Model**

Starting in the 1970's, international assessment of education has been showing consistently higher achievement among CHC students of Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan (e.g., OECD, 2012). Yet, their learning approach has been labeled as rote, lacking the celebrated Western independent thinking, self-expression, and creativity. Similarly, the corresponding childrearing approach of parents and teachers has also been criticized as authoritarian, adult-centered, stifling children's curiosity and exploration. CHCs have been self-critical, trying to westernize their learning, for over a century. In this ethos, the above striking educational achievement was mostly ignored by education reformers in CHCs. Yet, anyone with some sanity must ask: how can this be? How can their poor childrearing and educational practices produce any meaningful learning among children, let alone top international achievement consistently?

To address this jarring discrepancy, researchers in Hong Kong (Watkins & Biggs, 1996) dubbed the phenomenon as the 'paradox of the Chinese learner.' They called into question both the presumed validity of the Western learning approach as the only way to learn and to educate

anywhere, and the habitual, incessant but undifferentiated condemnation directed at learning across CHCs.

*Research on the Chinese and European American Culture-Level Learning Models*

According to anthropological insight (D'Andrade, 1995), human learning behavior is not random but guided by their beliefs, which are informed by their cultural learning models.

Building on the available research in CHCs (e.g., Holloway, 1988; Lewis, 1995), I conducted two studies to map the Chinese and European American (EA) learning models comprehensively: (1) their respective lexicons on learning concepts and relationships (2) profiles of their ideal learners.

A culture's learning lexicon encodes the meanings people attach to learning and can be analyzed and compared with that of a different culture. Large differences indicate different cultural emphases on learning. For Study 1, I (Li, 2003) collected, through a rigorous procedure in cognitive science (Rosch, 1975), 203 English and 225 Chinese core terms referring to learning. EA and Chinese (in China) college students sorted their respective terms into groups based on similarity in meaning. Analysis produced two conceptual maps, taken as the two cultures' learning models. As I have detailed elsewhere, despite the complexity of each model's ideas, the actual meanings of the two models differ so markedly that they hardly overlap.

To summarize, the EA map has terms concentrated on two sets of concepts: (1) the learning process and (2) individuals' characteristics. The first set contains concepts detailing active learning, different kinds of mental processes, inquiry, and communication. The second set elaborates on the learner's cognitive skills, motivation, open-mind and creativity, and different kinds of intelligence.

Quite differently, the Chinese map shows three basic sets of concepts: (1) a heart and mind for learning, (2) purpose of learning, and (3) achievement standards. Within the first, the weight falls on the learning virtues of self-exertion, lifelong dedication, diligence, endurance of hardship, steadfast perseverance, concentration, and humility. The second set reveals three purposes of learning: learning for its own sake, practical reward (e.g., status), and contribution to society. The third set displays four related notions of achieving breadth and depth of knowledge, extraordinary abilities (e.g., writing talent), the unity of knowledge and moral character, and originality.

Study 2 was conducted to substantiate these linguistically derived maps. Thus, I collected written descriptions of real images of learners by each culture's college students about the nature of knowledge/learning purposes, moral relevance, the process, and affective responses to good versus poor learning. Analysis yielded two profiles of the two cultures' learning models (Li, 2002).

The two studies jointly provided fuller learning models of the two cultures. Taken together, the EA model emphasizes cultivating the mind to understand the world, developing personal ability/skills/goals as learning purposes. For the process, learners ideally seek active involvement, think well, inquire into the world, and communicate effectively. The standards of achievement include understanding the essentials of a given field, personal expertise/creativity, and being the best one can be. Learners are also encouraged to express curiosity/interest, enjoy learning intrinsically, and challenge existing knowledge/authorities. When learning well, learners typically feel pride in their achievement. However, when not learning well, learners tend to feel boredom, frustration, and low self-esteem. Because mind and related processes are prioritized, I have referred this model as "mind-oriented," reflecting the long-standing Western intellectual

tradition. Recent research (van Egmond, 2011) on Europeans confirmed this Western learning model.

The Chinese model emphasizes the fundamental goal of moral/social self-perfection as promoted by Confucianism. While stressing mastery of learning for oneself, contribution to society is also highly valued. For the process, a set of learning virtues of earnestness, self-exertion, diligence, endurance of hardship, perseverance, and concentration are essential to foster in children. Such learning aims at achieving the breadth and depth of knowledge, its application to real life, and the unity of knowledge and moral character. This model also strongly favors respect for teaching authorities. When achieving well, learners watch out for self-fullness but display humility in order to strive further (Li, 2012). However, humility and respect for the teaching authority do not mean weakness or low self-esteem, as may be construed in the West, but personal virtues (for self-examination and self-improvement). These virtues enjoy a high positive regard in CHCs. In poor learning, learners feel not only sadness but also self-reproach and shame/guilt, particularly for letting down their family and teachers. Because the overall stress is on learning virtues, I have referred to this model as “virtue-oriented.”

These cultural learning models do not belong to any specific individual of either culture but to the respective cultures collectively. These models came about through their historical development and continue to evolve. At any moment, though, these models serve as repertoires of meanings from which individuals appropriate and reconstruct in order to develop their own individual learning beliefs. Hence, individual-level beliefs within a culture are conceptualized as reflecting core components of their culture-level model (D’Andrade, 1995; Shweder, 2011).

*Research on Children’s Individual-Level Learning Beliefs*

Do children hold culturally informed learning beliefs? If so, how young and how specifically? To address these developmental questions, I conducted two further studies: examining (1) children's ideas and feelings about learning and (2) parental socialization.

Assuming that parents start guiding their children early on, children should be able to reveal their developing beliefs. Preschool is a critical period where children actively construct their beliefs. Thus, my next study targeted Chinese and EA preschool children (Li, 2004, Li & Wang, 2004). We elicited their thoughts and feelings about learning with story beginnings about routine learning scenarios by asking children to complete each and to respond to further probes.

Data analysis showed EA children mentioning more mental activities, intellectual benefits, creativity, and positive affect for self. They also expressed more negative attitudes toward achieving peers although recognizing happy feelings by the protagonist, the teacher, and parents. In contrast, Chinese children emphasized more learning virtues, seriousness of learning, social benefits to self (e.g., respected by others) and to others (e.g., helping others), desire to emulate high achievers, and compliance with parental expectations. These children expressed far less negativity toward high achievers. Nevertheless, they voiced more concern with arrogance associated with high achievers. In each older age, these patterns became more consistent. Clearly, children's own learning beliefs reflect some core elements of their cultural learning models.

#### *Research on Parental Socialization*

Children do not develop their learning beliefs by themselves but under the socialization of the social world. Their parents play an essential role in this process (Bornstein, 2006). To examine parental socialization, my team (Li, Fung, Bakeman, Rae, & Wei, 2014) used simulated mother-child conversations (MCCs) to record mothers talking to their children about learning. Mother-child talk constitutes the bulk of interactions that underlie parental socialization effort



and child responses. We recorded 218 EA and Taiwanese (a typical CHC) MCCs with children aged 6-10 about a good versus a poor learning attitude/behavior. All recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

We did not find any cultural differences in the basic communicative elements such as topics (i.e., academic vs. non-academic), partners' turns, amount of talk, and MCC durations. We concluded that these factors did not explain the observed differences in MCCs (Li et al., 2014). We further tracked the sequences of the dyadic turns on four themes: (1) mental activities (e.g., reading), (2) positive affect (e.g., curiosity), (3) negative affect (e.g., boredom), and (4) learning virtues (e.g., persistence). We found large cultural differences. EA mothers talked much more about mental activities and positive affect, but Taiwanese mothers talked more about learning virtues and negative affect. Children echoed these maternal trends. Our sequential analysis also confirmed these patterns. Finally, we conducted discourse analysis of detailed MCCs (Li & Fung, 2014) and found again EA mothers elaborating on mental talk more (e.g., analyzing math steps). Likewise, we also identified Taiwanese mothers' much greater focus on virtue talk (e.g., helping the child recall how she persisted through learning).

These findings compelled us to conclude that children in these two types of cultures develop their learning beliefs under parental socialization effort. Such parental effort is guided by their respective cultural learning models.

### **Vitality of the Confucian Learning Model**

Based on available research, the Confucian learning model appears to enjoy lasting vitality. Cultural reform, that is, an attempt to revise cultural values and deep-seated practice (way of life) is too often a declaration made by politicians, social engineers, educators, even

parents as if such reform were a matter of sheer will by bold thinking and radical acts.

Apparently, Confucian learning tradition has been subject to this type of belief and action. Yet, this tradition seems to resurrect no matter what kind of assault has been directed at it. This very fact compels us to think why neither dashing zeal nor cool-headed effort seems effectual.

I would argue that the Confucian learning values have never been eradicated (although they might have become an undercurrent), rendering reforms futile. The main reason is that these values are not abstract notions codified in ancient texts on the forgotten shelves of the library, but what anthropologists regard as daily lived experiences. The real enduring power lies in the fact that these values have penetrated into families deeply and holistically. As in all cultures, most of what people do to express their values is often the second nature to them without their explicit awareness. This taken-for-granted nature makes parents the most willing and effective transmitters of their cultural values (Shweder, 2011). So long as the family is not legislated and censored for their daily routine, it is left alone to operate based on the basic principles of Confucianism. Then, there is little chance that any external force can break the system.

Although the CHC family system is much more complex, it suffices to highlight the most important moral foundation underlying Confucian learning in order to provide support for the above argument. As discussed widely, the essential moral obligation that commands commitment by both parents and children is filial piety (Yeh, 2005). Unlike the cliché though, CHC families are not just authoritarian dictators who demand their children's blind obedience, but filial piety as a childrearing model rests on two basic, mutually constitutive, obligations: (1) parents' total commitment to children's welfare, and (2) children's reciprocal commitment to their parents.

At the core of children's welfare is their learning/cultivation to become a full human being (做人). This conception of learning is not limited to technical skills, but more importantly toward becoming the most sincere, genuine, and humane person one can be (Tu, 1979). This learning purpose was initially articulated by Confucius and then solidified by his later followers. Confucius' idea about the purposes of human life stems from the very observation that all human flourishing depends on others' support. A human infant cannot possibly survive without the caregiver's care, and the child does not develop apart from his or her social world. Therefore, human flourishing is not conceptualized primarily as an 'individual' process inside the skin, but deeply rooted in the web of social relationships. A given child is not just Tom, with individual unique qualities, who receives love and care from others, but also and more importantly a son, a brother, a grandson, and a cousin (later assuming other social roles). By putting him in the web of significant relationships, Tom's life is defined and thereafter unfolds in inextricable interactions with his social world (Rosemont, 1992). Parental obligation is thus anchored in guiding children in learning about and living the various roles that come with moral and virtuous sensibilities.

In addition, this learning tradition has merged with academic learning since the introduction of formal schooling. Parental obligation naturally extends to school learning (Li, 2012; Zhou & Kim, 2006). In this family system, how well parents fulfill their obligation is primarily gauged by how well their children learn in both ways (socially/morally and academically). Parents, in turn, are highly motivated to guide and discipline their children. Such daily effort to nurture children in learning is known as *parental sacrifice*, a well-documented parental sense of duty (Cheah & Li, 2009).

The CHC family system also requires children's reciprocal response. From developmental research, we know that what caregivers do is of utmost importance, but the basic care for children does not differ significantly across cultures. What distinguishes the family in CHCs is how children are taught to *respond* to and to honor their social support system. From early on, children learn that the tremendous dedication and sacrifice their parents and extended kin make on their behalf shall not be taken for granted. Instead, they are guided to gain a deep sense of gratitude toward their caregivers (Li, Holloway, Bempechat, & Loh, 2008). Children are cultivated to understand that they are the beneficiaries of others' nurturance first; but as they reach maturity, they shall become the benefactors who nurture their young but at the same time return love and care to those who enabled their flourishing in the first place (e.g., parents. Rosemont, 1992). In expressing their filial piety, children must accomplish what their parents' sacrifice intends to serve—their progress in learning, including academic achievement. This dual obligatory principle is morally commanding and is understood by both parents and children (increasingly) as unquestionable. In CHCs, upholding and practicing this principle is reason for respect from society. Research confirms that this basic learning model continues to operate in CHC families across the world (Li et al., 2008; Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

To my mind, this basic family system is why the Confucian learning model tends to bounce back after being hacked down each time. Moreover, there are demonstrably strong reasons why the idea of honoring one's nurturers with like commitment and why learning how to maintain one's fundamental social relationships are adaptive values for all human flourishing. The bottom line is that a child who receives unconditional love and support--not just from his or her parents, but the entire family--is likely to develop better than a child who lacks such support

(and this applies to any culture's children). But it makes sense to teach the child to appreciate the nurture he/she receives so that he/she comes to *own*, the essential meaning of Confucian learning, the moral thought and makes his/her commitment willingly and gladly. This development enables grown-up children to nurture the next generation but at same time support their aging parents. Reciprocity conceived as such has indeed been serving families in CHCs well. Hence, it makes no sense for CHCs to abandon the system even if they could.

Finally, this family system does much good for community and society as a whole. Well nurtured children are likely to grow up with morals and virtues that promote better living and stability in society as anywhere else. But in Confucian persuasion, personal self-cultivation does not cease at the family. Those who achieve the learning milestones in the family are admired and entrusted to serve the community and beyond. Therefore, the Confucian learning model begins at home but ends, ideally, in larger human spheres (Li, 2012). These cultural values are expansive and transcendental beyond the local particularities, and as such tend to be promoted as a common human good. To use Mencius' metaphor, if the source of water stems from a sound origin, then its power is inexhaustible. If each family produces only a few drops of such water (moral power), then the source will never dry up. A culture made of like families generates hope and renews community. History, particularly recent history, is replete with setbacks Confucian learning values have faced. The triumphant durability of these values bears testimony to their vitality.

### **Facing the Century-Long Experiment and its Perplexity**

The effort to shed off the Confucian way of learning has been going on for nearly two centuries. Despite signs of futility, the zeal has not lessened. Due to the recent economic growth of CHCs, particularly China, there is a surging trend in this direction. Increased affordability for

*Jin Li*

a good Western education aside, we hear wide-spread, formulaic remarks made by both common people and scholars within CHCs, condemning the Confucian learning tradition. “Yes, our students are good at taking tests, but we still lack Einstein and Steve Jobs type of creativity.” However, it is no more sufficient to overturn CHC educational heritage than would be its obverse: overturn Western education because that culture has produced no Confucius or Lao Tze.

*Stunted Development of Asian Immigrant Children*

CHC generations after generations have been seeking what I call the “educational exodus from East to West.” These seekers were initially told by their governments as well as self-critical intellectuals that their own educational traditions were outdated and unfit to the modern world and that their salvation was to get the better education from the West. They aim for creativity, independent/critical thinking, and self-expression that CHCs lack (Yue, 2009). Now many more are joining the exodus, going west for education (IIE, 2014). Even more disturbing is the fact that the age of such education emigrants is becoming younger and younger (Zhou, 2009). Some parents and teachers believe that they ought to send their preschool children to the West for better education (by the count of hands at a lecture I gave to a large Chinese audience in 2012).

Yet, very little research exists to validate this widely held premise. We have reasons to believe that the first adult generation education seekers may have benefitted from their courageous endeavors because of some successful examples (e.g., the Nobel Laureates). However, now we must return to our calm center and ask a very basic question: Are their children more creative, more critical-thinking, and more self-expressive than their counterparts who have never left East Asia? Unfortunately, the answer to this question, based on emerging evidence, is likely no. Thus, there may be a hitherto unseen shadow on this long and massive human education exodus. If so, then what is the nature of this shadow? Is there a developmental

risk to exposing young children to two or more very different cultures' socializations simultaneously but prematurely?

Recent research on non-European heritage immigrant children in the U.S. shows that the 1<sup>st</sup>-generation immigrants fare relatively well. But their later generations do not. In fact, a downward trend has been observed (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2011; Portes, 1999). More current data on CHC immigrants also show the same pattern. For example, as Chinese families live longer in the US, they experience more problems such as children's social and emotional distancing from parents, lack of communication, parent-child conflict, and internalized psychological problems (Qin, 2006; Wu & Chao, 2011). Our recent longitudinal data also documents worse oral expression among US-born Chinese children relative to their EA peers (Li, Yamamoto, Luo, Batchelor, & Bresnahan, 2010).

These emerging findings are perplexing; they certainly counter the long held belief that CHC children are better off living and learning in the West. It is even stranger to consider the fact that CHC immigrants live in a culture that heavily emphasizes verbal self-expression. Yet, their poor oral expression does not cohere with this Western value. It is puzzling that living/being educated in the expressive West takes a toll on their verbal expression. Skeptics might cite the well documented verbal reticence in CHCs as the cause of the observed trend. Admittedly, this is a legitimate counterargument. To entertain this possibility, we compared verbal expression with the same kind of data from preschoolers in China. Analysis showed even more surprising but confirming results. The latter group's oral expression actually increased, not decreased, in each older age group, resembling the growth trajectory (if not the magnitude) of their EA peers! Hence, if children in China, where oral expression is indeed devalued (Li, 2012),

*Jin Li*

become more self-expressive, then something in CHC immigrants' intellectual development has gone awry.

*Plausible Explanations of the Paradox*

Virtually no research exists to answer the why-question. However, some plausible causes might be considered. We might ask further what happens when children no longer have the full exposure to the cultural learning model that is native to them? What happens when they are exposed to another very different cultural model while continuing to struggle with their native model? What if the two learning models clash, yet children are unable to process conflicting values and practices? For a long time, we have been told that exposing children only to their native Confucian learning model is a liability that puts them at a developmental disadvantage. Is this true?

Here I discuss three initial but related ideas that may be explored to explain the paradoxical development. First, the well-established research on human infant attachment to their caregivers informs us that the relationship between the caregiver and her child is of utmost importance for the child's psychological health (Bowlby, 1969). With this relationship in place, children acquire the basic developmental milestones of language, cognition, and socioemotional competence. However, the development of this elemental relationship takes place not in a vacuum but in their *specific cultural* context. The particular care of the caregiver is based on what she knows deeply (often implicitly) from her culture, learned from the previous generation in her own upbringing. If very young children who are still in the process of forming the bond with their caregiver but have not yet acquired the basics of development are forced to learn a different culture's language, cognition, and socioemotional knowledge, then these children's normal course of development might be interrupted and compromised. If so, then what is the



nature of such compromise (i.e., either distorted or underdeveloped)? This compromise may shed, hitherto not understood, light on the indispensable role culture plays in the architectural layout of young minds and hearts. As far as I know, there is very little research on this premature and interruptive exposure to multiple cultures and the associated consequences.

Second, there is no scientific foundation for our confidence that young children have the capacity to process two or more sets of linguistic and cultural information daily. Research shows that children display language delay when they are acquiring two languages at the same time (e.g., Core, Hoff, Rumiche, & Señor, 2013). This alone ought to give us pauses about the integrity of young children's linguistic and cognitive capacity. If adding even one language causes children's linguistic development to delay, then adding another language plus simultaneously adding another culture's norm must delay them further. The question is: Can they ever catch up? Only empirical research can answer this question.

Third, we also know from research that young children require a stable, predictable, and dependable environment to grow (Lightfoot, Cole, & Cole, 2013). Yet, subjecting them to an environment that is unstable, unpredictable, and undependable may end up stressing their fragile cognitive and socioemotional system. EA preschools that CHC immigrant children attend are such an environment because much of their daily routine is different, which is the breeding ground for cultural discord. As children learn the mainstream culture's way, they may distance themselves from their home culture's way with confusion about their identity and ambivalence toward their families. A large body of research (as cited before) has documented the cognitive, social, and emotional cost in immigrant children. Viewed from this perspective, maybe the real liability is to rob children off the full exposure to their native culture; perhaps their mother tongue and native cultural norms are meant for them to acquire before learning another language and another

cultural norm. The true luxury in this bewildering globalized world is not abroad but right here at home in the mother's lap.

### **Inherit Confucian Learning and also Learn Well From Other Cultures**

If I had to pose only one education question for East Asians in the new millennium, it would be whether they can both inherit their ancestral learning model and at the same time learn well from other cultures. My response is threefold: (1) futility and absurdity of trying to eradicate one's core cultural values, (2) desirability to learn other cultures' values, (3) how best to learn if (2) can be clarified.

First, based on anthropological and psychological research, it is both impossible and absurd to eradicate one's core cultural heritage. One may reject some noncore elements of one's own culture (e.g., shaking hands instead of bowing as a greeting gesture). But one does not and should not reject a core value such as filial piety. One's deep cultural heritage is called core because one starts to acquire it early on. It is also an inherent part of oneself shared not only by one's family but by one's community and larger culture. Before gaining sufficient capacity to even realize this all-around enculturation, the child has already developed culturally shaped beliefs, thoughts, and relationships. By the time one realizes this, it is either that she identifies with and embraces her native culture, or it is too late to jettison her cultural imprint (Shweder, 2011). Therefore, I would say that the urge to reform core cultural values was and still is misguided by people uninformed about anthropological and psychological research, causing more tragedy than true human progress.

That said, it is nevertheless desirable to learn from other cultures. It is a fact that individual human beings learn from any source simply because they have the capacity to do so

and they desire better lives, whether or not they are told to learn or not to learn from another culture. With the advent of technology, learning from other cultures now is but a norm. However, it is a different matter for an entire culture to dash to learn from another culture either by legislation or by authoritarian decision making while at the same time denouncing their own cultural heritage. This type of learning can be characterized as naïve if not schizophrenic. At the turn of the 20th century, country after country in CHCs issued policies to condemn/abandon their own way of learning in favor of Western learning. This experiment has caused an untold amount of individual suffering, family destruction, and societal turmoil (Li, 2012).

Undoubtedly, the West--and any other culture--has strengths that CHCs lack (but the reverse is also true). The reformers were not wrong in recognizing the need to learn from the West, given the dire political, economic, social, and military reality then. Clearly, CHCs have learned much from the West, particularly democracy and science, two areas identified as severely lacking in CHCs. We can also confidently add industrialization and commerce, law, and importation of the Western education system to this list of successful learning.

However, this accomplishment should not mask the central theme of this article: individual development in the family based on their own cultural values that CHC families rely upon in raising their children. Furthermore, CHC schools operate similarly and in tandem with families (Li, 2012). Together they bring up children who learn to cultivate themselves first, honor their families, fulfill their filial duties, acquiring many virtues that enable them to move forward with their lives. They are also able to form lasting bonds with friends and perhaps even serve their communities later. Learning from any other culture that leads them into more knowledge of the world and better skills for work is desirable. But if such learning comes at the cost of their primary development in the family, then I would argue that such learning is

undesirable. Unfortunately, many CHC children in the West have been found to experience exactly this grave consequence (Qin, 2006; Wu & Chao, 2011). Within CHCs, there are also alarming signs of prematurely severed mother-child bonds on a massive scale in the name of better economic gain (e.g., China's over 60 million so-called left-behind children, ACWF, 2014).

If desirability of learning from other cultures is carefully analyzed and determined, then how best to engage in such learning, the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of my response, becomes essential. I would argue that one's core cultural heritage shall never be comprised no matter what one learns and from where. This very idea needs to be on high alert and taught to children, families, and educators themselves. Schools might make this foundational preempt a part of their school mission and curriculum. There are successful groups who realize that an effective way of protecting their children is to protect their core cultural and ethnic heritage (e.g., African American's racial socialization). CHCs would benefit from studying and emulating such groups.

There is no need to pit one culture's learning model against another, including one's own. Nor should we place different cultural learning models in a hierarchy, admiring the top placement and scorning the bottom one. Different cultures have been evolving in different habitats and have found their own ways of adapting to changing environment. A better way to conceptualize diversity of learning models is to regard them as co-existing, needing protection and respect from each other.

Since it has not been eradicated after two centuries' effort, the Confucian learning model is probably here to stay. Rather than denouncing it again and again to no avail, it is time for CHCs to come to terms with it. It cannot be eliminated because it is part of most CHC families therefore part of most people's core self. From its moral and virtuous strength stems an

*Jin Li*

inexhaustible source of cultural vitality. One's own heritage is the real foundation for anyone from any culture to grow, to learn, and to achieve in the world.

## References

- ACWF (All-China Women's Federation. (2014). Retrieved June 15, 2014 from <http://www.womenofchina.cn/servlet/Node?node=82&community=womenofchina&luce=8&q=Left-behind+children>
- Bornstein, M. H. (2006). Parenting science and practice. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Series Eds.) & I. E. Sigel & K. A. Renninger (Vol. Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 4. Child psychology in practice* (6th ed., pp. 893–949). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, Vol. 1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cheah, C. S. L., & Li, J. (2009). Parenting of young immigrant Chinese children: Challenges facing their social emotional and intellectual development. In E. L. Grigorenko & R. Takanishi (Eds.), *Immigration, diversity, and education* (pp. 225-241). New York: Routledge.
- Core, C., Hoff, E., Rumiche, R., & Señor, M. (2013). Total and conceptual vocabulary in Spanish–English bilinguals from 22 to 30 months: Implications for assessment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 56*, 1637-1649.
- D'Andrade, R. G. (1995). *The development of cognitive anthropology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Garcia Coll, C. T., & Marks, A. K. (Eds.). (2011). *The immigrant paradox in children and adolescents: Is becoming American a developmental risk?* Washington, DC: APA Press.
- Harris, P. L. (2012). *Trusting what you're told: How children learn from others*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

- Holloway, S. D. (1988). Concepts of ability and effort in Japan and the US. *Review of Educational Research, 58*, 327-345.
- IIE (Institution of International Education). (2014). Retrieved April 1, 2014 from <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors>
- Lewis, C. C. (1995). *Educating hearts and minds: Reflections on Japanese preschool and elementary education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Li, J. (2002). A cultural model of learning: Chinese “heart and mind for wanting to learn.” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 33*, 248–269.
- Li, J. (2003). U.S. and Chinese cultural beliefs about learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*, 258–267.
- Li, J. (2004). Learning as a task and a virtue: U.S. and Chinese preschoolers explain learning. *Developmental Psychology, 40*, 595–605.
- Li, J. (2012). *Cultural foundations of learning: East and West*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, J., & Fung, H. (in press). 由親子對談窺探關於學習信念的文化詮釋框架: 台灣與美國學童之比較 [Cultural interpretive frame for mother-child conversations about learning: Comparing European American and Taiwanese dyads. In F.-W. Liu (Ed.), *同理心、情感、與互為主體 [Empathy, affect, and intersubjectivity]*. Teipei, Taiwan: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica.
- Li, J., & Wang, Q. (2004). Perceptions of achievement and achieving peers in U.S. and Chinese kindergartners. *Social Development, 13*, 413–436.
- Li, J., Holloway, S. D., Bempechat, J., & Loh, E. (2008). Building and using a social network: Nurture for low-income Chinese American adolescents’ learning. In H. Yoshikawa & N. Way (Eds.), *Beyond families and schools: How broader social contexts shape the*

- adjustment of children and youth in immigrant families (pp. 7-25). *New Directions in Child and Adolescent Development Series*. R. W. Larson & L. A. Jensen (Series Eds.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Li, J., Yamamoto, Y., Luo, L., Batchelor, A., & Bresnahan, R. M. (2010). Why attend school? Chinese immigrant and European American preschooler's views and outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 5, 1-14. DOI: 10.1037/a0019926
- Li, J., Fung, H., Bakeman, R., Rae, K., & Wei, W.-C. (2013). How European American and Taiwanese mothers talk to their children about learning. *Child Development*, 84, 1-16.
- Lightfoot, C., Cole, M., & Cole, S. R. (2013) (7th ed.). *The Development of Children*, New York: Worth.
- Mencius. (1970). *Mencius* (D. C. Lao, Trans.). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). (2012). *PISA 2012 results: What students know and can do: Student performance in mathematics, reading and science, Vol 1*. Paris: OECD.
- Parmar, P., Harkness, S., & Super, C. M. (2004). Asian and Euro-American parents' ethnotheories of play and learning: Effects on preschool children's home routines and school behaviour. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 28(2), 97-104.
- Portes, P. R. (1999). Social and psychological factors in the academic achievement of children of immigrants: A cultural history puzzle. *American-Educational Research Journal*, 36(3), 489-507.
- Qin, D. B.-L. (2006). "Our child doesn't talk to us anymore": Alienation in immigrant Chinese families. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 37(2), 162-179.



- Rosch, E. (1975). Cognitive representations of semantic categories. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 104, 192-233.
- Rosemont, Jr. H. (1992). Rights-bearing individuals and role-bearing persons. In M. I. Bockover (Ed.), *Rules, rituals, and responsibility: Essays dedicated to Herbert Fingarette* (pp. 71–101). La Salle, IL: Open Court.
- Shweder, R. A. (2011). Commentary: Ontogenetic cultural psychology. In L. A. Jensen (Ed.), *Bridging cultural and developmental psychology: New syntheses in theory, research and policy* (pp. 303-310). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tu, W. M. (1979). *Humanity and self-cultivation: Essays in Confucian thought*. Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press.
- van Egmond, M., C. (2011). *Mind and virtue: A cross-cultural analysis of beliefs about learning*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Jacobs University, Germany.
- Watkins, D. A., & Biggs, J. B. (Eds.). (1996). *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological, and contextual influences*. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre.
- Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead, England: McGraw Hill.
- Wu, C., & Chao, R. K. (2011). Intergenerational cultural dissonance in parent and adolescent relationships among Chinese and European Americans. *Developmental Psychology*, 47, 493–508. doi:10.1037/a0021063
- Yeh, K. H. (2005). Psychology and behavior of filial piety. In K. S. Yang, K. K. Hwang, & C. F. Yang (Eds.), *華人本土心理學, 上冊* [*Chinese indigenous psychology, Vol. 1*] (pp. 293-330). Taipei, Taiwan: Yuan Liu Press.

*Jin Li*

Zhou, M. (2009). Conflict, coping, and reconciliation: Intergenerational relations in Chinese immigrant families. In N. Foner (Ed.), *Across generations: Immigrant families in America* (pp. 21-46). New York: New York University Press.

Zhou, M., & Kim, S. S. (2006). Community forces, social capital, and educational achievement: The case of supplementary education in the Chinese and Korean immigrant communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76, 1-29.