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Cheng, Yue. (2010) 潜能发展心理学及潜能教育:
理论思考及实验实践研究 [*Developmental Psychology, Latent
Abilities and Education: Theoretical Reflections, Empirical
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Reviewed by Caven S. Mcloughlin
Kent State University
University of Johannesburg
Central China Normal University, Wuhan

Too few Western researchers in education and psychology have a sufficient language facility to be able to recognize the profound parallels in the development of an understanding of the psyche through comparing selected readings in the Chinese educational literature to those of the Western corpus. This review introduces an important, contemporary analysis of a Chinese perspective on developmental and psychological development of children and their aptitudes; one that is consistent with Confucian foundations while relevant to contemporary China.

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Inevitably, any modern publication in child developmental psychology emanating from China must reflect and embed recent economic surges evident in changes within Chinese society over the past 30-years.

Modern China is served by a rich and vibrant civil society with well-codified social relationships, governed by culturally-determined personal forces (such as fealty to the elderly) and an inexorable march towards a decentralization of government. China has adopted with vigor most of the forces that in the West lead to its economic ascendancy by the 20th century: The 'scientific revolution' and the development and manufacture of products based on scientific findings; modern medicine; economic competition (called the "market economy" in the People's Republic of China; PRC); and a consumer-oriented society newly committed to the ardent acquisition of goods and services, all supported by a solid work ethic.

While economic advances are not the only metric by which change can be measured in the PRC, according to the International Monetary Fund, China's GDP could overtake that of the United States in just four years. Until the dawn of the 21st century the West dominated the world's knowledge-generation through the implementation of the scientific method. Of late, that tide has turned. Arguably, and by any objective index, China has now taken the lead in the development of new knowledge, particularly within the 'hard' and applied-sciences. This same trend is less evident in education and psychology; but, some gems are emerging and this review highlights one of them.

The author, Yue Cheng, a physician/doctoral-level child psychologist with impeccable academic credentials, has engaged in longitudinal research for 25 years. His methodology, founded on fundamentals readily susceptible to scrutiny using Western-style science, attempts an explanation of the entire spectrum of the human condition. Yet, consistent with current priorities in the newly-emergent PRC his explanations articulate most convincingly in the delivery of high-quality preschool and kindergarten curriculum and in innovative teaching methods for able-to-gifted youngsters. He writes, "only by teaching students according to their aptitudes and fostering strengths and circumventing weaknesses" can education

cultivate individualized talents and be accepted by the public (p. 1).

This pair of volumes addresses, in turn, theory and practice. The first engages in theoretical reflections and provides empirical research that reports on the contribution of PRC-derived developmental-psychological research to an understanding of latent abilities. Contributions rest on findings from Western as well as Asian research paradigms, and incorporate contemporary analyses from modern genetics, brain science and standard psychological experiments. The references are contemporary, the analyses of research designs are elegant, and the implications are persuasive. Naturally, the context of the research priorities is entirely Chinese, and the foci being investigated reflect Confucian ideals—albeit with a modern application. In five multi-section chapters the author dissects Western research, provides a Chinese overlay, and demonstrates implications for practice ~ some universal and some exclusively Chinese.

Volume Two begins by addressing inconsistencies between *what is practiced* in educational settings and the *results of modern empirical investigations*, particularly those relating to the development of children's potential. Contradictions are reconciled by accepting evidenced-sourced findings and discarding armchair speculation. The practical foci are all directed to promoting accelerated learning through strengths-based instruction (although it is also egalitarian, as disclosed by the title of Volume 2, Chapter 3; 'Education should be Universal, Fair and Comprehensive to Achieve Comprehensive Development for All Children').

There is evidence in the 'theory' text of the efficacy of the practices described in the 'implementation' text. The utility of the approach described in these two volumes is practically demonstrated in model preschools and kindergartens in eleven provinces of the PRC in 100+ settings. 'On-the-ground', this reviewer has visited 9 of the 114 sites in different regions of the PRC where this curriculum is being implemented and can attest that, at least in terms of face-validity, the system "delivers."

The author's 'Golden Cradle Potential Development Kindergartens' espouse a merger of empirically-sourced

educational guidelines consistent with a Confucian ethic. The cultural-relevance of the practices is extant, the educational-system is consistent with Chinese society's mores, the parents of students appear satisfied, and the data convincingly show that the young candidates following the theory-to-practice model are accelerated compared to their peers. And, unlike many such school settings (whether in the East or the West) the educational procedures practiced in classrooms are solidly founded on a well-articulated theoretical foundation. A step-by-step recipe for the practice elements of the curriculum is disclosed in an Appendix.

Modern education and psychological thinking and research from China deserve a broader audience in the West. Few policy-makers, academicians and practitioners are monitoring the national experiment that has transformed China over just a few decades. Education is an important engine for many of those changes. The twin volumes reviewed here constitute a fine window for Western researchers curious to understand how and why the World's most populous nation is dramatically modifying its approach to the delivery of educational services ~ based on indigenous research-generation and innovation that remains largely unknown to Western academics and educators.

About the Reviewer

Caven Mcloughlin serves as the Editor of *School Psychology International Journal* and serves on the faculty of several universities. His own travels to the PRC for research and teaching began in the mid-1980s and continue today.

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Editors

David J. Blacker

blacker@edrev.info

Gustavo Fischman

fischman@edrev.info

Melissa Cast-Brede

cast-brede@edrev.info

Gene V Glass

glass@edrev.info

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