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LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONFUCIAN HERITAGE CULTURE IDENTITY IN MALAYSIAN CHINESE PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The words Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) may bring to mind Confucianism. The words may also point to those of Chinese origin. Yes, although CHC evolved from Confucianism, yet it does not mean that it is the original Confucianism. CHC has evolved. Past literature has CHC related studies done mainly in the West and documents the achievements of CHC students (particularly Asian students). They have persistently performed well in international comparative studies of mathematics and science achievement. Nevertheless, these studies cannot be generalised, because globalisation and rapid social change has influenced and shaped the Chinese community in CHC countries, one of which is Malaysia. The present paper presents a literature review of CHC based on a larger study in search of a CHC identity among Malaysian Chinese pre-university students. The literature helped to

uncover the underlying characteristics, namely respect, education and perseverance which were then incorporated within appropriate items in a survey instrument in the larger study to investigate CHC among a selected group of students. These underlying characteristics points towards a CHC identity inherent in these students. This paper will not discuss the instrument or the findings of the larger study.

Keywords

Confucianism, Confucian Heritage Culture, Chemistry Education, Chinese Values

1. Introduction

The achievements of Confucian heritage culture (CHC) students, and particularly Asian students, are well documented. They have persistently performed well in recent international comparative studies of mathematics and science achievement. The top 10 performers in Mathematics and Science are from Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, Macau, Vietnam, Hong Kong, China, and Korea (Dave & Takuya, 2019; Davie, 2017). These countries have CHC societies strongly influenced and shaped by the ideologies, practices, moral and cultural influences of Confucianism (Tu, 1996). CHC is found not only in China but also in other parts of the world such as Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and including Chinese communities in Malaysia.

However, past literature shows CHC related studies done mainly in the West and therefore not completely being able to explain this phenomenon in relation to Chinese students' learning. Moreover, most of the past research on CHC have been conducted in other part of Asian countries, research on Chinese students from Southeast Asia, particularly from Malaysia is still lacking. There have been relatively even lesser studies investigating on Malaysian Chinese students.

Although the CHC has evolved from Confucianism, it does not mean that CHC will be in the original form of Confucianism. Globalisation and rapid social change have influenced and shaped the Chinese community in CHC countries. Therefore, the present paper shall capture whatever CHC characteristics of the selected Malaysian Chinese students who participated in a study in search of a CHC identity in chemistry education. This paper discusses the underlying characteristics of the Malaysian Chinese pre-university students identified in the study, namely respect, education, and perseverance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Respect

As mentioned in the Chapter 14 of Analects,

14.43 原壤夷俟。子曰：‘幼而不孫弟，长而无述焉，老而不死，是为贼。’以仗叩其胫。

“Respect is an essential part of the teaching of Confucianism. The above quote has mentioned that one would not be able to contribute much to society if there is a lack of respect and modesty”.

Besides, respect has been linked highly in the Hofstede’s study, measured under the Power Distance Index. Power Distance Index is the degree of acceptance by the less powerful people on the unequal distribution of power. Malaysia being a high Power Distance Index, values respect highly. As mentioned in the Hofstede’s study (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), power distance difference among countries is rooted in the family, and such a situation will be reflected at school as one of the basic family values and behaviours carried forward from family into the school. At school, the status of teacher and student is maintained unequal. Respect for teachers and other elders in the school is considered a basic virtue. Students stand up and greet the teacher when the teacher enters the classroom. Students speak only when they are permitted (Hofstede, 2001). In the classroom, the teacher is regarded as the authority of knowledge. This phenomena of regarding teachers as the authority of knowledge could be due to the family taught virtue that children were told by their parents to be submissive to the requirements and teachings of teachers (Liu & Feng, 2015; Stork & Hartley, 2011). Consequently, teacher as the authority of knowledge has resulted in the hierarchical difference and inequality between the teachers and students in the Chinese society (Liu & Feng, 2015).

2.2 Education

物格而后知至；之至而后意诚；意诚而后心正；心正而后身修；身修而后家齐；家齐而后国治；国治而后天下平；自天子以至于庶人。

“Extending knowledge and investigating things to obtain knowledge and education; then to sincerity; to a right mind and heart; to the cultivation of the person; to the taking care of the family; governing of the people properly and peace for all will be achieved”.

The above quote mentioned in Book of Rites, by a Neo-Confucianism scholar named Zhu Xi, stresses the importance of education and self-cultivation in its teachings. CHC is continued to value highly in education (Liu & Feng, 2015; Marginson, 2011; Yuen, Park, Chen, & Cheng, 2017) due to

the examination heritage which plays a dominant role since the time of feudal dynasties (Wang, 2013). However, whether the competition in the examinations is due to the influence of Confucianism or modernisation of the education system is debatable (Clark & Gieve, 2006; O'Dwyer, 2016).

2.3 Perseverance

Inevitably, Zhuxi and other Confucians advocate education and self-cultivation, which can be achieved through perseverance (Rainey, 2010). Perseverance is very important to a Chinese student because it shows his ability to push himself to be a better person. In Confucianism, perseverance is an important virtue for one to succeed in life. A person needs perseverance to see through tasks undertaken, even under extreme circumstances, with lack of materials or support. Chinese students who have perseverance have the patience for delayed gratification as opposed to students who lack the perseverance and look for immediate gratification and quick results (Marambe, Vermunt, & Boshuizen, 2011; Yuen et al., 2017).

CHC learners have been found to use learning approaches that value achievement because of the overemphasised and competitive examination system. Chinese learners need to persevere to succeed in their examinations. In Chinese societies, parental influence grounded in Confucian teachings emphasise virtues of diligence, perseverance, self-reliance, and duty (Celli & Young, 2017; Yuen et al., 2017). As emphasised in Confucian tradition, the success or failure of education is not due to one's innate ability but one's effort, determination, perseverance, and patience, which are the determinants of educational achievements (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). There is a strong belief in Chinese society that everyone is educable and capable of attaining perfection. Although differences in intelligence and abilities may be varied, "no distinctions should be made in dispensing education" (you jiaowu lei 有教无类). Hence, CHC learners when faced with academic problems, begin to solve the problem through great perseverance (Helmke & Tuyet, 1999).

Japanese society is also considered as a CHC society, which adopts the moulding-through-repetition and the sticky-probe approach in their educational practice. These two approaches assume the learner to be compliant, hardworking, persistent, and patient (Hess & Azuma, 1991). In their study, Hess and Azuma found a correlation between persistence and achievement among Japanese children but not American children.

Perseverance is one of the Confucian values used in the Chinese Value Survey related to Long Term Orientation (LTO) (Hofstede, 2001). LTO is the degree of fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards. Malaysia, Singapore and China scored of 41, 72 and 87 respectively, when the mean

score was 57. In other words, Malaysia, which had a collective score from the different ethnic groups including Malay, Chinese, Indians and others, was the lowest LTO indicating Short Term Orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010). Singapore and China, with a Chinese majority population, have long-term orientation (Hofstede et al., 2010). Long-term orientation is regarded as having perseverance with sustained efforts toward slow results, having a sense of shame, and respect for circumstances among others (Helmke & Tuyet, 1999; Hofstede et al., 2010; Nguyen, 2008; Saravanamuthu, 2008).

3. Conclusion

Reviews of the literature on the three underlying characteristics are essential in the search for the identity of the Malaysian CHC student. This paper described the literature review of three of the underlying characteristics, namely respect, education, and perseverance, which pointed the way to the inherent CHC among Malaysian Chinese pre-university students. The present review was then incorporated within appropriate items in a survey instrument in a larger study to investigate CHC among a selected group of students.

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