

What are the key differences between modern western and chinese education?



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Both the West and East have long histories of education, teaching and learning; the practices of which have been shaped by either side's culture and traditions over millennia. The rich and complex educational histories of both China and the West have long been kept somewhat separated.

However, recent history has seen some convergence of these different educational philosophies and beliefs, highlighting differences, as well as bringing change—notably in the Chinese system. This essay will discuss these key educational differences from a cultural and philosophical perspective, then analyse their effects of each on individuals and society.

The nature and aims of an educational system can reveal a lot about, taught content and teaching methodology. According to (Chen, 2018) Xueji, or 学记—China's earliest records of learning—outlines principles for Confucian education practices; this is referred to as learning 'dao' or 'the way'. The Xueji suggests that aim of education is to instil attitudes or ideas in humanity via the guidance of a teacher. The Western education stands somewhat in contrast to this idea. Western education has its roots in ancient Rome (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2015), and is based on heavily on the idea of rational thinking, rather than the passing of knowledge. The Western educational philosophy is less teacher centered like the East, and instead more active. As (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2015) explains, students are encouraged to share ideas, opinions, discuss and solve problems with peers (p. 3). Both educational philosophies have their merits, however they set out to achieve different objectives. The more teacher driven Eastern Philosophy operates with the Confucian school of thought that suggests gaining moral insight to oneself in the context of nature and the community is of the utmost

importance. Where the west strives for knowledge acquisition and the betterment of oneself.

According to (David, 2017) within the Eastern educational philosophy, often the person in the position of teaching or leading, is shown great respect by students (p. 24). As the knowledge is passed down from teachers, questioning the knowledge of, or suggesting that one's teacher may be wrong, can be seen as a sign of disrespect. From a western perspective however, not questioning or being involved in a discussion may result in the teacher believing the student is not engaged or is lacking understanding (David, 2017). This particular difference highlights the difference in the key aims of both philosophies.

Confucian thought as outlined in the Xueji text states that, students should learn through constantly practicing what they have learned through self-cultivation and social interaction (Chen, 2018); a style of learning and thought base for which differs significantly Western methodologies. The memorisation and reiteration of learnt information through self-study fits with the passive and non-participatory behaviour that is often observed in modern day East Asian and especially Chinese students (David, 2017). Aspects of these traditional methodologies have filtered through into China's modern education system, even after a number of major reforms, such as the introduction of the ' Four Modernizations' by Deng Xiaoping.

These particular round of reforms saw industry and technical skills became the focus higher education; differing from the early traditional philosophy of exploring virtues and moral insight as a major focus. This in turn had positive

implications for Chinese society in terms of living standards, economic growth and development (Chen M. , n. d). Also with these reforms came the re-introduction of *Gaokao* .—the university entrance exam. With the reintroduction of this exam, students from all over, regardless of background were given an educational opportunity based on test scores alone.

The Gaokao exam is often regarded as one of the world's most intimidating exams due to the extreme pressure candidates are under. The exam is “ a prerequisite for undergraduate university education, it is a chance of a life time for a decent career or meritocracy. And in this sense, its significance far exceeds education or schooling itself” (Ruiqing, 2013, p. 13). Because the result of this exam can essentially reroute the path of ones future, the pressure students are under in order to gain entrance into a prestigious university and then on to better living and working conditions in future, it is simply unmatched in the West (Chen J. , 2018).

According to (Yuan, 2019) New Zealand students “ have more opportunities to demonstrate their capacity and potential” because their exam results do not decide 100% of their future. This statement is thought provoking in terms of the number of Chinese students that may be missing out on reaching their full potential, entirely due to nature of the education and assessment system in place. Not only is it heart-breaking for the students who don't meet the requirements; the potential loss in productivity and creativity that Chinese society so desperately needs, may lie in those particular students who haven't had the chance to prove themselves. In order to prepare for this exam memorisation is essential. It is ingrained in Chinese high school culture to spend hours per day and undergo immense <https://assignbuster.com/what-are-the-key-differences-between-modern-western-and-chinese-education/>

stress, not only for the student but for the students family, as their child gears up for the exam (Ruiqing, 2013). As mentioned by (Paulo , 2019) “ if stress is around for a prolonged period of time this may result in the weakening of the immune system and later on cause high blood pressure, fatigue, and depression”. According to (Ruiqing, 2013) the claims that Paulo has made about health issues arising as a direct result of Gaokao are common place and one of the areas that are constantly under scrutiny.

The implications of Gaokao don't just stop after the exam is over. Because the education system is geared toward memorisation and passive leaning, students could see issues in later life with a lack of critical thinking and problem solving skills. The claim is “ that the prevailing construction of “ Chinese students” as uncritical, is to be explained by a deficient domestic education system”. (Lu, 2017, p. 11).

Discussion and debate may have been overlooked in the Chinese education process, thus, the manifestation of deeper meaning and real world application may not eventuate from learned materials (Lu, 2017). The discussion by (Fei, 2019) also alludes to the lack of critical thinking in the Chinese education system; “ in china, students study for the grade and result”. This shows that students motivation is set on studying for grades, rather than knowledge itself. Knowledge is essentially the essence of all education albeit West or East. It is clear that “ memorisation is a signature practice of Chinese teaching and learning, which is further taken to be a manifestation of traditional Chinese educational philosophy and methods” (Di, 2017, p. 443). This shows how deeply engrained this practice is and why it is becoming an issue for the Chinese economy and society.

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