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The East Asian educational system has garnered praise and attention for its scores in international rankings. This has led Western countries to question and re-evaluate its teaching methods to emulate this model in hopes of improving its test scores. While the U. S. outspends more money per student, the academic success of East Asian students may attribute their academic success to social, cultural and educational factors. In this essay, I will attempt to answer what factors lead to the academic success of South Korean, Japanese and Chinese students.

East Asian students may be viewed as more successful in their academic studies than students in Anglo-Western countries due to cultural factors. Their values places education as a top priority, a message that is often reinforced by families, society and the bonds that are shared in communities across these countries.

While South Korea, Japan and China are in themselves separate countries, I will group them as East Asian countries for this essay. They share a common Confucian ideology that reinforces family bonds, self-perfection, prestige and honor. Schneider & Lee (1990: 360) noted the Japanese culture for its ability to “ emphasize respect for authority and parental wishes, duty to community, diligence, cleanliness, personal achievement, and the importance of keeping up an appearance.” These qualities work in tandem with the educational system and contribute to expectations that education is key to a stable society and brings prestige to one’s family as well as one’s nation. This is a key point given the political instability that South Korea and China faced in the past, education was a strategic method to bring national prestige against western industrialized nations.

(Schneider and Lee 1990: 362) also claims that one way that expectations are formed to relay the importance of education is through “ multilevel process of interactions among parents, children, teachers and peer groups.” That is, the structure of the nuclear family with two parents, monitors the learning activities of children at home with the full expectations that the children achieve social mobility, respect and self-improvement utilizing school and community ties coupled with family resources through attainment of a good education.

Parental expectations are internalized by these students and lead to self-expectations, reinforced by society as well as government institutions. The latter is achieved through subsidies of colleges and universities. The tight-knit East Asian families with clearly delineated lines of parental authority enhance their ability to control their children’s behavior and use of free time.

There’s a purpose or intent to the attainment of education. “ If you achieve something in China, it is not your own victory, but it’s also your family’s victory and your country’s victorywe study for our family and for our culture.” These Confucian ideals stress self-improvement for the sake of one’s community and one’s nation.

“ Cram schools” have gained in popularity among parents for providing additional educational instruction as parents believe that these schools give their kids an “ edge” for a better future. These schools offer private or group-tutoring sessions at costly rates that can exacerbate an achievement gap between poor and rich families.

It’s no surprise that parents of East Asian students are dedicated to their

children's educational future. In an elementary school event in Japan, parental participation was noted at nearly 100%, including attendance by dads. Asian parents also have a high rate of educational aspiration that may help to explain why some students are more motivated to achieve high grades than others. The author also points to evidence where Asian parents value having a place to study over a private room. Also, Asian parents often dedicate resources to planning their children's college plans. This demonstrates the level of dedication and commitment to greater academic success.

There is the expectation that teachers and student's families work together to ensure that learning is continuous. It doesn't stop just because the school day is over. Instead, parents and teachers are duly invested in the future of these students. This is why the high expectations of one's community and family reinforces values of achievement and academic success. The mindset of students isn't whether they are college-bound, but to which institution they are headed.

There is also evidence to suggest that the intent and focus shared by East Asian families towards their children's educational future is due to in part to counter anticipated discrimination in the workplace. This is especially relevant for children of immigrants living overseas. The logic is that by compensating for unequal compensation due to discriminatory practices, education can be the great leveler. This is where national pride plays a key part. Given the past historical changes, having a talented pool of young people is a source of pride for one's nation. Case in point: South Korea has gone from mass illiteracy to being an economic powerhouse in less than fifty

years. Having a educated workforce that can compete on a global scale will move these economies forward especially in our information-based societies.

In populous East Asian countries, there is the belief that students are fighting to distinguish themselves against their peers. And yet, despite all the accolades of the academic success gained by students in East Asia, problems still exist. Critics point to the rote memorization skills that does not instill a higher level of thinking, the college entrance exam amounts to a lottery due to the few slots available for students in college in East Asia means that only a small percentage of students are deemed successful. A recent study indicated that South Korean children are the least happy in a study among developed countries due to the high expectations to achieve.

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