

# 'BRIDGING ASIAN AND EUROPEAN WAYS OF LEARNING IN THE NEW GLOBALIZATION'

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# THE TIGER MOTHER

- Much has been debated about the contrast between the Asian and Western ways of educating (and bringing up) children following the release of Amy Chua's (2011) best seller, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Chua believes that the Asian method of education - rote learning and practice, insistence on high achievement, and strict discipline - produces the most successful, and in the end, happiest children. Some agree and some disagree. The debate is relevant to our discussions today.

# AN IDEAL COMPROMISE?

- Between the Eastern and Western educational traditions and practices, some have suggested a compromise so that -
  - “It would be ideal for students if they were exposed to both types of educational practices in their lives; preferably to Confucian educational practices at an earlier stage of their lives to acquire basic knowledge and build character and then to Socratic educational practices at a later stage of their lives to acquire critical thinking skills and seek truth” (Aoiki 2008:29).

# TWO CONCURRENT WORLD TRENDS

- Two concurrent trends together are shaping (or reshaping) the world and its future in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:
  - Globalization
  - The rise of Asia

# UNDERSTANDING AND DECONSTRUCTING GLOBALIZATION

- ◉ Thomas Friedman's (2005): *The World is Flat*.
- ◉ “Anglo-American globalization”
- ◉ The force of indigenization: Samuel Huntington (1993): *Clash of civilizations*.
- ◉ The limited social base of any monolithic Western (or indeed global) model of development: John Gray (1999): *False Dawn*.

# RETHINKING “MODERNITY”

- Francis Castles (1998): “a modernity with many mansions”
- What is “modernity”? The modernity discourse thus far has essentially been Eurocentric
- Genuine globalization is not about Europeanization or Americanization, nor one ‘best’ route to modernity and human development.
- Globalization should draw its nutrition from multiple cultures and diverse human experiences across races and societies; and should champion a process of multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism, grounded in cross-cultural fertilization and mutual learning rather than conformity and convergence.

# THE RISE OF ASIA

- As Asia rises economically in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is witnessing a new Asiatic mode of production.
- Kishore Mahbubani (2008: “The rise of the West transformed the world. The rise of Asia will bring about an equally significant transformation”).
- Jeffrey Henderson (2011): a new “Global-Asian Era”.
- While many in the West have now recognized *economic* Asia, it still regards *political* Asia as a backwater, and fails to fully appreciate the immense vitality of *cultural* Asia.

# THE ASIAN JOURNEY

- “Asian Values”
- “Modernization without Westernization”:
  - “Chinese study as the essence, Western study as the tools” (中學·體、西學·用, *zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong*)
  - “Japanese spirit, Western knowledge”
- East Asia is fast grooming education hubs and boasts major clusters of top-grade universities: The 4<sup>th</sup> wave of *internationalization* of higher education is coming?



# THE CRISIS OF EDUCATION: LOSS OF PURPOSE AND WISDOM

- ⦿ Universities imparting knowledge but not ‘wisdom’?
- ⦿ Modern tertiary education driven more by economic productivity and less by liberal and critical values?
- ⦿ “The university in ruins” (Readings 1996)
- ⦿ “Hollow excellence” or “Excellence without a soul” (Lewis 2006)
- ⦿ Economic instrumentality and competitiveness has unduly conditioned and constrained education and the grooming of new citizens who seek purpose in life and meaning in what they study, and who are able to display imagination and creativity unbound by conventional wisdom and mainstream thinking, or cultural and social boundaries.

# THE SEARCH FOR PERFORMANCE IN BOTH EAST AND WEST

- ◉ Some see the Western culture as leaning towards a rational tradition, viewing knowledge as objective and reality as existing independently of mental representations of the world, and the Eastern (Chinese) culture of knowledge as subjective and more instrumental to interpreting the world. These two strands represent the actualization of distinct development of the possibilities common to all people.
- ◉ The present discourse of globalization geared towards economic pursuits and competition has already triggered tensions in values in education.
- ◉ Dichotomized visions and pedagogies could be fallacies. Neither the West nor the East should throw away the babe together with the bath water.

# BRIDGING THE EAST AND WEST IN LEARNING AND PEDAGOGY

- ◉ Both Asia and Europe have a long history and rich tradition of knowledge and epistemologies.
- ◉ The European tradition of higher learning was grounded in the ideas of reason, moral and culture. Similarly, in China, Confucianism saw the way towards great learning as entailing “the formation of high moral character, enlightening the people (community), and ultimately achieving the ideal realm” (大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善).
- ◉ There have, however, been many misperceptions of the Confucian learning culture, whether in the West, or even in the East.

# CONFUCIAN TRADITIONS

- ◉ In the Chinese traditions, the pursuit of higher learning - through the transcendence of the self and of the values of living - was always considered to be more important than the pursuit of knowledge in the texts.
- ◉ The Confucian notion of a teacher is not just that of an authority on learning. The teacher does not just impart knowledge, but inculcates wisdom (“remove doubts”) and sets a role model in life for the students. He should aspire to be the contemporary sage.

# WESTERN TRADITIONS

- ◉ Western intellectuals were not just the custodians of knowledge; they also represented the conscience of the society
- ◉ Western-originated core values like justice, reason and compassion have now become universal values. In the ancient Chinese traditions, the values of *ren* (仁 mercy), *yi* (義 justice), *li* (禮 ritual), *zhi* (智 wisdom) and *xin* (信 trust) had similarly been pursued over the centuries as the fundamental values of life.

# DRAWING WISDOM FROM BOTH WESTERN AND EASTERN TRADITIONS

- ◉ Drawing wisdom from both the Western and Eastern cultural and intellectual traditions are thus essential to human development and a broad holistic educational experience.
- ◉ Education (and lifelong learning) should also raise people's awareness of cultural differences between the East and the West. It should nurture the capacity to both *preserve* the cultural heritage and to *transform* society towards higher humanistic goals.

# CONCLUSIONS: GOING BACK TO BASICS

- ◎ Over centuries of civil-examination-oriented education and reinforced by the modern Western school system, the Chinese learners have become acculturated towards scholastic achievement in a structured way aiming at high functional results - “instrumentalism”
- ◎ But Confucian traditions still attach great cultural values to education as the formation of the person and to the role of the family within a holistic construct of education - “holistic development”
- ◎ If we go back to the basics of Confucius’ pedagogy, there is much that resonates the contemporary theories of learning and education

# INTEGRATING EAST AND WEST

- ◎ The current paradox may well enable Chinese (and East Asian) education to integrate both the traditional and the contemporary through *reinventing a pedagogy* that can bring education closer to the essence of genuine learning. Similar efforts can also be made by Western pedagogies restoring the traditional to the modern.
- ◎ To conclude, there is a lot to be mutually learnt between the Western (European) and Asian ways, bearing in mind, too, the diversity of European and Asian traditions and cultures.
- ◎ *Bridging the Asian and European ways of learning* should mark the feature of the New Globalization of this century.