

Research on the Impact of Cultural Values on Social Interaction in Chinese Education

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Abstract: Confucianism, a philosophy and belief system founded by Confucius in ancient China, emphasizes the importance of having a good moral character. Cultural values are deeply embedded in the daily interactions of Chinese people. Unfortunately, some Confucian ethics have been misinterpreted and become a tool of "mind control," which tends to control one's thoughts and insert unwanted thoughts in others. This study aims to highlight the issues in Chinese education concepts that are heavily influenced by cultural values and the psychological concept of mind control, as well as how they impact children's psychological development and behaviors. It also offers some recommendations on how to create a good learning environment. It can be concluded that cultural values significantly impact social interaction in China.

Keywords: Chinese education, cultural value, mind control, social interaction, confucianism

1. Introduction

Cultural values are defined as distinguishing between the good and the bad, the real and the unreal, the beautiful and the inharmonious [1]. It is usually determined by a community rather than the individual. It also significantly influences how people should behave and decide how they should live within the culture. For each culture, the cultural values vary based on that culture's history and beliefs.

If people ask Chinese students about the words their parents say to them the most often, the answer would be very similar. Chinese parents had already become a representation of strict authority. It is largely impacted by the cultural values of China that pass on through generations.

China is one of the oldest countries in the world, and its history can be traced back thousands of years. Cultural values in China are largely developed and passed on from ancient China to modern times, like Confucianism. It established the foundation for many of today's Chinese cultural values. The influence of these values is crucial and impacts every individual Chinese person's behavior in daily life. Each identity group has its own way of behavior that corresponds to the cultural meaning of that identity. It becomes a shared value that cannot be violated and a standard to follow.

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Social interaction is also an essential part of our lives. Goffman defines social interaction as the environment in which two or more individualisms are physically present in each other's presence [2]. It allows individuals to socialize and form a community through interacting and sharing ideas. Cultural values broadly impact the way people interact within a culture, especially in education. As

a result, this paper will investigate how cultural values influence social interaction in China's educational system, beginning by introducing and discussing relevant theories. It would also focus on the cultural values in China and how they are embodied in social interaction in the education system.

2. Cultural Values' Impacts on Social Interaction in Chinese Education

Before discussing Chinese cultural values, this paper will present a clear definition. Chinese cultural values are mainly influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes the importance of having a good moral character by showing respect, altruism, and humility, creating a sense of community by providing the concept of out-group and in-group.

2.1. Identity Control Theory

Burke raised Identity Control Theory (ICT) in 2007. It focuses on the nature of persons' identities, as well as the relationship between those identities and their behavior within the context of the social structure within which those identities are embedded [3]. People usually act out their identity that corresponds to how society thinks the identity should behave and the standard that the higher hierarchy within the identity determines. Four components construct it: identity standard, perception, comparator, and discrepancy. The identity standard is the meaning of the given identity. Perception is how people see ourselves in relation to our identity. The comparator is to compare the perception with the identity standard; the discrepancy is the difference between the perception and the identity standard. If the discrepancy is zero, there is no difference between how people perceive ourselves and the standard of identity. If it is not zero, there will need some adjustments to make the discrepancy zero. It can be used to determine whether one's behavior corresponds to the identity that one belongs to and to see if any change is needed. It is a significant part of social interaction if people share the same meaning of identity. This study can also connect ICT with identity theory. According to Smith-Lovin's article "To Thine Own Self be True," identity means the meanings and labels attached to the self by self and others, including person identities, role identities, and social identities [4]. Identity within a social structure has to do with our place in society. In terms of ICT, if it is role identity, the behavior of reducing differentiation to zero is the goal of social efforts. According to Identity Control Theory, people tend to have a perception of what role the identity they occupy should play and adjust if it does not correspond to the identity standard [3]. The concept of identity also impacts how people socially interact within the education system. It reflects the discrepancy between how children perceive their identities and how their parents and teachers perceive them, which creates the difficulties in social interaction.

When a person is with his family, that person is either a mother, a father, or a child. Each individual within the family would perform their roles according to the identity based on their perception. Based on the cultural values of China, the idea of "filial piety," which means devotion to family, is very critical [5]. Confucianism emphasizes submission to parental authority and the importance of being respectful to other members. According to the ICT, the identity standard is based on cultural values based on belief. However, the children in the family usually behave in a way that is against the identity standard because they have a different perception of how a son or daughter should behave. The children think they should have the right to decide their lives, but their parents think they should have the authority to decide how their children behave. Then, the discrepancy becomes non-zero, and the social interaction cannot continue if the discrepancy is not brought back to zero. It implies that it is not acceptable to express ideas against the parents because they are the ones who represent the identity standard, but the child is the one who violates the standard. The article "Analysis of Sino-American Family Education Differences: Collectivistic or Individualistic?" also indicated that Chinese families

are more prone to a “force” environment where parents hold absolute authority [6]. If the child complains about the situation to others, others will say, “They are your parents, and you just need to listen to them.” Therefore, in the social interaction between parents and children, the identity standard is designed by the one who takes authority. Burkes also mentioned that “children have very little power, and their identity standards are firmly set by their parents, who have the power” [3]. During the process of social interactions and arguing the identity standard between parents and children, parents usually use their power in the family to suppress their children. This leads to the psychological term - mind control which can also be called PUA in China.

2.2. Mind Control (PUA)

The term PUA has become popular these years in China. It is the acronym for Pick-up Artist, which is usually used in a romantic relationship and refers to manipulative and psychological skills that make others question themselves [7]. The term has been widely used in other circumstances, like family and schools, to show the intention that others try to control what others think by telling them their own beliefs and values and persuading others to behave in that way to obey them.

The biggest problem in Chinese family education is that parents want to exercise absolute control over their children physically and psychologically, and call it love. A psychologist, Diana Baumrind, shared the three parental control models: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting [8]. According to research, Asian parents tend to be more authoritarian, and the way Asian parents educate their children is usually described as control and power [9]. Authoritarian parenting emphasizes a strict and controlling style that expects obedience, discipline, and control of the children while allowing little communication with them and disregarding their feelings. In authoritarian parenting, many parents adopt mind control to make their children understand their love and overly control their behaviors to embody the strict education style.

These sayings can be grouped into four categories. The first category is that parents would emphasize their payoff and morally kidnap their children to obey. The typical saying is, “We provide you with every meal and a place to live, so you must listen to us.” “We work so hard every day and save money for your future, but you do not listen to us.” Parents’ intention in emphasizing their hard work is for you to understand their payoff, but the children receive guilt, stress, and self-doubt. The initial feeling kids have when they hear is guilt. They would wonder why I could not behave better, creating so much trouble for my parents. And then they’d be stressed because they’d already given it their all, but the result was disappointing. They would also question themselves, “Am I burdensome to the family?” and “Am I that bad?”. In this criterion, parents use the method of moral kidnapping to trigger their children's emotions of guilt and make them obey their commands. The parents think it is how the children should behave to show respect to them.

The second criterion is comparing. “Why other children can do it, but you cannot,” and “You are worse than other children, but we still raise you up and love you,” are common phrases. By comparing their children with other children, parents want their children to see the difference and learn from others, but they forget that every child is different. In this situation, children may believe they are more stupid than others and that they will never succeed. Children would be doubting themselves and feeling animosity towards the child being compared. This would also increase their independence. The second saying would create a sense of guilt and make the children feel sorry for their parents and obey what they say in the future.

The third criterion is to emphasize the hierarchy, like “We are your parents, and we are always right in the family.” In this circumstance, the parents emphasize their speech priority in the family so that the children cannot say anything against it because they do not have freedom of speech since they are not an authority in the family. Usually, parents deny their children's requests and resist their perspective because they think their children are still immature.

The last criterion is establishing a “good kid” standard. For example, parents would emphasize that good children always listen to their parents, respect their parents, and do not deny their parents. The child would believe their actions do not fit the criteria of a good child when their parents repeat them again and again. They would change their actions in order to follow their parents’ expectations. In this circumstance, the child’s own morals and beliefs are changed according to their parents’ speech and standards. This is the power of mind control that people do not realize they are being changed but still believe they are wrong.

The action of mind control is highly impacted by the cultural value of Confucianism that “parents are always right” [10]. From the parent’s perspective, they think they can have the absolute power to define the definition of the identity standard, which means they can control how children behave, think, and live.

3. Conclusion

This paper attempts to determine how cultural values influence social interactions in China. After the analysis, it can be concluded that cultural values significantly impact social interactions in China. It shapes how people identify themselves in a social group and how people should behave. Based on the study result, people could then reflect on whether it is a positive or negative pattern of their current social interaction. Positively, cultural values have shaped the society in good order. With the existence of social hierarchy, people tend to be more regulated and would consider their actions before they behave. It will benefit society and make things less chaotic. However, people need to consider if people have overreacted to cultural values. Cultural values exist to regulate the self, but not as a tool to manage how others should behave. It is not wrong to have the cultural value of respecting parents, and it is even an excellent behavior to follow, but people should not interpret respect as a hierarchical concept. People should manage their behavior and remind themselves to respect others, but not use it as a “mind control” tool to reject suggestions. It is a misinterpretation of the initial intention of Confucianism. It would turn a good cultural value into a negative approach that people would never improve when people overemphasize cultural values. Parents should keep in mind that their kid is an independent unit, and they have their personalities. In family education, parents and children should work together to figure out the way of interaction that both are comfortable with to have a zero discrepancy between identity standards and perception.

This research did not discuss too much about the psychological impact the interaction had on children in a Chinese family. For future study, it is expected that they can do a comparison between different types of education in different cultural backgrounds, figuring out a way that is suitable for children to learn effectively and happily, and adapting it in real life to establish a positive environment for learning.

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