**The Middle Way – Lance G King**

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**Part 1: Views on Thinking**

The Chinese word for thinking is *si*. “*Si* is a broad concept that encompasses understanding, reflection, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, making connections, drawing analogies, making inferences, forming judgements – a taxonomy of thinking.” (Tan, 2015)

“Learning without *si* leads to bewilderment, si without learning leads to perilousness” Confucius, Analects 2.15

The Chinese term for *knowledge* is made up of two words *xue* (to learn) and *wen* (to ask). The derivation of the English word *knowledge* is also in two parts – *acknowledgment of a superior* and *action or process.* Both derivations suggest an active inquiring mind always asking questions in order to learn and develop knowledge.

The Confucian view of acquiring knowledge first involves research and deliberation then a decision to take action followed by knowledgeable action. Confucius emphasized the importance of learning in mediating the relationship between knowledge and action. (Ching-tien, 2014)

“Study extensively, inquire carefully, ponder thoroughly, sift clearly, and practice earnestly” Zhu Xi (neo-Confucianist 1130-1200)

“Confucius stressed using individual instruction and personal, informal methods (Analects, 6.21; 11.22); while recognising the importance of application and requiring students to apply what they learned by putting their knowledge into practice (Analects 1.1)” (Smith & Hu, 2013)

Confucius’ view of human intelligence encompassed qualities such as:

* the ability to identify areas of intelligence in others
* self-knowledge
* problem-solving skills
* verbal fluency
* the ability to think actively and flexibly
* the capacity to make healthy personal decisions.

Confucius emphasised the importance of two forms of reflection in achieving learning:

* Reflection on everything that has been learned to synthesise, integrate and look for patterns and commonalities, and
* Reflection on oneself, in order to ensure that such synthesis and integration proceed in an open‐minded, fair and autonomous way, and integrate knowledge with the self, that is, to internalise it until it becomes oneself. (Hye-Kyung, 2003)

The ancient Greeks’ view of knowledge acquisition has a lot in common with the Confucian view:

“Do not then train youths to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.” Plato 428 – 349 BC

The closest ancient Greek word to our modern concept of intelligence is *nous*, but that is closer to mind or the process of thinking. The ancient Greek term for wisdom is *phronesis* which means a specific type of intelligence relevant to practical action, implying both good judgement and excellence of character and habits, or practical virtue. Phronesis is distinct from *phrontis* (reflection), *metis* (cunning), *episteme* (understanding), *gnome* (intuition) and *techne (technical skill).*

In the East and the West different historical formulations of thinking carried through in the development of language have led to two identifiable styles of thinking:

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| Eastern Thinking | Western Thinking |
| All behaviour is the result of complex interactions difficult to understand or predict | All behaviour can be understood and predicted |
| Difficulty in separating objects from environment | No difficulty separating objects from environment |
| Both A and Not-A can be true simultaneously | Either A or Not-A must be true alone |
| Cannot understand the whole without reference to the parts | Can understand the whole through analysis of the parts |
| Field dependent thinking | Field independent thinking |
| Take into account the effect of all influences | Build logical, evidential arguments to reach conclusion |
| Find the middle way | Make a decision and stick to it |
| Think change is likely | Think stability is likely |
| Reasonable  (Nisbett, 2003) | Rational |

In ancient times both the Eastern and the Western traditional views of intelligence were broad and flexible involving reflection and understanding and not just the accumulation of facts. It is interesting to notice how far modern schooling in both the East and the West has moved away from its own intellectual traditions. Schooling these days in most countries is characterised for students by long hours and rigidity, a lack of passion, a focus on grades, the accumulation of facts and being subjected to continuous, pointless, standards-based assessments.

A long way indeed from either the Confucian or ancient Greek views of learning, thinking and the development of intelligence.

And while Eastern countries perform at the very top of every international measure of learning and Eastern students do the same wherever they are in the world this high achievement unfortunately comes at a steep price. By the time they reach high school, Eastern students are often working much longer hours than their Western counterparts with outside-school tuition and homework taking up most of their “free” time. They feel a much greater responsibility to succeed academically for the welfare of their families and an expectation that they will perform at the highest level in all tests and exams. This relentless pressure causes Eastern high school students to suffer from higher levels of stress, maladaptive perfectionism, sleeping difficulties, anxiety, depression and suicide than their Western counterparts (Zhao & Qiu, Model Minority Myth Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Demysitfying Asain American Educational Experiences, 2008).

The other casualties of intensive, test driven education are interest, satisfaction and confidence.

After the publication of the 2011 TIMSS (international maths assessment) results which put Singapore at the top, the Singapore Ministry of Education noted:

“Despite performing better, our students expressed less confidence in these subject areas than their peers in other education systems” (Singapore, 2012)

Similarly in Korea, educators recognised the importance of focusing on the “affective” aspects of education as well as the academic and recommended helping students to increase satisfaction and confidence by lowering assessment pressure and specifically teaching students how to manage their “affect”.

“Affective variables are not only important in subject learning but are significant in themselves” (Kim, 2010)

In Hong Kong in the 2011 TIMSS test eighth graders performed very well in Maths but only 26% said they valued the subject and only 19% said that they liked Maths. Professor Leung of Hong Kong University expressed concern with this trend:

“Students are expected to meet the expectations of their parents and society, however, interest is very important because we are now talking about lifelong learning. Without interest, students will turn away from learning once there are no longer exams.” (Li, 2013)

