
Asian learning culture

In East Asia the status of a person depends on the fact that he "is someone" and that he occupies a corresponding position. Whereas in Germany professional authorities are esteemed highly, that means, people who "can do something" and who are therefore experts (cf. REISCH/TANG 1992, p. 15).

Teachers, lecturers, superiors and elder persons are natural persons of respect, who need not legitimize themselves. They are not scrutinized and criticized. Criticism, confrontation are considered as disrespectful and impolitely to a maximal extent, even aggressive or hurtful, this is a sign of bad education. Discussions and contradictions are unusual, hints on mistakes as well (cf. REISCH/TANG 1992, p. 6). Queries imply that something was forgotten or explained insufficiently. This would comprise subtle criticism, this is not compatible with the assigned roles. Teachers are persons of knowing and respect at the same time, they arrange their knowledge to the unknowing (the students). The students are therefore dependent on the teacher (cf. ROHLEN/LETENDRE 1996, p. 287). Because "knowledge is power", the person imparting knowledge is settled higher in the hierarchy than the person who learns. If a teacher must have himself taught from a subordinate, then this has face-loss as consequence.

In East Asia it is considered as a characteristic of bad trainers if they admit that they do not know something. A teacher does not expect from his students to discover or elaborate the knowledge themselves. If he possesses knowledge, he should also pass it on, if he does not, he is no longer accepted as a knowing person.

Teaching and learning style

The situation of teaching is primarily one-sided, a one-way-process: what the teacher announces is relevant and right. The students are not entitled to ask about sense and purpose, to require reasons or even to question the content the task of the students is solely to suck up the mediated knowledge like a sponge, they appropriate as much of the teacher's knowledge as they can. The following table compares preferred teaching and learning styles:

Germany (Western countries)	(East) Asia
Techniques of independent learning	Techniques of memorizing
Team work	Lecture, report, presentation
Combination of theory and practice	Thorough theoretical knowledge
Discourse / controversy	Receptive: teacher explains, students summarize
Discussion (polarization)	Integration of different opinions
Analysis of objects, texts	The correct usage and handling
Making comparisons	Understanding, interpretation
Experimenting	Practising
Detecting problems	Techniques of adaptation
Work-sharing	Cooperation
Criticizing	Imitating
Transformation	Reproduction
Learning is thinking	Learn first – think then
Learning by doing	Acquiring knowledge
Relevance for practice	Educational ideal
Acquiring	Imparting, conveying
Active / Expertise	Receptive / Education

(cf. REISCH/TANG 1992, p. 12)

It is probably exaggerated to claim that the teaching process is more affected than its content, but this much is certain that the classes aim altogether at a receptive learning style, at the mediation of knowledge and at the support of reproductive abilities. The participants are accustomed to receptive learning. Repetitions are one of the characteristics of the teaching process and used regularly without the statement's content varying. Asian students learn by repeated practise rather than by explanation (cf. LEESTMA/WALBERG 1992, p. 244). This learning style can be very strenuous and demands an intense effort, but Asian students are used to this kind of learning. They are aware that knowledge leads to success and social prestige ultimately. Besides, active participation is not common and the demand for it would provoke astonishment. In addition, students are insecure and afraid of saying something wrong. This would be a disgrace in front of the class and lead to face-loss, this time with the student.

Theoretical education is consequently dominant and as a matter of priority opposite the practice - practitioners enjoy essentially less prestige. In Asian schools therefore students learn that extensive knowledge is the most essential.

Relationship between teacher and student

The following table compares behaviour mainly encouraged in Western and Asian societies. The different relationship between Asian teachers and students is obvious.

Germany (Western countries)	(East) Asia
Articulation of needs (open, direct)	Control needs / emotions
Insight, comprehending somebody's train of thought	Accepting, obeying
Asserting oneself against somebody	Integrating oneself
Insisting on one's right	Fulfilling one's duties
Independence	Competence
Self-responsibility	Responsibility for others
Forming an individual opinion	Accepting differences in opinion
Dealing with conflicts	Avoiding conflicts, tolerating
Breaking something down into parts, experimenting, analyzing	Practising
Treating others as equals	Treat others with respect
Having a critical look at something	Searching for common ground
Deductive logic	Inductive logic
Elaborating	Reproducing
Reducing, focusing	Adding, integrating
Either-or	As well-as
Originality	Adaptability
Justifying, arguing	Listening, understanding
Being better than others	Being an example for others
Active, independent learning	Receptive, accepting learning

(cf. REISCH/TANG, p.11)

Respect is given by students towards a teacher not only during working hours, but also outside the work place. The relationship of teachers and students does not finish after school but also applies in the private contact, but personal contact with the students is re-garded as unusual.

Despite formal distance and respect in the contact together, careful interest and worry are significant for the harmony and the learning process. Formal harmony in learning situations is maintained at all times. Teachers would not point out the students' mistakes, because this could follow already mentioned face-loss. The meaning of harmony is very important, especially in the Japanese society (cf. SCHUBERT 1992, p. 123-128). Uppermost principle is the

avoidance of confrontation and this is imparted since early childhood. Homogeneity of social order is stressed extremely in Asia.

Conclusion

Teachers in East Asian countries are highly respected. His or her social status can be compared with the prestige teachers used to have in Western societies in former times. The reasons that contribute to this remarkable status are various.

Confucianism and Buddhism are nearly omnipresent in East Asian cultures and deeply rooted in the individual life of every member of society. From a child, Asians are faced with the prevailing rules and duties which are passed on by parents and teachers enduringly. Very early children learn about the importance of avoiding confrontation and of respecting authorities. Asian societies are considered to be vertical and hierarchy plays a weighty role which is often underestimated by Westerners. Opposition and contradiction are not exercised directly to a reputable authority like teachers, trainers and educators. Teachers derive their high social status from the fact that they are the ones who impart knowledge to persons who are ignorant and "not knowing". Even if teachers are not paid as their position in society would imply it, being a teacher is a popular profession in Asian countries. Reasons like lifelong job-security or social prestige see to it.

But it would be naive to claim that the schooling situation is that unscrupulous and perfect without any criticism. For example, in Japan, the flood of entrance examinations and tests to be passed to attend a reputable high school or university is criticized not only by Westerners but also by students, parents and even teachers in Japan. The Japanese "examination hell" is more and more scrutinized closely and sometimes even declared as "test fetishism" (cf. DECKE-CORNILL 1996, p. 107). Japanese government thinks about reforms in the educational system, for example more liberty in terms of creativity or modifications of the curriculum. This also happens against the background of forming more creative individuals to remain competitive in the international market (computer science, software engineering etc.) (cf. BPB 1997, p. 26).

In some fields, the teacher's authority is not as unimpeachable as it used to be and the students' behaviour shows tendencies of violence and offences in school, especially among students themselves. But compared with the difficult situation in Western countries, this development could be regarded as relatively insignificant. As far as the teacher's status in Asia is concerned, it should be pointed to the fact that even if his absolute authority might have changed over the last years, the famous phrases "Knowledge Is Power" is still relevant.

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