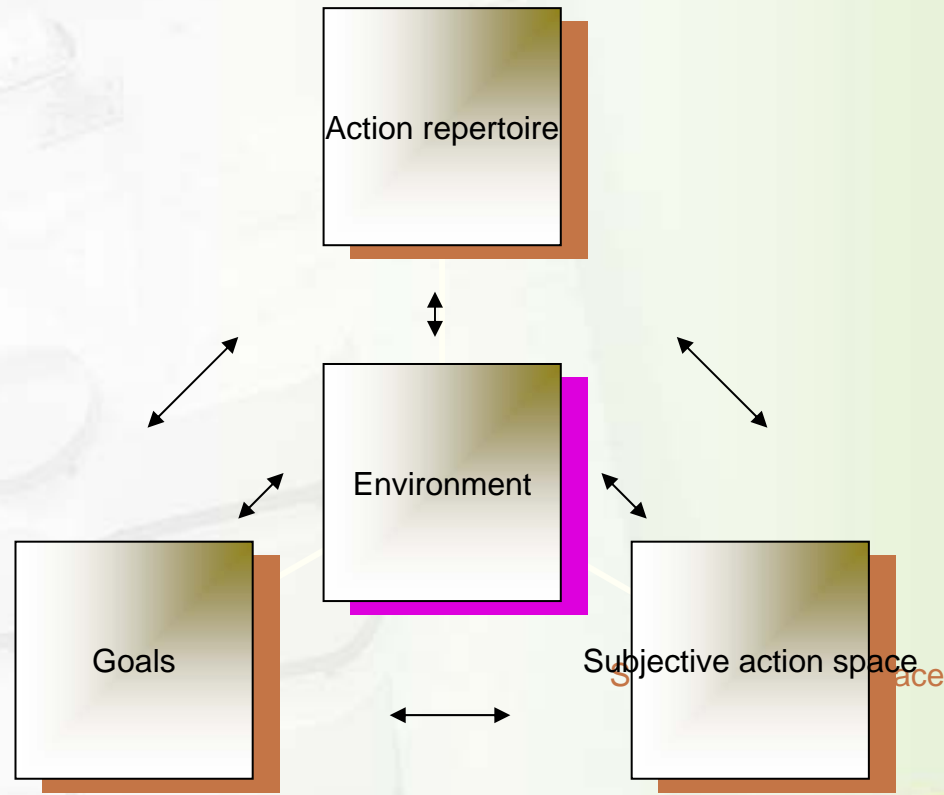


The Chinese culture and the Actiotope Model of Giftedness

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The Actiotope Model of Giftedness



The environment and human development

Vygotsky (1978)

- ... interaction of child with environment important in their cognitive development.
- Child learns to interpret and act on the environment ... leading, in turn, to further adaptation of their environment.
- Child and environment 'mutually shape each other in spiral process of [cognitive] growth (van Der Veer, 1997, p. 22).
- Bronfenbrenner's (1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) bioecological systems theory of human development.

Learning environment in the Chinese culture

Academic achievement of students in East-Asia attributed to “Confucian” culture...

... including Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong SAR, Shanghai PRC.

Debate - Ji, 2010; Mok, 2010; Stankov, 2010.

Sources - Chan, 2007; Sun 2008; Watkins and Biggs, 1996, 2001; other.

Effective learning environments

- Interactions between learner, the environment and task (Blumenfeld, Marx, & Harris, 2006).
- Constructivist perspectives.
- When grounded in research, can be used to manipulate the environment.

Effective classrooms

In Hong Kong, research in Cheng and Mok (2008) showed that

1. Development of student achievement, attitudes towards school, school satisfaction ...

... effective classrooms are characterized by their social climate, physical environment, family factors, teacher's use of professional power.

2. Relevance to individual and society ...

... effective classrooms are characterized by student attitudes toward learning, application of learning methods, learning effectiveness, multiple ways of thinking, school satisfaction.

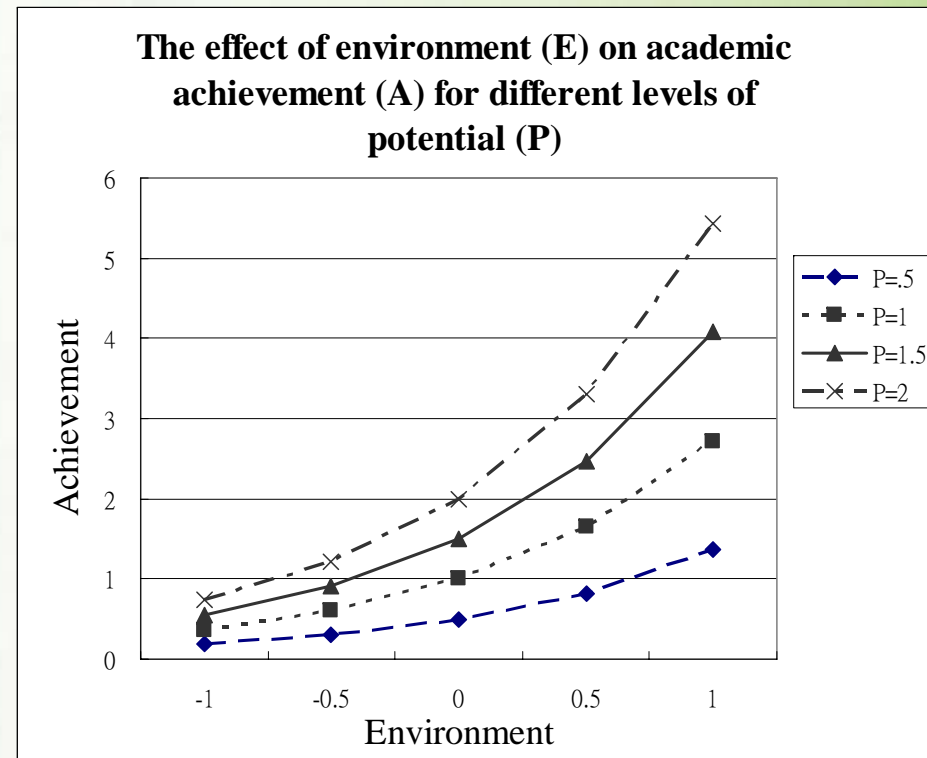
Measuring learning environments

$$A \propto Pe^E$$

- A is mathematical achievement,
- P is intellectual ability, and
- E is the overall educational environment.

Measuring A and P provides a measure of E.

(Phillipson, 2008; Phillipson & Tse, 2007).



Sociotopes and action repertoires

An individual's learning environment includes features that act independently of each other.

- Encourage expansion of the actiotope (E.g. mentors).
- Inhibit its expansion.

A sociotope is a “relatively stable environment that makes certain opportunities for action [both] accessible and normatively regulated” and includes:

- **Objective action space** (...all possible actions that can be carried out in a particular environment...) and
- **Normative action space** (... the local pressures an individual experiences that select for or against particular actions).

(Grassinger, Porath and Ziegler, 2010).

Objective action space

Objective action space is not a resource but depends on educational resources (i.e. educational policy, the availability of physical equipment and effective pedagogy).

The availability of resources increases the likelihood that an individual will develop their action repertoire.

Objective action space depends on ...

- Value and esteem placed on the importance of learning
- Resources

Four types of *objective action space*.

- Value or esteem 1) high or 2) low, and
- Resources 1) high or 2) low.

Normative action space

Direct pressures that act on the individual.

Examples include:

1. **Supportive** of objective action space (*pupils discuss excitedly the results of an experiment*);
2. **Neutral** of objective action space (there is nowhere to read a book); or
3. **Actively rejects** of objective action space (i.e. a peer group mobs a very able student)

(Grassinger et al, 2010)

Types of sociotopes

Four types of *objective action space* and three types of *normative action space*, totaling of 12 sociotopes.



12 types of sociotopes (learning environments)

An individual's **sociotope** consists of their *objective action space* and *normative action space*.

The *objective action space* depends on ...

In turn, the *normative action space* ...
...the objective action space.

...value and esteem	...resource availability	<i>actively supports</i>	<i>neither supports nor inhibits (neutral)</i>	<i>actively rejects</i>
High	Rich	Optimal sociotope	Infrastructure sociotope ¹	Toxic sociotope
High	Poor	Thematic sociotope ¹	Infrastructure sociotope ¹	Toxic sociotope
Low	Rich	Suboptimal sociotope	Infrastructure sociotope ¹	Toxic sociotope
Low	Poor	Deficit sociotope	Competing sociotope ¹	Antagonistic sociotope ¹

An individual's sociotope (learning environment) for any one domain consists of their *objective action space* and *normative action space*.

The objective action space consists of all possible actions that can be carried out in the sociotope and depends on the value and esteem (*High* or *Low*) placed on learning in the objective action space and the presence of appropriate resources (*Rich* or *Poor*) as outlined in Blumenfeld (2006).

The normative action space consists of those actions that can be expected to be carried out within a particular environment. The normative action space depends on pressures exerted directly on the individual.

¹ Descriptions of the various sociotopes are from Grassinger et al (2010). Note that their terms *learning sociotope* and *professional sociotope* is not used in this model.

Antecedents of the Chinese *learning* environment

Students in East-Asia are part of a cultural group broadly described as Confucian (Daoism and Buddhism also important).

- System of values and examples of behaviour.
- Focus on Confucianism.
- Influences of Confucianism varies from society to society, the Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) form a relatively homogenous cultural group.

(Chan, 2007; Lee, 1996; Sun, 2008)

Basic tenets of Confucianism

Focus is on developing the “ideal Confucian scholar”, thereby forming the basis behind the values and esteem of learning.

The tenets include:

- benevolence (ren, 仁),
- righteousness (yi, 義),
- propriety (li, 禮),
- filial piety (xiao, 孝),
- loyalty (zhong, 忠) to one’s ruler,
- the development of a cultured or educated man (jun zi, 君子),
- the doctrine of the mean (zhong yong, 中庸),
- five cardinal relationships
- mandate of Heaven (tian ming, 天命) and concept of Heaven (tian ming guan, 天命觀)
- rectification of names (zheng ming, 正名).

These tenets help regulate Chinese society, providing a complete set of values guidelines and exemplars for both individual behaviors and the behaviors of groups. In observing these tenets, the person becomes at one with heaven (tian ren he yi, 天人合一).

The importance of learning

Interpretations of the Confucian tenets ...

Benevolence, righteousness and propriety

The tenets of benevolence, righteousness and propriety mutually underpin each other (Sun, 2008).

- Benevolence is concerned with the desire to bring out the best in other persons through the expression of genuine love and concern.
- In being righteous, a person enacts their benevolence towards others.
- Propriety, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with avoiding any inappropriate actions.

According to Sun (2008), the interplay of *benevolence*, *righteousness* and *propriety* supports social stability and the equitable allocation of resources.

Filial piety and loyalty ...

These twin tenets required to maintain stability and harmony within the family and beyond respectively .

- Filial piety is more than being respectful to parents and ancestors, requiring a high degree of selflessness.
- Modern Chinese society is less concerned with filial piety than in previous times ... being replaced with a modern version emphasizing filial reciprocity (Sun, 2008).
- Nevertheless, filial piety remains an important tenet in the CHC.
- Filial piety is primary attribute of ideal child (Shek & Chan, 1999).

Filial piety and loyalty ...

- Loyalty governs the relationships of people outside the family, including persons in positions of authority.
- In the classroom, students' are expected to be respectful toward their teachers with their teachers.
- Hong Kong teachers also seem to use a balanced approach to ensure compliance, including both authoritarian practices (ridicule and shame) and “warm and caring relationships” (Ho, 2001).
- Holistic rather than compartmentalized approach helps to explain the academic success of their students (Biggs & Watkins, 2001).

Development of cultured and educated person ...

The purpose of education is to develop oneself according to the needs of others.

The fruit of this “life-long endeavour” is a love for humanity and selflessness (Sun, 2008, p. 9).

The purpose of education is to bring benefits to the individual and society as a whole.

All persons *can* and *should be* educated - although not always to the same extent.

The link between education, learning and effort is very strong.

Academic achievement, self and social needs ...

Academic achievement fulfills both a “self” need and a “social” need (Chang & Wong, 2008; Lee, 1996) . Hence, a positive correlation between need for achievement and need for societal affiliation.

- The relationship between these two needs, is strongest in East Asian students (Chang & Wong, 2008).
- Students in Hong Kong’s “lowest achievement schools” display a number of discipline problems (actions harmful to self, anti-social behaviours and anti-school behaviour) (Tam, 2003).
- Students with high academic achievement consistently attained better grades for school conduct (Yu, et al, 2006).
- Low academic self-concept (Mok, 2010).

Motivation and attributional styles ...

Understanding motivation ...

- The purpose of education is for self-realisation and pragmatic reasons (“Money, BMW and women ..”).

Personal goals, *academic success* attributed to internal factors (ability/effort), *academic failure* attributed to external factors (luck, task difficulty).

Social (“vertical”) goals, *academic failure* attributed to internal factors (Chen, et al, 2009).

- Hong Kong Chinese parents and children attribute academic success to effort and effective learning strategies. Parents source of attributional information.(Phillipson, 2006).

Doctrine of the mean ...

... seeks to maintain social harmony by finding the best course of action between two conflicting positions.

- Encourages persons to adopt moderate forms of behaviour, including expressions of emotions, in social situations.
- In the classroom, students are expected to conform to uniform standards of behaviour (Ho, 2001).
- Teachers provide appropriate role model, and initiate harsh methods of discipline (social or group disapproval).
- Teachers in Hong Kong reprimand students for their misbehaviour in public ... strengthens both the individual and group (Ho, 2001).
- “Lazy me! Lazy me! Why should I be punished? I am punished. Why should I be so lazy?” (Hue, 2007).

The five cardinal relationships ...

... refer to the relationships between *ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger, brother and friends.*

- The junior member owes strong duty of service and reverence to the senior member,
- The senior member owes a duty of care and benevolence to the other (Sun, 2008).

In the Hong Kong classroom

- Teacher-student dyad shows a high degree of reciprocal respect.
- Teachers hold Confucian values (“the ideal student is honest, self-disciplined, responsible, respectful”), while themselves exercising benevolent authority (Ho, 2001).
- Teachers’ interactions reflect Confucian values (memorization, effort, and limiting the use of praise) (Salili, 2001).



Rectification of names ...

... helps to maintain social harmony.

Correct terms should be used when describing the relationships between people.

People demonstrate their understanding of their role and responsibility within society.

In using these terms correctly, “sociopolitical order” will follow (Sun, 2008).

Exceptionality and Confucian culture

- **Collectivism (集體)** Collective decisions are safe and more likely to be positively reinforced by members of the group ... new ways of thinking are discouraged.
- **Harmony (和睦)** The importance of social harmony limits opportunities to raise questions, thereby inhibiting intellectual development.
- **Sexuality and gender (性事)** Females are considered subordinate to males and lower in intelligence, creativity and giftedness. As a consequence, females may not be given the same opportunities as males.
- **Aggression (攻擊)** Confucian thinking discourages the expression of alternate viewpoints.
- **Intelligence (智慧)** Confucian insistence of respecting those in authority depends on being subservient to teachers and to reproduce materials teachers regard as important.
As a consequence, originality, verbal fluency and flexibility, persuasive arguments, and other higher order thinking skills are less developed.

(Chan, 2007)

- **Family (家庭)** A child's greatest responsibility is to family. Hence, obedience requires them to follow the instructions of parents, with freedom of speech and creative expression considered disrespectful.
- **Feng Shui (風水)** The concept extends to a person's future talent and success. Although *feng shui* changes the person's locus of control to external forces, the individual is free to try and change their personal *feng shui*.
- **Filial Piety (孝道)** The importance of filial piety means that when parents become ill, children should stay by the bedside. On the death of the parents, all scholastic activities should be suspended for a time.
- **Shame (羞恥)** It is considered shameful to be less bright, less competent, less useful than others or fail an examination.

The antithesis of shame is honour, epitomized in the saying “nothing succeeds like success itself”, where honour allows the possibility of a decent and happy life.

- **Yuan (緣分)** Refers to outcomes that cannot be predicted or explained by logic.

In terms of conceptions of giftedness, giftedness is rare and cannot be predicted ...

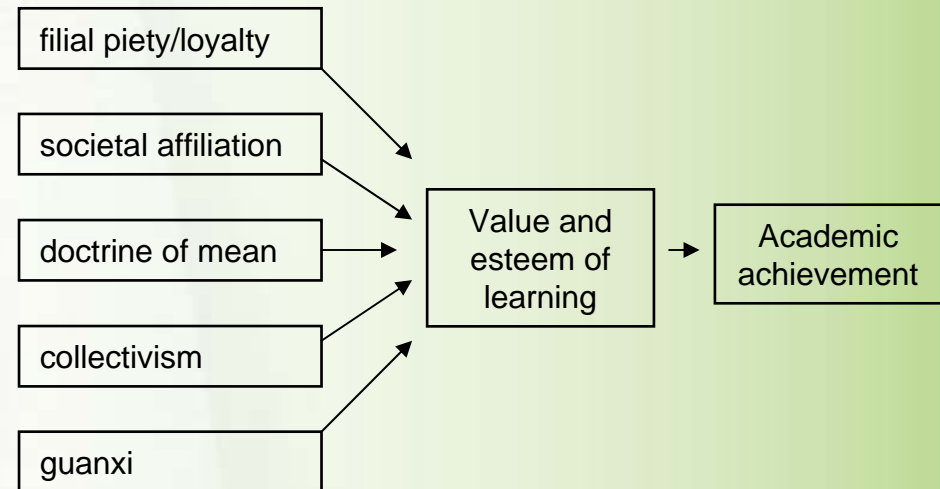
- **Guanxi (關係)** Describes the closeness and trust between two or more people.

Conclusion

- Many aspects of Chinese culture can be studied from an emic perspective.

Guanxi (關係) has been studied in a management context to study the relationship between managers and co-workers (Chen & Peng, 2008).

- Instruments to measure aspects of Chinese learning culture and the relationship between aspects of this culture and academic achievement can be modeled.
- These instruments measure the value and esteem of learning held within their objective action space.
- Individual differences in the *value and esteem* of learning held by students in the Chinese culture.



Normative action space and the Chinese learner

Teachers , parents and peers within the normative action space

- For Chinese Hong Kong students in Grades 1 & 2, teachers, parents and peers more supportive of underachievers than in Grades 5 & 6 (McCall, Beach & Lau, 2000).
- Pro-social peers strengthened the positive influence of maternal parenting in Grade 5 students, but weakened by anti-social destructive peers (Chen et al, 2005).
- Secondary students in Hong Kong viewed the academic support of teachers positively, and from parents negatively (Chen, 2005)

Schools and normative action space

Good schools are those with ...

- past record of high academic results,
- small class size,
- quality of the teaching staff,
- breadth of the school's alumni network,
- English Medium of Instruction, and
- Religious and cultural ethos

(Cortazzi & Lixian, 2001; Dahlin, Watkins, & Ekholm, 2001).

Chinese sociotopes

12 types of sociotopes (learning environments)				
A Chinese sociotope consists of an <i>objective action space</i> and <i>normative action space</i> .				
The <i>objective action space</i> depends on ...		In turn, the <i>normative action space</i>the objective action space.		
...value and esteem communicated through Confucian culture	...resource availability	<i>actively supports</i>	<i>neither supports nor inhibits (neutral)</i>	<i>actively rejects</i>
High	Rich	Optimal sociotope (e.g. teachers, parents)	Infrastructure sociotope	Toxic Sociotope (e.g. teachers, parents, MOI)
High	Poor	Thematic sociotope (e.g. teachers, parents)	Infrastructure sociotope ¹	Toxic Sociotope (e.g. teachers, parents, MOI)
Low	Rich	Suboptimal sociotope	Infrastructure sociotope ¹	Toxic sociotope
Low	Poor	Deficit sociotope	Competing sociotope	Antagonistic sociotope

Academic self-concept

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