

## Chinese Students & Critical Thinking

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## Definitions of critical thinking

- "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." Ennis (1989: 10)
- "purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, as well as explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, and contextual considerations upon which that judgment is based. . ." (Delphi Report, 1990)

## Types of Critical Thinking

- weak sense critical thinking - argument analysis, synthesis and evaluation.
- strong sense critical thinking - ethical sense of fair-mindedness to negate any ego-centrism. (Paul, 1992)

## scientific thinking = critical thinking(?)

- postulational, experimental, modeling, taxonomic, historical derivation, and probabilistic thinking (Crombie, 1994) - weak sense critical thinking.
- + subjectivity of observation - sociologists of science – strong sense critical thinking.
- Traditional Chinese science displayed all of these except probabilistic thought (Elvin, 2004).

## The Confucian heritage

- It's not just Confucius – Mencius, Daoism, Legalism, Mohism, Buddhism, Christianity, Marx, Nietzsche, .....
- East & West - a bifurcation.
- Power relationships
  - the traditional Chinese concept *shi* 勢
  - venerability
  - Japanese academic papers
  - *pungsu* in Korea
- The role of the teacher – respect – Cultural Revolution?
- The role of language
  - 'Chinese students in Hong Kong are handicapped as far as the mastery of the content of the lesson is concerned when they are taught in English'. (Ng, Tsui and Marton 2001:159)
- Environmental history of China

## Chinese students & critical thinking

Joseph Needham – *Science & Civilisation in China* – 27 volumes

- Mohist philosophers – rationalists - 'using the tools of the (Chinese) Sophists to build a utilitarian ethical system which will be logically impregnable.' (Graham, 1989, p. 106)
- Descartes and Leibniz saw China as more advanced than the West
- Wang Chong – Han dynasty – concept of force
- Francis Bacon – gunpowder, paper money & the compass
- Concept *fa* 法 – 'let 100 flowers bloom', 'tiananmen'
- Longest continuous written culture.
- Rote learning from textbook – knowledge as a fixed commodity.
- 18 year olds generally think of knowledge as a fixed commodity (Pennington 2003)
- Cultural chauvinism?

## Motivation for Postgraduate International Student for Study in the Faculty of Economics and Business

- Survey – based on Harris and Halpin (2002) - *Development and Validation of the Factors Influencing Pursuit of Higher Education Questionnaire*
- 32 questions + data on nationality, 1<sup>st</sup> language, other languages spoken, undergraduate university and degree awarded, longest essay written in English (number of words), & IELTS average score.
- Introductory Microeconomics ECON5001 & Advanced Financial Reporting ACCT6001
- 283 respondents yielding 274 usable surveys.

## Results

- 91% students Chinese language speakers.
- 10% SA/A parents chose their current degree
- Only 15% SA/A that English skills were good – of these only 6 scored 7.5 or above while 12 only scored 6.5
- 35% SA/A chose degree to get PR.

Chinese international student —  
reflective journal entry

- “The other two important things I have learned from this course is how to critically evaluate the world around me and bring out my own argument to convince others. I have learn that university is a place to start build up my own value of the world, that things happen in the world is not simply good or bad, it is important to understand the story and the background of it, so that I can understand why it is happening and the other sides of them. Challenging professional people is not a wrong thing to do since it is challenge and doubt that help us bring up knowledge. Having my own stance is important because it represents a part of me.”