

**The difference between Western and Eastern education**

**- Education system in need of change?**

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## **I. Introduction:**

People tend to think that Westerners are more assertive and creative, while Easterners are more conservative and reserved. So what makes all these difference? I would suggest it is the result of the different education systems. Having studied under both foreign and local teachers, I discovered that their approaches to teaching are fundamentally different. In this essay, I would like to examine and evaluate these differences. This is vitally important as it influences our choices and responses in life beyond school. And will finally determine our values, the quality of our lives and the satisfaction we derive from life.

## **II. Thesis:**

### A. Teacher-centered and student-centered

I would say that the prime difference between the two education systems is that one uses teacher-centered classes, and the other uses student-centered classes. In the Eastern education system, the teacher is the only authority; his or her words are not to be questioned. Students are not expected to speak up in class or respond to the questions that the teacher asks. Therefore, most of the questions are rather rhetorical. Questions are brought up for the teachers to answer. Thus, there is no motivation for the students to be active. This leads to a very unusually phenomenon, the students sleeping in class.

Students of the Western education system, on the contrary, participate more in class. They have class or group discussions and they are forced to express opinions, which are valued. In this way, students also listen to other's ideas, which make them not only learn from the teachers, but also their peers.

### B. Memorizing and understanding

The way students learn individually (not as members of a class) also differs from East to West. For instance, Eastern education is mainly based on book learning and memorization. They focus on classics and exams. Teachers often have to rush through the textbooks to meet the deadline of every monthly examination. Hence, students learn from memorizing facts, which are often forgotten after a short period of time, rather than understanding. And the lack of understanding all the facts results in the need for cram schools. However, sometimes students put too much dependence on

cram schools and often exhaust themselves, which can easily pull down the efficiency of learning. I noticed that recently teachers tried to train us in the ability to analyze and organize information we receive, but exams put pressure on students to ignore this, since memorizing information is the key to winning points. Somehow the community has formed a rather queer concept that certificates and scores are believed to represent ability. In the end, all we are best at doing is scoring high in exams or getting a diploma. Even our attitude and behavior is graded by numbers. The truth is, however, that most of us show lack of efficiency in solving problems we are confronted, and oftentimes we find difficulties when it comes to organizing activities or our daily routine. We are so competitive but we're still not in step with the more advanced countries.

If we take a look in the Western way, they have a comparatively relaxed pace of learning. This allows better and deeper understanding of the topic they are working on. They spend more time on class and group discussion in order to know how to speak up logically and learn to accept other people's opinions. They are often given assignments in the format of a report or project and will have to do their own research and gradually develop their independence. Presentations are also expected to be given properly with a clear voice and information, good time-control and stable eye contact. The skill of taking notes directly from the teacher's lecture replaces following lifeless textbooks. This is the education of training students to be provided with skills they will need in their further studies and future careers.

### C. Conformity and originality

The Eastern education system puts a great deal of emphasis on conformity. There are tons of school rules to follow and students are expected to line up like troops when attending assembly. Rules like: "sneakers and socks have to be white or black", "shirts need to be tucked in", and "no makeup or nail polish is allowed" are common. I personally don't think these issues have anything to do with one's attitude. All students are basically graded by scores they get in the exams. The disadvantage of this is that some students might study around the clock but still fail and this would terribly cut down the interest they have towards studies. The Eastern education system seems to be working on producing "perfect", "zero-mistakes" students. Any action that's out of the ordinary is regarded as some sort of rebellion and will be questioned or punished. Occupations like doctors and lawyers are regarded as decent jobs to do while being an artist or designer is not so respected by others since in our education system, only those who score low in exams attend vocational schools. This prevents

those with special talents from developing into professionals.

Unlike the Eastern system, in the Western education system, mistakes are considered positive. There is no doubt that humans at least once in a while make mistakes, and for Westerners, these are simply steps towards learning and are perfect chances to mature. In contrast to the Eastern grading system, they grade students by assessment of their performance. This way, students who put lots of effort to their studies can be satisfied with the grades they get and will maintain the motivation to keep up the good work and those who don't work hard also learn that lack of effort is not sufficient to earn a good outcome. Originality and extracurricular activities are highlighted and encouraged, activities like a donation contest, visiting an orphanage or building houses for the poor. Consequently, they produce more artists and designers that dominate the fashion trends and create a more concerned community.

#### D. Relationship between teachers and students

Traditionally, the relationship between teachers and students has always been tense between students and teachers in Eastern culture. Teachers are meant to be respected and sometimes students even have to bear teachers' bad temper. No matter how familiar we are with a teacher, it is not easy for us to automatically talk to them about our concerns. Some don't even speak freely with their peers.

Students under Western education generally are more willing to speak about their problems to their counselors and are more flexible about other people's advice. This is also due to the fact that Westerners consider emotional problems as something normal and always try to be optimistic about them. Through lots of discussions and debates in class, teachers have the status of an assistant or guide instead of a director.

### **III. Conclusion:**

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that there are some definite differences between the two education systems. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Western education encourages people to pursue their true interests, producing a broad range of skills and areas of expertise. Eastern education, on the other hand, discourages the pursuit of learning that has no strictly practical purpose, such as visual and performing arts. Eastern education, however, is an efficient way of training people to perform tasks that require quick and precise thinking.

Confucius is known to be the greatest teacher ever. In schools, we are taught about all the famous lines that he said. Things like “The teacher should teach differently according to every student’s condition” are familiar to all of us, but do we see it inside our education? It’s very ironic that we have the greatest teacher ever but we produce “robot” students. Surely there are some wonderful teachers showing up now and then, but if the whole system doesn’t change, it would be difficult to just rely on this small portion of teachers.

Overall, I would say that the advantages of Western education outweigh its shortcomings. Western education produces people who are able to make choices more consistent with their own true interests. Therefore, they ultimately achieve more satisfying lives. This gives them the motivation to follow their interest with passion which drives them to become leaders in their chosen field. In the East, seniors often tell us to equip ourselves so that we will have the ability to help others after becoming an adult, but the West lets students participate in charity work since childhood or adolescence and this gradually becomes one of their habits. In actual fact, there is so much we can do even if we are only seventeen or eighteen.

In addition to individual consequences, the education system also has an impact at the social level. For example, the two education systems produce different values. Eastern education gives out the concept that working is the main purpose of life. While this creates some social stability, it also means that the spiritual life of each person is easy to impoverish. On the contrary, Westerners know better how to relish life and this world. I believe if we want our society to be more progressive and be in line with the most advanced countries, there is definitely a need to reform our education system.

#### **IV. Resources:**

The following is the survey that I gave out to several students. These answers and my own experience have been the source of the information used in this essay.

1. Name:  
Age:  
Gender:  
Occupation:  
Nationality:
2. Please give a brief description of your education up to and including high school.

(National/ international school, your attitude towards learning new things...)

3. Please give a brief description of the way your school gives out homework (reports, presentations, tests...) and the way they teach (group discussion, corporal punishment...). Do you agree with it?
4. How does the education in school affect you? ( before and after going into society)
5. How do you solve/ react to things you are not satisfied with?
6. How do your teachers deal with your mistakes?
7. If your teachers and you have opposite opinions, how do you deal with it?
8. In your opinion, what's the difference between Western and Eastern education?

A. Students under Eastern education system: (Translated by Joyce Lin.)

a.

1. Name: Xu Tian Lin

Age: 17

Gender: female

Occupation: student

Nationality: Taiwan

2. From elementary school to junior high, I attended national schools outside Taipei. And I attended a Taipei national high school.

3. Homework is mostly give out in the format of written reports. There is rarely any opportunity for oral reports. Under the justification of advancing to a higher school, teachers cram all the “will-be-on-the-test” things into us.

4. In my impression, I was born to be a very lively and outgoing person, but after receiving such an education, the pressure of exams and the common anticipation and values of society forced me to work towards the same direction as everybody else.

5. I pour out my troubles to my mom, and deal with them after listening to her comments.

6. Mostly exhortation and encouragement.

7. Compromise both ideas.

8. The Western emphasis is more on individual thinking and the development of creativity. Eastern puts more weight on conventional knowledge.

b.

1. Name: Yang Sun Xin

Age: 17

Gender: male

Occupation: student

Nationality: Taiwan

2. Not much studying during junior high. I usually read novels in class. I have to concentrate in high school, though I don't want to.

3. Mostly the exercises in the textbooks. In elementary school, if homework is not handed in then we can't leave. We have corporal punishment in junior high, I didn't like it or dislike it.

4. When we are not yet into the society, it seems that schools are just for studying, but I think after going into the society, we will realize that lots of principles we learned will be in use.

5. Find someone to pour it out and ignore it.

6. Some teachers call for a marshal (教官), some counsel me by themselves.

7. Sometimes I mutter and ignore them.

8. The West has more freedom and independence.

c.

1. Name: Li Qiao

Age: 18

Gender: female

Occupation: student

Nationality: Taiwan

2. I've always attended national schools. It was more interesting and easier to understand in elementary and junior high. I was more willing to learn, the range of

subjects was smaller but I felt like knowing more and my attitude was more aggressive.

3. Scarcely any oral presentation. If there is one, normally we did badly due to lack of preparation. Fewer written reports as well, but I prefer oral or reports because I feel more involved in the subject. Tests should be of appropriate frequency, so that we have enough time to prepare for them, or else it's just useless. The education system has lots of problems. How can they expect us to be perfect?

4. (Good question...) Besides the knowledge in class, it's important to learn to associate with people, as well as face the truth that there are some shortcomings in our education, accept some facts in life and know how to respect and tolerate all kinds of things.

5. Express it tactfully in private.

6. I think I was hit by a cram school teacher when I was young because of low score. Usually they just exhort us to do better.

7. Blame him or her behind his or her back (just to vent), and be really nice and obedient in his or her face, so that there won't be so much trouble. But they wouldn't know that I'm upset so they won't change.

8. Western education seems to be livelier and there is more interaction between teachers and students. Students can more easily bring their talent into full play, and are more creative. They also tend to have more personal space with lesser stress, which makes them more aggressive. Teachers also respect students' opinions, and won't embarrassed them just because they answered something stupid. This gives students more confidence, and teachers teach in a more dynamic way.

The pace of Taiwanese education is too hurried. Because of this, we can't absorb information well enough and this, therefore, causes more stress. The way the teachers teach is normally boring, especially if there is too much to learn, and too many tests to take with too little time to study. It's hard to learn well even if I want to. They don't take our physical limits into consideration, which overwhelms us, again reducing the motivation we have toward learning. All the teachers and elders care about is the scores and certificates we get, but not the talent we

naturally have. They don't enlighten our ability, as if a student getting a poor grade means he's/she's fooling around. They need to find a proper way to teach.

d.

1. Name: Song Xian Hao

Age: 17

Gender: male

Occupation: student

Nationality: Taiwan

2. I attended national school. It's only when I'm learning sports that I feel more interested, and can be more focused. I will also study books about sports.

3. Mostly reports and lots of tests. I like reports better. I was caned....the "love education".

4. Before going into society: The lessons in school seemed to be useless, but schools forced us to have a better daily schedule and we were under someone else's control.

After going into society: We know more about what to do and what can't be done, and we can present ourselves better to others.

5. Depends on the situation. If it's able to be corrected, then I'll try, if it's not possible, then I'll just leave it.

6. The teacher will give me a few chances; if I keep on making the same mistake then they will give me detention or call my parents.

7. Both make a concession or use another method, or just give in.

8. The West sounds more open and has more diversity in information and sources. And it seems to be more fun. The East is more competitive.

B. Students under Western education system:

a.

1. Name: Anthony Robinson

Age: 18

Gender: male

Occupation: student

Nationality: Irish

2. I've had Irish secondary school and am at the moment doing the leaving certificate. I've studied Japanese in a Japanese language school in Japan for 6 weeks. That's it, I suppose.

My attitude to learning new things is great. I want to learn as much as I can, possibly everything. I don't care what it is, whether life lessons or others.

3. Well, I don't know. They would cover the material in class and set homework to do that night or week. Group discussions, yes, because you get to hear everybody's opinions.

4. Well, I don't think my old school was that good because I felt I was very sheltered and when it was time for me to leave, I felt alone and confused and not really knowing where and what I'm doing.

5. Depends.

6. Depends on the teacher; some thought that you would learn from your mistakes and others were angrily impatient.

7. It has never really happened because I don't learn subjects that teach philosophy or things like that. Naturally, there is a set course, so basically just facts you must learn. So they're right most of the time.

8. Well, I don't know enough to really have a judgment on it. But the thing that I would probably point out is that the Eastern system is a lot tougher and harder and there is more to learn and things like that than the Western education.

b.

1. Name: Tomo Nishizawa

Age: 17

Gender: Female

Occupation: Student

Nationality: Japan

2. I went to a Japanese kindergarten and Japanese school for 1st grade. I've also attended international schools in Canada, Yemen and Qatar. I believe my attitude towards learning new things has always been positive. Although I procrastinate work, I don't mind learning. In fact I often enjoy it.
3. We are given assignments in the form of group projects, essays and presentations mostly. However it feels like we have lots of essays to write as high school students. The way we are taught... I guess we have lots of discussions during class. Yes, I think it's an effective way of learning. It allows one to express his or her opinion, at the same time, listening to what others say.
4. We just had a discussion about this at our dinner table. I don't know if what I am learning right now is going to help me in my future. I don't know if my future profession has anything that's got to deal with what I'm learning at the moment. Yet, I guess it's worth it because then I gain common knowledge. It will be of use someday.
5. I stick with something until I feel satisfied. For instance, if I don't understand a problem in chemistry, I don't easily give up. I think, think, think and try to solve it. If I don't get it, then I go ask the teacher the next day.
6. Teachers deal with my mistakes? I don't think they care whether we make mistakes. I think we are in a privileged environment wherein teachers accept our mistakes. They probably think that making mistakes will help us learn. I personally don't think making mistakes is bad.
7. If my teacher has a different opinion than me, it doesn't really matter. I just think that that's how they think. But that's not going to influence how I think.
8. The image that I have of Western education is that they encourage students to voice their opinions. They seem to seek for creative and critical thinking out of us. On the other hand, Eastern education seems to be more rigid in structure. Teachers have somewhat more control over students, and there is not much communication between the two of them.

c.

1. Name: William Epps

Age: 19

Gender: Male

Occupation: Student

Nationality: British

2. I went to two very working class schools, which were very much in contrast to my more middle class upbringing, before high school, which had a more varied mix of people. As I have always lived in a very rural area, however, this was still mostly people from working and middle class white backgrounds. Generally, I was very keen to learn, but I have some specific learning difficulties, which, coupled with class attitudes, definitely held me back.

3. The sixth form college I'm at at the moment (sixth form is similar to the last two years of high school in America), homework really depends on the subject: In English, we're normally assigned an essay every Friday, to be completed for the next Friday. In Italian, we normally have vocabulary tests on Mondays, and essays set intermittently. Spanish, there is no pattern at all. Film and Media, we very rarely are set homework. Teaching also varies from subject to subject, although I have found that my film and media teacher, whilst truly having the mind of a genius, is not quite a teacher to match that; he gives lessons in the form of University lectures, with no group discussion whatsoever. My previous teacher in this subject more or less taught entirely through group discussion, introducing ideas and allowing the class to debate them, as well as attempting to bring out our own ideas, which was a method I preferred. In language subjects, all learning is very vocal and aural, which is good for me as I learn best through speech and discussion, though inevitably there is some note taking and essay writing. I personally don't think there's any guaranteed-to-work teaching method, but I have a good rapport with all my teachers, so I don't have too many problems with the way they teach.

4. This really depends on who you ask, as a lot of the time you will find people in the UK school system whose knowledge base is more or less identical, and there isn't much diversity of ideas. This is specific to individuals as much as the education, however, as people who can find areas they are truly interested in have more interesting ideas, and probably end up better equipped to go into 'the real world'.

5. I'm comfortable talking to all my teachers, and they all seem willing to take my

complaints on board. This is a maturity thing, as some students still draw up a very strict boundary between themselves and the teaching staff, but most teachers are happy to listen to their students and will take into consideration any problems they have.

6. By correcting me. Homework is always given back with plenty of notes and feedback, making it easy to see what you're doing wrong and how to fix this.
7. Both me and my teachers are open minded enough to respect each others opinions, and they're happy to discuss them with you without forcing ideas on you.
8. I can't really answer this, having only ever been schooled in the UK, but my impression is that they both have similar aims. The main difference I'm aware of, which is more to do with the contrasting cultures than the actual school systems is that Western Education focuses on self sufficiency much earlier than in the East; Though I may be wrong about this, I have been told that in Asia, students are encouraged to focus on their schoolwork, whereas in Europe and presumably America, extra curricular activities (charity work, etc) and part time jobs are far more common.

d.

1. Name: Ayaka Nakano

Age: 17

Gender: female

Occupation: student

Nationality: Japan

2. Kindergarten and pre-school in a Japanese school.

1st-2nd grade in an international school in Indonesia (I was nervous at this stage, because I didn't understand English).

3rd-7th grade in Kyoto International School (it was a small school so I had a lot of fun. Many times, we learned not from text books but from experience, so it was interesting).

8 ~ 12th grades in Canadian Academy, where I learned the most out of the education I had.

3. It depends on the class. In math, we get homework from text books, while chemistry we have lab reports, and homework from text books. In economics, we have to answer questions after reading the textbook. In English we have to read

books, and write essays and be prepared for group discussion. Sometimes we have presentations. In French, we have to write journals and essays. In Japanese, we have essays, questions, reading books, presentations and we have tests and quizzes for each unit. I guess I agree with our school system because it helps us learn.

4. Education affects how we act after we graduate from school because it affects how we think and believe. If I was raised up in a Japanese school, I wouldn't be able to talk as much. And I guess I got more open.

5. Depends on the situation, but usually I get advice from people like my friends or my family. I think there's a way to solve every problem, so I'll think and find a way.

6. Depends on the teacher, but they will correct my mistakes over and over again so I finally get them.

7. I can't really argue with the teacher so I will just take it in and give up.

8. I don't really know about Eastern education.