

Chapter 1

Chinese Pedagogy or Western Andragogy?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports the results of a study designed to compare Chinese adult education methods with Western (i.e., United States) educational methods using the conceptual framework of the principles of andragogy. Adult educators from two universities in China and one university in the United States responded to an online survey comprised of closed- and open-ended questions about their teaching practices. Study results indicated that while the U.S. educators were consistently andragogical in their approach, Chinese adult educators were less so. Although a few andragogical elements were reported by the Chinese educators, their approach appeared more pedagogical, a finding that was consistent with reports in the literature of adult education in China. Even in 1998, under the leadership of the former administration, the Chinese people were promised the growth of China's education system. Today, China provides resources to support education so that China is more competitive in the global market today. China's blueprint for the future is evidence of the commitment to education China emphasizes. China has created its own Ivy League schools to support the next generation workforce that are competitive with Ivy League schools in the United States. China's Ivy League is funded by the government. It leads to the question of whether the recession of 2008 in the United States will negatively impact the services American institutions will offer and ultimately affect the number of international students enrolling in universities in the United States. It also leads to the question on whether China will surpass the United States in the quality of education it provides to its students and therefore reduce the number of Chinese students who study in the United States. The style of teaching in this new system may impact both the quality of education provided and its impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Few issues have more concerned China's present leadership, or more excited Western scholars, than the failure of China's heavy reliance on adult education to promote desired changes in political ideology, socio-economic relations and human productive capabilities (Wang & Colletta, 1991) at the end of the 20th century. Although China's current adult education teaching methods have exerted considerable influence in Japan, Korea and other Southeast Asian nations, these methods are fundamentally pedagogical rather than andragogical or a more student-centered approach. As noted by Biggs (1996), the Chinese teacher is viewed as an authority figure that relies on lecture method that focuses primarily on items that are to be tested through quantitatively measured exams. The teacher expects the students to master the content often through repetition using a subject-centered approach. The teacher uses external rewards system as well as punishment for lack of student performance.

Since 1911, China's leaders have experimented broadly with culturally distinct educational principles imported from the West. However, andragogy, a popular approach to adult learning in the West for over 30 years (Wang & Bott, 2004; Wang & King, 2006; Wang & Cranton, 2012), has never gained a foothold in China. Even John Dewey, an outspoken supporter of experiential learning method who lectured for 26 months in China during 1919-1921 (Kaplan, Sobin, & Andors, 1979), failed to exert appreciable influence on adult education in China. Pedagogy has remained firmly entrenched as the preferred method of adult education in China, and China's leaders have overlooked andragogy's potential for fostering the desired transformation and emancipation of Chinese adult learners. However, as educational reform develops in China, perhaps this is the time to witness changes in educational goals, teaching methods, and course content. The 1998 administration helped to grow China's

universities (Douglass, 2012). The administration set goals to grow China's education system. Enrollment increased. Additionally, the quality of China's education system improved. Douglass continues to say how China has strived to develop its knowledge base in its people by focusing on the quality of education in the universities in China. The Chinese government was fast to jump on the band wagon and demonstrates its support toward education. Policies were developed. In 1998 the 985 Project was born and so were the first nine (9) Chinese Ivy League universities:

1. Fudan University
2. Harbin Institute of Technology
3. Nanjing University
4. Peking University
5. Shanghai Jiao Tong University
6. Tsinghua University
7. University of Science and Technology of China
8. Xi'an Jiao Tong University
9. Zhejiang University

Since the birth of these nine (9) Ivy League universities, many more universities have been born. There have been a total of thirty-nine world class universities developed since the birth of the project. The 985 Project was intended to develop Chinese universities into institutions that would compete with other world class institutions globally. The project is within its third phase: 2009 – current (Qi, 2011).

It was the hope of the Chinese government that these universities would ultimately be part of the 2020 Blueprint. The 2020 Blueprint would support universities to incorporate some of the finest features of the leading universities: something that the Chinese would certainly support (Douglass, 2012). According to the 2020 Blueprint, higher education in China would continue to grow and develop. The blueprint will look closely at how education is delivered to the students and organized; constantly looking to improve. Rather than

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