

Chinese Early Childhood Parenting Style as a Moderator of the Development of Social Competence Based on Mindreading

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Abstract : The first issue that we discuss in this paper is a battery of research demonstrating that culture influences children's performance in tasks testing their theory of mind, also known as mindreading. We devote special attention to research done within Chinese culture; namely, studies with children speaking Cantonese and Mandarin natively and growing up in an environment dominated by the Chinese model of informal home education. Our attention focuses on the differences in development and functioning of social abilities and competences between children from China and the West. Another matter we turn to is the description of the nature of Chinese early childhood education. We suggest that the differences between the Chinese model and that of the West reveal a set of modifiers responsible for the variation observed in empirical research on children's theory of mind (mindreading). The modifiers we identify are the following: (1) early socialization – that is, the transformation of the child into a member of the family and society that set special value by the social and physical environment; (2) the Confucian model of education – that is, the Chinese alphabet and tradition that determine a certain way of education in China; (3) the authoritarian style of upbringing – that is, reinforcing conformism, discouraging voicing of private opinions, and respect for elders; (4) the modesty of children and protectiveness of parents – that is, obedience as a desired characteristic in the child, overprotectiveness of parents, especially mothers; and (5) gender differences – that is, different educational styles for girls and boys. In our study, we conduct a thorough meta-analysis of empirical data on the development of mindreading and ToM (children's theory of mind), as well as a cultural analysis of early childhood education in China. We support our analyses with questionnaire and narrative studies conducted in China that use the 'Children's Social Understanding Scale' questionnaire, conversations based on the so-called 'Scenarios Presented to Parents', and questions designed to measure the 'my child and I' relation. With our research we aim to identify the factors in early childhood education that serve as moderators explaining the nature of the development and functioning of social cognition based on mind reading in China. Additionally, our study provides a valuable insight for comparative research of social cognition between China and the West.

Keywords : early childhood education, China, mindreading, parenting

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