Aspects of Psychology in China
Before we explore Chinese Psychology it is important to review some fundamentals of cross cultural studies first:

A) Power Distance

The extent to which members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1980)

High-power-distance cultures accept inequality between elite or leaders and subordinates, also between breadwinners and other family members e.g., patriarchy
B) Individualist versus Collective Cultures

Definitions

**Individualist** culture is a culture in which the goals of the individual take precedence over the goals of the group.

**Collectivist** culture is a culture in which the goals of the group take precedence over the goals of the individual.
The distinction lies in what extent to which cultures promote individual values over collective values.

There is a correlation...

Individualist cultures tend to be economically rich.

Collectivist cultures tend to be economically poor. ... but there are exceptions.

Also applies on a personal level.

That is, one can personally be collectivist while his or her culture is individualist.
In an individualist culture, members are responsible for themselves and, perhaps, their immediate families.

In a collectivist culture, members are responsible for the group as a whole.

In an individualist culture, success is measured by how far one stands out from the crowd.
   EX: self-made millionaires, employees of the month, standing out...

In a collectivist culture, success is measured by one’s contributions to the group as a whole.
   EX: loyalty to company or country, specialized skills, fitting in...
Individualistic:
France, Netherlands, Nordic countries, Czech, Hungary, Poland, Italy, German Speaking Countries, USA, “Anglo” Countries

Collectivistic:
Thailand, Korea, Costa Rica, Chile, Russia, Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, China, Japan, Mexico, Venezuela, Arab World, Greece
C) High-context cultures and Low-context cultures

High-context cultures (including much of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and South America)

• Emphasize interpersonal relationships.
• Tend to be collectivist, preferring group harmony and consensus to individual achievement.
• Words are not so important as context, which might include the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, posture, position, status, and age.
• High-context communication tends to be more indirect and more formal. Humility, and elaborate apologies are common.
**Low-context cultures** (including North America and much of Western Europe)

- Logical, linear, individualistic, and action-oriented. People from low-context cultures value logic, facts, and directness.

- Speakers are expected to be straightforward, concise, and efficient.

- Very different from those in high-context cultures who depend less on language precision and legal documents. High-context business people may even distrust contracts and be offended by the lack of trust they suggest.
CHINESE CHILDHOOD SOCIALIZATION

Childhood Socialization:
  ▪ how parents raise their children
  ▪ how children learn to become acceptable members of a society.

In the Chinese historical and cultural context what values and behaviors are to be instilled in a child?
The Confucian Tradition of Parental Education

As early as the 1st century C.E. Confucian scholars noted that adult family members were the key to early childhood education.

By the time of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, neo-Confucian scholars were writing essays to guide parents in providing their children with proper discipline (the Sanzijing).
In this view, a person by nature does not become an acceptable human being unless educated through deliberate efforts to attain *ren*.

The emphasis is placed both on paternal responsibility for instruction and the child’s responsibility for learning about the way of becoming human.
The basic assumption of the Confucian scholars is that a child’s disposition derives from environmental influences, even before birth and during gestation.

When a woman becomes pregnant she engages in ‘gestational education,’ in order that she may be able to impart to the child a proper disposition before it is born.”

If she is affected by good things the child will be good, if by bad things the child will be bad.
ENVIROMENTAL THEORIES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

• The process of learning to become human, according to Confucian theorists, must begin early in the family.

• The ancient Chinese theories of child development emphasize the formation of habits of correct behavior without a trace of deliberate teaching or coercion.
MODELS AND STRATEGIES OF TRADITIONAL CHILD REARING

Thus, teaching by example was and still is an important principle. EX. a father, a school-teacher

Parents, as the child’s first teachers, must model exemplary behavior to set a life-long foundation for the child.
TRAINING OF AFFECTIVE CONTROL

Early training in the control of affective display is part of the education in good manners.

*Yanshi Jiaxun*, Yan’s Family Teaching (531-91 AD): train a child from infancy to interpret an adult’s facial expressions and to act according to parental wishes.

Yan’s 20 essays on family education set a model for later Confucian scholars.
Emphasis: composed, reverential behavior and on the restriction of physical activities among children.

Parents should teach their children “no leaping, arguing, joking, or using vulgar language.”

“How children should be taught to sit, stand, walk, speak, bow, recite, and write.”

“The little ones are exhorted always to walk slowly with the arms held under the sleeves, with no waving of the arms or jumping.”
An important aspect of socialization in traditional Chinese culture is to train a child to hold back one’s thoughts and feelings.

Chinese parents pressured to instill solemnity and self-control early on in their children.
The age at which a child is old enough to be punished is based on the assumed developmental stages of a person’s capacity for moral reasoning: called dongshi (understanding things).

“When the son reaches the age of dongshi (understanding/reason), the father must be serious and proper in his speech and way of living in order to teach his son.”
In Sima Guang’s (1019-86 C.E.) Jia fan (Family Examples): “As soon as the child can eat by himself, he must be taught to eat with his right hand. Family discipline must begin as soon as the child can talk and begin to know things. By the age of six, teaching of numbers and names of things must begin.”
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIALIZATION

Training for obedience, proper conduct, impulse-control and the acceptance of social obligations

Training children to develop a moral character, such as respecting elders, cooperation and maintaining harmonious social relations.

They help and push children to achieve in school, and expect adults to set examples for children to emulate.

Young parents may not be harsh disciplinarians, but they still expect children to obey, to act on parents’ command.

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES AMONGST CHINESE FOLKS:
Boys and girls should receive equal levels of education. This is a departure from the more traditional Chinese attitude.

Mothers are expected to discipline boys more severely than fathers. This also varies from traditional thinking.
Different from Shanghai parents: Parents should show loving, tender care to children, a view that goes against the traditional idea that a father must be strict & a mother must be kind.

Contrast with parents in Shanghai: Taiwanese parents generally agree on embracing and kissing to show love. It is all right to show intimacy with a spouse in front of the children.
SOCIALIZATION IN SINGAPORE

They depend less on physical punishment than parents on the Mainland (People’s Republic of China).

Parents take the position that they are more Westernized, allowing their children to be assertive.
EMOTION AMONG THE CHINESE

Arthur Kleinman (Harvard anthropologist, 1986 paper): Chinese tend to believe emotion to be destabilizing; they value moderation in all matters, and emphasize social harmony over individual expression.

Thus, emotional behavior is moderate or suppressed.
Emotional Behavior in a Social Context

Potter (1988) provides a different analysis: Emotions are simply less relevant in China than they are in the West.

They do not achieve social ends and are not needed to legitimate social relationships.

Harmful emotions can therefore be discouraged; others’ emotions can be expressed but ignored.
(ROMANTIC) LOVE IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE COMMUNITY

Potter: In China, social order, relationships and behavior do not require an emotional basis.

In the West, love is thought to be the proper basis of relationship between husband and wife and between father and son.

In the village Potter studied in China, romantic love was not required for a successful marriage or filial piety.

Marriages were arranged between persons from different villages.
(ROMANTIC) LOVE IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE COMMUNITY

A father who expressed affection for a son was thought to invite a breakdown of proper respect.

Love, rather than affirming the social structure, was seen to endanger it.

“Romantic love is culturally alien in Mainland China... marriage choice is ideally based on ‘good feelings.’”

A person with good feelings toward another is willing to work and sacrifice on behalf of that person. i.e. unconditional responsibility and altruism.
(ROMANTIC) LOVE IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE COMMUNITY

However, Jankowiak (1993 paper): Study of Hohhot, the capital of the inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

Romantic love as the theme of films and magazines. Young people date and fall in love.

Jankowiak: “Romantic love existed well before the founding of the Han dynasty, in some cases, actually thrived in the face of powerful parental opposition.”
Traditional marriage: arranged, without passionate love; but emphasis obligation & duty

Yet, in *Shijing* the first anthology of Chinese poetry compiled Confucius, there is romantic love 6th-5th BCE.

Often stories describe love between a man and a concubine where the man can make his own choice of his lover.
ConTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGICAL BELIEFS: EXTERNALITY & THE NATURE OF THE OUTCOME

Humility: a modest or low view of one's own importance; humbleness.

The humility norm for Chinese people is seen in the tendency to make external attributions for successes (others’ joint effort) and internal attributions for failures (blaming oneself).

The humility norm in Chinese societies suggests that Chinese people select more internal explanations for failures than for success, the US the opposite.
Compared with Americans, Chinese believe that academic achievements are more strongly related to effort.

Such an emphasis on effort is rooted in human malleability which is advocated by Confucianism.
BELIEFS ABOUT SELF-CONCEPT

Chinese hold a less positive view of the self than do people in the US (or Canada).

Bond (1986): the humility norm in Chinese societies may lead to a less positive evaluation of the self, and that:

“in the absence of further research, one cannot assume that low self-esteem in the Chinese has the same implications for social functioning as the same level in respondents from some other cultures.”
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL BELIEFS: COLLECTIVISM

Chinese: collectivistic

Because the futures of individuals from the same in-group are inter-related and that each person’s well-being depends upon the results of collective effort.

If each person follows the norms of the group and acts in the interest of the group, the group will be harmonious and prosperous.
The collectiveness of Chinese leads them to believe that an effective way to get things done is often through one’s *guanxi* (interpersonal connections).

Chinese tend to believe that out-group members are less likely to be dependable and trustworthy than are members of the in-group.
BELIEFS RELATED TO POWER DISTANCE

Social structure for Chinese: hierarchical and exhibits a large power distance.

The basic belief is that the ideal way to organize a collective is through a well-defined hierarchy, with explicit responsibilities for each role in the hierarchy.

E.g. the typical leadership pattern in Chinese societies tends to be paternalistic and authoritarian.