

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Title: Summary and Review of
Zhao, Y. (2014). *Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Dragon?*

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Summary/ Abstract: Zhao was raised and educated in China. He furthered his study in the USA and wrote about China education. This is a popular book on the subject.

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Chapter Summary of Zhao's *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Dragon?*

Appendix: River Elegy

Zhao's popular book jumped the bandwagon of criticizing China. He points to the euphoric, uncritical enthusiasm of endorsing China's high-PISA score; he argues it was the result of authoritarianism.

The book tells little about China's education; it is some shallow criticism of China's authoritarian rule and its repressive culture in general, (Chapter 1 – 5) followed by superficial criticism of China's education (Chapter 6 – 8).

- (1) The book is for mass consumption and helps to promote / perpetuate the negative attitude on China, Chinese culture and CCP.
- (2) Zhao is eager to promote liberalism and creativity, seeing Chinese as offering none.
- (3) More worse, Zhao argued that China's authoritarianism and homogeneity produces high exam scores and simply stifles creativity.
- (4) He casually cited Chinese history (ancient and contemporary) to support his point, a selective story teller.
- (5) Then he picks about news / events in China education. It alerts me that I know so little and have so much to learn.
- (6) Easy to read, some lines / sources to follow but little ideas to pick.

Introduction

Zhao outlined US education's recent race for scores, from George W Bush's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) to Obama's *Race To The Top* (RTTT).

He cited cases of Beverly Hall's fraudulent test scores (p.1 – 3) on the US urge for higher academic performance but failed. But his position is:

If the United States and the rest of the West are concerned about being overtaken by China, the best solution is to avoid becoming China.

Chp 1. It contains quite a good summary of US's admiration of China's success (2000 – 2013). (p.15 – 26) He named Thomas Friedman's *China for a Day* (p. 15), Joshua Ramo's *Beijing Consensus* (p. 17), Time's '*China Takes the World*' (p.18), Jacques' '*When China rules the*

worlds' (p.19), and Marc Tucker's *'Surpassing Shanghai'* (p. 20) It's worth going to original sources. See also US poll on attitudes to China (p. 26)

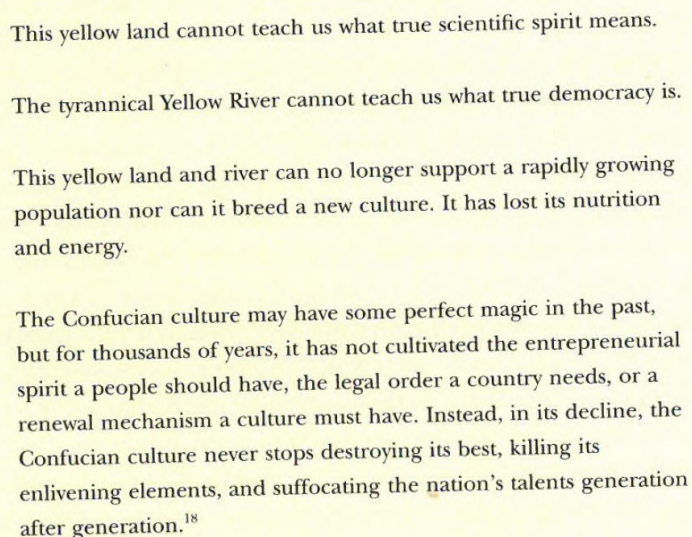
Chp 2. Imperial China used Kejie (科舉) to rule and control its people. It is “a perfect machine for homogenization” (p.29)

As a system formally initiated by an emperor who seized the throne from his own boss, keju was first and foremost developed to prevent anyone else from repeating the emperor's coup.

Zhao wrote an anecdote history in journalistic style. Full of spiteful stories, but too simplistic, all common knowledge to an educated Chinese.

Chp 3. Zhao wrote about the 1978 economic reform and made it as “The peasants who saved China” (p.51), on the stories of Xiaogang Village (安徽·小溪河鎮小崗村). It is stupidly entertaining. Then the story of Fool's Sunflower Seeds (p.54) and the Coke Battle (p.61) for laugh. Paul Krugman was called in (p.66) too.

Chp 4. Zhao tells the Qing dynasty story from self-strengthening to collapse, plus River Elegy (河殤) (p.88) to shatter Chinese Culture (1988)



This yellow land cannot teach us what true scientific spirit means.

The tyrannical Yellow River cannot teach us what true democracy is.

This yellow land and river can no longer support a rapidly growing population nor can it breed a new culture. It has lost its nutrition and energy.

The Confucian culture may have some perfect magic in the past, but for thousands of years, it has not cultivated the entrepreneurial spirit a people should have, the legal order a country needs, or a renewal mechanism a culture must have. Instead, in its decline, the Confucian culture never stops destroying its best, killing its enlivening elements, and suffocating the nation's talents generation after generation.¹⁸

Chp 5. Zhao exposes China fake academic fabrication and low-quality patents. He called them little cleverness and junk papers (p. 107)

When the emperor (or, more recently, the Chinese central government) desires something, the people make it happen, at any cost and in all sorts of ways, including fabrication.

Chinese patents grew from 12,672 in 1991 to 415,829 in 2011, a thirty-two-fold increase.

He mentions 3 reasons of practice and success: wishful thinking, (p.112), upward mobility (p. 113) and a uniform and quantifiable standard (p.115)

Chp 6. Zhao said exams killed creativity

- (1) A Peking University Graduate becomes a butcher (p.122) with quilt. (p.122)
- (2) Education as homogenized

Education in China is, in essence, a process through which those willing to comply are homogenized, and those unwilling or unable to comply – but quite possibly talented or interested in other, nonscholarly pursuits – are eliminated.

- (3) Can PISA be prepped (p.130 – 133)
- (4) The Maotanchang School (p.134 – 138) (安徽六安毛坦廠中學)

Chp 7. China wants to reform but failed.

- (1) Cultural revolution and Mao (p.143 – 145)
- (2) Restoration of Exam (1977)
- (3) Government measures to deemphasize exam (p.152 – 153)
- (4) Zhao called for liberalization of education. (p. 162)

Chp 8. Lessons from China – what not to do!

R: Two criticisms and one observation

- (1) It is doing harm to China's image by a caricature of superficial understanding. It helps to perpetuate misunderstanding of China and waterdowned belief of US liberalism / superiority.
- (2) It contains so little about China's education. Little figures, little working mechanisms, little analysis, little organization, ... No deep understanding of Chinese strategy of education.
- (3) The making of Zhao is an interesting story: from international (外語) school students to English teachers, to US exchange, to research, to liberalist critic.

Appendix: Further Information on River Elegy (河殤)

1978 年改革開放之後，中央電視台（中視）在 1983 年拍攝過《話說長江》紀錄片，甚受歡迎，在八十年代亦有日本電視台拍黃河片，被審查只能在日本播放。

約 1987 年，中視計劃拍黃河片，找來蘇曉康（報告文學作家）和王魯湘（北師大講師）撰稿，還有金觀濤、厲以寧為顧問。一連六集的《河殤》批判中國文化的愚昧、保守、落後，提倡未來是邁向西方 " 藍色海洋 " 。

《河殤》播出引起熱議，在高等院校和社會上扮演思想啟蒙的角色，後被指引起「六四」，是幕後黑手，蘇曉康被通緝，現身在美國，王魯湘被捕下獄九個月。

其他：

1988 年，河殤出版了單行本。

2013 年，王義桅（人民大學教授）出版《海殤》，批判西方文化。

文化是個...

(1) 複雜的問題

世界八大文化，文明衝突(Huntington)·挑戰與回應(Arnold Toynbee (1889 – 1975): Challenge and Response)·還有 Karl Jasper·Oswald Spengler·余英時等。中國人愛說黃河文化·藍海洋文化·非常複雜·不易入手和研究。

(2) 沉重的問題

文化影響日常生活·價值觀·中國前途·人類未來·是我們每日能見到·承擔著的問題。

(3) 危險的問題

文化捲入政治·《河殤》作者蘇曉康批判中國傳統文化·被指為六四幕後黑手·流亡海外。