

“*Di Zi Gui*” (Standards for being a good student and child): Implications for children and youth development and parenting

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Abstract

“*Di Zi Gui*” (*Standards for Being a Good Student and Child*) is a classic Chinese text outlining the proper behavior of a good student and child. It covers the “desired” behavior of children at home and away from home, things that one should pay attention to in daily life, trustworthiness, love of humanity, learning from people with virtue and compassion, and further study after accomplishing the basic tasks. In the present study, the basic assertions in different chapters of *Di Zi Gui* were examined with reference to contemporary scientific literature on youth development and parenting. Several observations can be highlighted from the review. First, some assertions in *Di Zi Gui* (such as the emphases on bonding and character) are similar to the emphases in the contemporary youth development literature. Second, some assertions (such as the thought of undermining the rights of children) are not consistent with the contemporary views. Third, *Di Zi Gui* offers novel insights (such as emphasis on the importance of self-cultivation) into the youth development and parenting theories. Finally, there are practical implications of *Di Zi Gui* for youth development and parenting. It is concluded that although *Di Zi Gui* is a classic Chinese text written several centuries ago, some assertions show striking resemblance to the contemporary scientific findings and it has tremendous implications for contemporary youth development and parenting science and practice.

Keywords: Parenting instruction book, Chinese culture, children and youth development, parenting science

Introduction

In many cultures, there are two questions confronting young people, parents, youth workers, allied professionals and policy makers. The first question is what should the developmental “ideals” for children and adolescents should be. In the cultures emphasizing hunting, good physical strengths and

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independent living skills in children are usually emphasized. On the other hand, as order and social harmony are indispensable to crop growing in the agricultural societies, children are taught to be patient and respect the social norms. The second question is how parents should nurture their children to attain such developmental ideals. Again, different cultural characteristics with reference to the children's rights or parental power would suggest different strategies in the socialization process.

Regarding the developmental ideals for youth development, different attributes such as positive self-concept, high self-esteem, meaningful engagement and good interpersonal relationship have been proposed by Western theorists. With particular reference to the positive youth development perspective (1-4), the developmental ideals of young people focus on their talents and potentials. According to Catalano, Berglund (5), a thriving young person has the attributes of bonding, resilience, psychosocial competence, self-determination, self-efficacy, positive identity, meaningful life, identification with prosocial norms and meaningful community engagement (6). According to Lerner, Brentano (7), the developmental ideals for young people include competence, character, connection, confidence, caring and compassion. According to Park and Peterson (8), there are 24 character strengths which can be regarded as the developmental ideals for young people.

Concerning how parents nurture the developmental ideals in young people, it is a question of parenting. In the Western literature, there are two commonly used frameworks of parenting. The first one is based on the work of Baumrind (9) which suggests that there are three types of parenting – authoritarian parenting (absolute control of the child with little freedom), permissive parenting (absolute freedom for the child with little control) and authoritative parenting (appropriate control and freedom for the child). In the second framework proposed by Maccoby and Martin (10), it is proposed that parenting is defined in terms of two dimensions (responsiveness and demandingness). As a result, four types of parenting emerge, including authoritarian parenting (low responsiveness but high demandingness), authoritative parenting (high responsiveness and high demandingness), permissive parenting (high

responsiveness but low demandingness) and neglectful parenting (low responsiveness and low demandingness). There are also studies proposing that dyadic and systemic family processes influence adolescent development (11, 12).

In the past few decades, researchers have commonly used the Western models of youth development and parenting to understand Chinese children and parents. In the process, the question of whether the Western notions of youth development and parenting frameworks are applicable to our understanding of Chinese behavior has been raised (13). One response is that the Western concepts may not be totally applicable and we need to use indigenous Chinese concepts to understand youth development and parenting. In addition, it can be argued that Chinese writings such as the classics can contribute to our understanding of the developmental ideals for youth development and parenting.

In the traditional Chinese culture, there are writings on the developmental ideals of children and adolescents (14-16). For example, filial piety was described in the examples in the classic 24 stories of filial piety. The key messages are that the children should obey and serve their parents because their parents gave birth to and take care of them; filial children are blessed by Heaven. Besides, there are many parenting books ("*jia xun*") which emphasize the developmental ideals of the children and family practice ("*jia gui*") governing the "proper" behavior of the children (12, 15).

In this paper, we reviewed the Chinese Classic entitled *Di Zi Gui* to understand how the child developmental ideals and parenting were conceived under the traditional Chinese culture. *Di Zi Gui* was written by Li Yu-xiu in the Qing dynasty when Kangxi was the emperor of China. Same as *San Zi Jing* (Three character classic), it takes the form of a three-character verse. The main ideas of *Di Zi Gui* are based on the Confucian thoughts, including the emphases on filial piety, family harmony, self-cultivation of virtues and morality, and maintenance of good interpersonal harmony. In this paper, we will analyze this problem with reference to four topics: a) areas of similarity between the propositions and modern parenting science; b) areas of dissimilarity between the propositions and modern parenting science; c) novel or non-conventional views offered;

and d) implications of the propositions about nurturance of the child developmental ideals and parenting. It is noteworthy that there are different versions of *Di Zi Gui*. In this paper, the English version of *Di Zi Gui* is based on the English translation of Pure Land Learning College Association (17). In this paper, the children refer to the human beings below the age of 18.

Review of the outline

總敘：弟子規 聖人訓；首孝弟 次謹信；汎愛眾 而親仁；有餘力，則學文。

“Outline: *Di Zi Gui* or *Standards for Being a Good Student and Child* is a book that was taught by Chinese saints and sages of the ancient past. The book first teaches us how to be dutiful to our parents, and how to be respectful and loving to our siblings. It then teaches us how to be cautious with all people, matters, and objects in our daily lives; how to be a trustworthy person; and to believe in the teachings of the ancient saints and sages.”

Several observations can be highlighted from the Outline of *Di Zi Gui*. First, the assertions are the teachings of saints and sages of the past. While great men in the past should be respected, it is “authority-based” knowledge rather than “evidence-based” knowledge (18). Hence, it is questionable whether the related assertions are effective in reality. On the other hand, if the “authority-based” knowledge is consistent with the knowledge derived from contemporary youth development and parenting science, it can be argued that traditional wisdom has contemporary relevance.

Second, family, particularly the father-child relationship and the sibling relationship, is regarded as the central developmental context of the children and adolescents, with filial piety as the cornerstone of child development. A review of the child and adolescent developmental theories shows that many theories are individualistic in nature. For example, Freudian theories focus on the inner dynamics of human development and cognitive theories focus on the schematic changes throughout the development. While the micro psychological theories have generated much research about the child and

adolescent development, they have been criticized for ignoring the environmental influences. Hence, there are theories that focus on how different social systems influence child development. Amongst them, the family-based developmental perspectives focus on the development of children within the family context and how family processes shape the developmental trajectories of adolescent development (19). *Di Zi Gui* clearly highlights the importance of the family to child development.

Third, the Outline describes the things that one must pay careful attention to. With reference to the expectations about hygiene and daily living, the related measures can be regarded as self-management issues. This feature is quite unique because self-management is an emergent field in the child and youth development in the past few decades. Besides, the focus on “cautions” also hinges on prevention which is an important focus in child and adolescent psychology and prevention science.

Fourth, *Di Zi Gui* emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness of oneself as a cornerstone of selfhood and interpersonal relationship. This point is interesting because trustworthiness (i.e., trust from others) is not a major focus in the contemporary theories of youth development, although self-confidence (i.e., trusting oneself) is commonly emphasized in the positive youth development theories. Obviously, gaining trust from others is much more difficult than gaining trust from oneself.

Fifth, *Di Zi Gui* does not focus on self-cultivation alone. It also emphasizes the importance of loving other human beings. This focus has three unique features. Primarily, it is collectivistic rather than individualistic (i.e., focusing on others is more important than focusing on oneself). Besides, it focuses on the possible contribution of young people to the society. Furthermore, the focus of youth development is on a higher ideal when we cover mankind.

Sixth, it is emphasized that learning from those with virtue and compassion is important. This addresses an important issue about identity formation when the adolescents may model themselves on the significant-others. This point is also related to the adolescent development literature that modeling on positive adults and peers (i.e., bonding) is important for positive youth development (6).

Seventh, one interesting observation from *Di Zi Gui* is that learning from the literature is the last emphasis for youth development. In fact, learning is the last thing when a child has “spare effort”. This is in sharp contrast to the Eriksonian view that children and adolescents should learn the “technological ethos” of the culture. This is also not consistent with the emphasis of the modern societies that formal education is an important developmental task for children and adolescents. Most important of all, this is inconsistent with the contemporary Chinese parenting value, “do not lose at the starting line”.

Finally, the general outline is consistent with the ecological model that different systems should be considered in child and adolescent development. In *Di Zi Gui*, children are taught about the importance of family duties within and outside the family (family system), things that should be cautious (individual system), doing good for other people and loving others (interpersonal system), learning from people with virtue and good reputation (interpersonal system) and learning from literature (historical system).

Review of chapter 1

入則孝

父母呼，應勿緩。父母命，行勿懶。父母教，須敬聽。父母責，須順承。

冬則溫，夏則凊；晨則省，昏則定。出必告，反必面；居有常，業無變。

事雖小，勿擅為；苟擅為，子道虧。物雖小，勿私藏；苟私藏，親心傷。

親所好，力為具；親所惡，謹為去；身有傷，貽親憂；德有傷，貽親羞。

親愛我，孝何難；親憎我，孝方賢。親有過，諫使更；怡吾色，柔吾聲。

諫不入，悅復諫；號泣隨，撻無怨。

親有疾，藥先嘗；晝夜侍，不離床。喪三年，常悲咽；居處變，酒肉絕。

喪盡禮，祭盡誠；事死者，如事生。

“At Home, Be Dutiful to My Parents

When my parents call me, I will answer them right away. When they ask me to do something, I will do it quickly. When my parents instruct me, I will listen respectfully. When my parents reproach me, I will obey and accept their scolding. I will try hard to change and improve myself, to start anew.

In the winter, I will keep my parents warm; in the summer, I will keep my parents cool. I will always greet my parents in the morning to show them that I care. At night I will always make sure my parents rest well. Before going out, I must tell my parents where I am going, for parents are always concerned about their children. After returning home, I must go and see my parents to let them know I am back, so they do not worry about me. I will maintain a permanent place to stay and lead a routine life. I will persist in whatever I do and will not change my aspirations at will.

A matter might be trivial, but if it is wrong to do it or unfair to another person, I must not do it thinking it will bear little or no consequence. If I do, I am not being a dutiful child because my parents would not want to see me doing things that are irrational or illegal. Even though an object might be small, I will not keep it a secret from my parents. If I do, I will hurt my parents' feelings.

If whatever pleases my parents is fair and reasonable, I will try my best to attain it for them. If something displeases my parents, if within reason I will cautiously keep it away from them. When my body is hurt, my parents will be worried. If my virtues are compromised, my parents will feel ashamed.

When my parents do wrong, I will urge them to change. I will do it with a kind facial expression and a warm gentle voice. If they do not accept my advice, I will wait until they are in a happier mood before I attempt to dissuade them again, followed by crying, if necessary, to make them understand. If they end up whipping me, I will not hold a grudge against them.

When my parents are ill, I will taste the medicine first before giving it to them. I will take care of them night and day and stay by their bedside. During the first three years of mourning after my parents have passed away, I will remember them with gratitude and feel sad often for not being able to repay them for their kindness in raising me. During this period, I will arrange my home to reflect my grief and sorrow. I will also avoid festivities and indulgence in food and alcoholic drinks. I will observe proper etiquette in arranging my parents' funerals. I will hold the memorial

ceremony and commemorate my parents' anniversaries with utmost sincerity. I will serve my departed parents as if they were still alive."

Two observations can be highlighted in Chapter 1 of *Di Zi Gui*. First, parents play a superior and dominant role in the family (i.e., parent-centered family). Second, children are expected to fulfil many family duties, particularly for their parents. As far as the child development is concerned, an "ideal" development would be to learn the duties and execute them well. As far as parenting is concerned, children should be taught or socialized to be filial at home. These observations are consistent with the analyses of Shek and Chan (20) on the attributes of an ideal child.

An examination of the assertions in chapter 1 shows that some of them are consistent with the propositions of the contemporary scientific literature on children and youth development and parenting. First, the focus on respect for parents and duties of children is consistent with the notion of "demandingness" of the notion of authoritative parenting (10). Instead of providing everything for children as denoted in permissive or indulgent parenting, children are expected to learn and perform their filial piety duties.

Second, the assertions about self-improvement, striving for excellence and perseverance are consistent with the expectations of positive youth development. Primarily, it is conjectured that the duties to be accomplished by the children and adolescents are "doable", which can be improved through perseverance and a strong motivation to excel. This view is consistent with the positive youth development approach that young people have potential to excel and striving for excellence is possible through perseverance and effort. This view is obviously positive, which sees the children and adolescents as an active agent learning the good things of life and developing virtues (21).

Third, concern for parents is a strong emphasis in this chapter. In terms of family functioning, concerning for one's parents is a sign of "mutuality" which is basic to the well-functioning families. In the previous studies, it was found that "mutuality" is an important dimension of Chinese family functioning and it has positive relationships to the well-being of Chinese adolescents (22). Psychologically speaking, showing love to one's parents will elicit love from the

parents. The loving behavior of the children will also foster a warm and reciprocal loving environment within the family.

Fourth, besides taking care of the daily living and physical well-being of their parents, the children are also expected to take care of the "feelings" of the parents (i.e., children should not do things that hurt their parents). This point underscores the importance of cultivation of "empathy" in children and adolescents and the starting point is to practice it within the family. In contemporary adolescent psychology, empathy has been identified as an important factor governing adolescent development (23, 24).

Fifth, the children are expected to follow their family rules, such as telling their parents where they go. In some contemporary family models of family functioning, having family rules is an important sign of family functioning. For example, in McMaster Model of family functioning, it is proposed that "family rules" is an important dimension of effective family functioning. In the parenting literature, following the family rules is an important component of parental behavioral control such as whether the parents know the whereabouts of their children (25, 26). In fact, parenting workers usually suggest that the families should have clear and reasonable family rules to regulate the behaviors of their children.

Sixth, *Di Zi Gui* asserts that children should love their parents even if their parents hate them. By doing this, the children are learning resilience and forgiveness. Regarding resilience, the children have to learn how to interact with their parents in adversity. Regarding forgiveness, the children have to learn how to accept the wrongdoings of their parents and help them to change. Furthermore, the role of children to dissuade their parents is consistent with some of the family theorists' propositions that the children can also assume an "adult" role in pointing out the wrongdoings of their parents and inviting them to reflect.

Finally, the assertion on mourning is consistent with the contemporary literature that bereavement takes time (27). The suggestion of mourning for three years is in fact very psychological and consistent with the literature that premature termination of mourning is detrimental to one's well-being. The practice of remembering the ancestors also

provides psychological support and cultural resources to those family members who are still living (e.g., to complete the good work of the ancestors).

On the other hand, some of the assertions in this chapter are not consistent with the contemporary literature on child development and parenting. Fundamentally, the parent-child relationship is a hierarchical one, with the parents higher than their children. According to Maccoby and Martin (10), this is a form of authoritarian parenting where the children should strictly follow the parental expectations and prescriptions.

The expectation of absolute obedience of children may also be against the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Besides, contemporary literature highlights the duties of parents instead of children in the socialization process. Some examples are illustrated below:

- **Article 12:** States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- **Article 13:** The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
- **Article 18:** States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

There are two novel points regarding youth development in this chapter. First, one should remember that one's body is inherited from their parents and one should take care of their own body. This view is novel because the emphasis on one's

responsibility of taking care of their body is intrinsic to the Western scientific literature. By focusing on the view that one's body is from their parents, one would take into account of the effort that their parents pay in the socialization process. This would reinforce the value of his/her body that the child should take great care of. Besides, this view will also provide an additional perspective for the child to consider when he/she attempts to harm or kill oneself.

Another novel point covered in this Chapter is the notion of having awareness of the feelings of the parents. With growing egocentrism in young people, there is a need to promote empathy in the adolescents. By focusing on the feelings of their parents, it is easier for the children and adolescents to learn empathy. Also, family is a good venue for them to practice empathy. Unfortunately, as Chinese people are quite reserved to express their emotions (28, 29), whether the children can really learn to understand the feelings of their parents is an important question to be considered.

There are four implications of this chapter for child development and parenting. First, young people and parents should develop the belief that young people can excel themselves and do well with perseverance and motivation as the key processes are involved. Second, promotion of empathy in children can start with helping them to understand the feelings and experiences of their parents. Third, we should reinforce the notion that one's body comes from their parents and one should take care of their own body. This strategy would have important implications for health promotion and prevention of self-harm and suicide. Finally, the notion of the children "advising" their parents is opening up the possibility of more active involvement of children and communication between parents and children.

Review of chapter 2

出則弟

兄道友，弟道恭，兄弟睦，孝在中。財物輕，怨何生；言語忍，忿自泯。

或飲食，或坐走，長者先，幼者後。長呼人，即代叫；人不在，己即到。

稱尊長，勿呼名；對尊長，勿見能。路遇長，疾趨揖，長無言，退恭立。

騎下馬，乘下車，過猶待，百步餘。長者立，幼勿坐；長者坐，命乃坐。

尊長前，聲要低；低不聞，卻非宜。進必趨，退必遲；問起對，視勿移。

事諸父，如事父；事諸兄，如事兄。

“Standards for a Younger Brother When Away from Home

If I am the older sibling, I will befriend the younger ones. If I am the younger sibling, I will respect and love the older ones. Only when I can maintain harmonious relationships with my siblings, am I being dutiful to my parents. When I value my familial ties more than property and belongings, no resentment will come between me and my siblings. When I am careful with words and hold back hurtful comments, my feelings of anger naturally die out.

Whether I am drinking, eating, walking, or sitting, I will let the elders go first; the younger ones should follow. When an elder is asking for someone, I will get that person for him right away. If I cannot find that person, I will immediately report back, and put myself at the elder's service instead.

When I address an elder, I should not call him by his given name. This is in accord with ancient Chinese etiquette. In front of an elder, I will never show off. If I meet an elder I know on the street, I will promptly clasp my hands and greet him with a bow. If he does not speak to me, I will step back and respectfully stand aside.

Should I be riding a horse and spot an elder I know walking, I will dismount and pay respect to the elder. If I am riding in a carriage, I will stop, get out of the carriage, and ask if I can give the elder a ride. If I meet an elder passing by, I will stand aside and wait respectfully. I will not leave until the elder disappears from my sight. When an elder is standing, I will not sit. After an elder sits down, I sit only when I am told to do so.

Before an elder, I will speak softly. But if my voice is too low and hard to hear, it is not appropriate. When meeting an elder, I will walk briskly towards him; when leaving, I will not exit in haste. When answering a question, I will look at the person who is asking me the question. I will serve my uncles as if I am serving my parents. I will treat my cousins as if they are my own siblings.”

In chapter 2 of *Di Zi Gui*, some assertions are consistent with the contemporary scientific literature. First, the duties of the elder siblings (to befriend the younger ones) and younger brothers (respect and love the older ones) are clearly defined, which surround the notion of filial piety. If the elder siblings are friendly to the younger ones and the younger ones respect and concern about the elder ones, it would result in a harmonious family. In fact, in some of the contemporary family therapy models, there is an emphasis on playing the appropriate roles by different family members (25). In fact, if the members do not play their appropriate roles, the family will become chaotic and cannot function properly. This chapter also focuses on the importance of taking up appropriate roles by the family members.

Second, consistent with the contemporary theories and research on youth development, some important elements of social competence are emphasized in the assertions. Primarily, it is emphasized that one should be careful about words. From an interpersonal communication perspective, appropriate verbal responses such as appreciating or praising others would enrich the relationship. On the other hand, hasty or impulsive words would definitely hurt the interpersonal relationship. Hence, the expectation to “hold back hurtful comments” is in fact positive and even therapeutic in interpersonal relationships.

Third, consistent with the clinical literature, it is asserted that it is important to reduce bitterness and anger (30). From an intervention point of view, many unsolved human problems stem from bitterness, such as regarding one as unfairly treated or other people being better than us. Similarly, anger also makes interpersonal relationships complicated. In *Di Zi Gui*, it is asserted that through careful verbal communication, anger would subside. Fourth, both assertions and the contemporary scientific literature mentioned controlling one's bitterness and anger. Fifth, with reference to the propositions of the positive youth development approach, the notion of not to show off in front of elder people is to practice humility, which is regarded as a character strength.

On the other hand, two areas of inconsistency with the contemporary literature can be identified. First, while respect for old people is part of the Chinese culture, it is not consistent with the United

Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Obviously, the phrase “or other status” clearly suggests that old and young people should be treated equally in terms of their rights.

The second inconsistency is about “showing off” in front of an elder. It is noteworthy that under the influence of the “self-esteem” movement, children are usually taught to show what they can do and they should appreciate their own talents. Having “shows” in front of other people is commonly encouraged in the contemporary parenting writings because such a behavior can promote self-confidence and self-efficacy in young people, hence contributing to the positive identity in young people.

As far as the novel messages noted in this chapter, there are two distinct observations. First, it is asserted that the family ties should be considered as more important than property and belongings. In other words, a good family is priceless and beyond material calculation (i.e., spiritual emphasis). This point immediately brings the importance to a spiritual level. While many people regard families as important, few theorists have an attempt to assert that the families are more important than material possession.

Second, the saying of “serving your uncles as if they are your fathers and treating your cousins as if they are your brothers” is a good gesture embracing humanity. There are two elements intrinsic to this saying. In the first place, one loves all people instead of categorizing them into “intra-familial” or “extra-familial” people. Besides, one attends to the needs of any people who come into contact with the young person. In terms of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, it would be the highest level of moral development involving the universal ethical principle – having universal love for all (31).

There are two implications for child development in this chapter. First, parents should teach their children to say words carefully. With an advance on the Internet, the kids usually give “likes” or leave impulsive comments in the virtual world. Hence, it would be important to promote “careful words” among children while balancing it with

encouraging them to express their views. Second, parents can use the family-versus-material possession dilemma to encourage their children to *make* their choices and understand the reasoning behind (32).

Review of chapter 3

謹

朝起早，夜眠遲，老易至，惜此時。晨必盥，兼漱口，便溺回，輒淨手。

冠必正，紐必結，襪與履，俱絜切。置冠服，有定位，勿亂頓，致污穢。

衣貴潔，不貴華，上循分，下稱家。對飲食，勿揀擇，食適可，勿過則。

年方少，勿飲酒，飲酒醉，最為醜。步從容，立端正，揖深圓，拜恭敬。

勿踐闕，勿跛倚，勿箕踞，勿搖脾。緩揭簾，勿有聲；寬轉彎，勿觸棱。

執虛器，如執盈；入虛室，如有人。事勿忙，忙多錯；勿畏難，勿輕略。

鬥鬧場，絕勿近；邪僻事，絕勿問。將入門，問孰存，將上堂，聲必揚。

人問誰，對以名，吾與我，不分明。用人物，須明求，倘不問，即為偷。

借人物，及時還，後有急，借不難。

“Be Cautious in My Daily Life

I will get up each morning before my parents; at night, I will go to bed only after my parents have gone to sleep. When I realize that time is passing me by and cannot be turned back, and that I am getting older year by year, I will especially treasure the present moment. When I get up in the morning, I will wash my face and brush my teeth. After using the toilet, I will always wash my hands.

I must wear my hat straight, and make sure the hooks of my clothes are tied. My socks and shoes should also be worn neatly and correctly. I will always place my hat and clothes away in their proper places. I will not carelessly throw my clothes around, for that will get them dirty.

It is more important that my clothes are clean, rather than how extravagant they are. I will wear only what is suitable for my station. At home, I will wear clothes according to my family traditions and customs. When it comes to eating and drinking, I will not pick and choose my food. I will only eat the right amount; I will not over-eat.

While I am still young, I must not drink alcohol. When I am drunk, my behavior will turn ugly. I will always walk composed, with light and even steps. I will always stand up straight and tall. My bows will always be deep, with hands held in front and arms rounded. I will always pay my respect with reverence.

I will not step on doorsills or stand leaning on one leg. I will not sit with my legs apart or sprawled out. I will not rock the lower part of my body while standing or sitting down. I will always lift the curtain slowly, and quietly. I must leave myself ample space when I turn so I will not bump into a corner.

I will hold empty containers carefully as if they were full. I will enter empty rooms as if they were occupied. I will avoid doing things in a hurry, as doing things in haste will lead to many mistakes. I should not be afraid of difficult tasks, and I will not become careless when a job is too easy.

I will keep away from rowdy places. I will not ask about things that are abnormal or unusual. When I am about to enter a main entrance, I must first ask if someone is inside. Before entering a room, I must first make myself heard, so that those inside know someone is approaching.

If someone asks who I am, I must give my name. To answer 'It is me' or 'Me' is not sufficient. Before borrowing things from others, I must ask for permission. If I do not ask, it is stealing. When borrowing things from others, I will return them promptly. Later, if I have an urgent need, I will not have a problem borrowing from them again."

Regarding chapter 3, there are several areas of consistency that can be highlighted from the assertions. First, the emphasis on personal hygiene (e.g., washing one's face and brushing one's teeth after waking up, washing hands after going to the toilet) and posture (i.e., standing and sitting properly) is consistent with the modern guidelines on parenting and the expectation that young people should stay healthy (33). As promotion of physical health of children is emphasized in modern medicine and parenting, it is interesting to note that this was

highlighted in *Di Zi Gui* roughly three centuries ago. Second, the focus on tidiness in the dress code is also emphasized in modern parenting and professions (such as occupational therapy) because tidiness in clothing is a social skill. Dressing in a tidy and decent manner can create a sense of "positive social identity" for the child, which would eventually create self-confidence in young persons.

Third, appropriate eating and drinking are also highlighted in modern child care and developmental psychology. Having good eating habits does not only ensure nutritional needs of the child; it also promotes a "non-choosy" habit in children. Fourth, there are also some assertions related to "accident prevention" (to lift the curtain slowly and quietly and not to bump into corners). This is in line with the literature on accident prevention (34).

Fifth, regarding risk behavior, it is asserted that young children should not drink alcohol and the negative consequence of drinking too much alcohol is emphasized. This point closely echoes to the proposition of prevention science that children should stay away from alcohol. Sixth, regarding the expectation that the children should keep away from the rowdy places, this view is consistent with prevention science that children stay away from the rowdy places, which are commonly regarded as risk factors precipitating risk behavior in the adolescents (35).

The assertion that is not consistent with the contemporary knowledge is on the expectation that the children should dress in a tidy manner. Besides the argument that the children have the right to dress in the way they want, there are also views suggesting that the non-conventional ways of dress are signs of creativity and innovation. Besides, the assertion that one should avoid doing things in a hurry manner is somehow not consistent with the contemporary view that one should learn multi-tasking (i.e., doing many things at one time is actually a merit).

There are several unique features of the assertions in this chapter. First, the focus on child development is quite holistic in nature, ranging from physical health to social health. Second, the focus on cleanliness rather than extravagance underscores the importance of the non-materialistic values. Third, setting rules on borrowing can promote social competence of young people. Fourth, it is asserted

that children should treasure time which is not commonly described in the literature on child development.

The implications of this chapter on child development are multiple. First, the parents should nurture the self-management skills in children in different domains. Second, the children should develop a sense of treasuring time (36).

Review of chapter 4

信

凡出言，信為先，詐與妄，奚可焉。話說多，不如少，惟其是，勿佞巧。

奸巧語，穢污詞，市井氣，切戒之。見未真，勿輕言，知未的，勿輕傳。

事非宜，勿輕諾，苟輕諾，進退錯。凡道字，重且舒，勿急疾，勿模糊。

彼說長，此說短，不關己，莫閒管。見人善，即思齊，縱去遠，以漸躋。

見人惡，即內省，有則改，無加警。唯德學，唯才藝，不如人，當自礪。

若衣服，若飲食，不如人，勿生感。聞過怒，聞譽樂，損友來，益友卻。

聞譽恐，聞過欣，直諫士，漸相親。無心非，名為錯，有心非，名為惡。

過能改，歸於無，倘揜飾，增一辜。

“Be Trustworthy

When I speak, honesty is important. Deceitful words and lies must not be tolerated.

Rather than talking too much, it is better to speak less. I will speak only the truth, and I will not twist the facts.

Cunning words, foul language, and philistine habits must be avoided at all costs. What I have not seen with my own eyes, I will not readily tell to others. What I do not know for sure, I will not easily pass on to others.

If I am asked to do something that is inappropriate or bad, I must not agree to it. If I do, I will be doubly wrong. I

must speak clearly and to the point. I must not talk too fast or mumble.

Some like to talk about the good points of others, while some like to talk about the faults of others. If it is none of my business, I will not get involved. When I see others do good deeds, I must think about following their example. Even though my own achievements are still far behind those of others, I am getting closer.

When I see others do wrong, I must immediately reflect upon myself. If I have made the same mistake, I will correct it. If not, I will take extra care to not make the same mistake. When my morals, conduct, knowledge, and skills seem not as good as those of others, I will encourage myself to be better.

If the clothes I wear, and the food I eat and drink are not as good as that of others, I should not be concerned. If criticism makes me angry and compliments make me happy, bad company will come my way and good friends will shy away.

If I am uneasy about compliments and appreciative of criticism, then sincere, understanding, and virtuous people will gradually come close to me. If any mistake I make is inadvertent, it is merely a mistake. If it is done on purpose, however, it is an evil act. If I correct my mistake and do not repeat it, I no longer own the mistake. If I try to cover it up, I will be doubly wrong.”

Consistent with the positive youth development perspective, honesty, non-tolerance of deceitful words and lies, speaking the truth and keeping one’s promise is emphasized in the assertions in this chapter (37). Second, the assertions that speaking should be clear and messages should be succinct are consistent with the principles underlying social competence. Finally, the assertion that one should not be concerned about one’s food and clothes not as good as others’ is consistent with the view of the cognitive-social perspective that one should not have unnecessary competition.

There is one area that is inconsistent with the contemporary literature – one should not be angry about criticisms and happy about compliments while one should appreciate criticisms and be uneasy about compliments. This assertion is not consistent with the psychological principle that one should be true to one’s feelings and one should feel good if they receive compliments from others.

There are several unique points covered in this chapter. First, one should not use cunning words and foul language. Second, it is emphasized that one should be careful about witnessing and should not gossip about others. Third, the assertions emphasize self-reflection. Fourth, while one should not compare with others in terms of clothes and food, we should compare with others in terms of morals, conduct, knowledge and skills.

The present chapter has several implications for youth development and parenting. First, young people should learn to use their words in a careful and decent manner. Unfortunately, the general public tend to endorse the use of foul language and regard it as “entertaining.” Second, no gossip is good for child development because it creates hatred, misunderstanding and even bullying. Third, children should be encouraged to reflect, including both the good things and bad things about themselves. Finally, learning not to compare with others on material possession is needed because the contemporary societies are very materialistic in nature. On the other hand, sensitivity about one’s virtues relative to others for improvement is helpful to child development.

Review of chapter 5

汎愛眾

凡是人，皆須愛；天同覆，地同載。行高者，名自高；人所重，非貌高。

才大者，望自大；人所服，非言大。己有能，勿自私；人有能，勿輕訾。

勿諂富，勿驕貧；勿厭故，勿喜新。人不閒，勿事攪；人不安，勿話擾。

人有短，切莫揭；人有私，切莫說。道人善，即是善，人知之，愈思勉。

揚人惡，即是惡，疾之甚，禍且作。善相勸，德皆建；過不規，道兩虧。

凡取與，貴分曉；與宜多，取宜少。將加入，先問己；己不欲，即速已。

恩欲報，怨欲忘；報怨短，報恩長。待婢僕，身貴端，雖貴端，慈而寬。

勢服人，心不然，理服人，方無言。

“Love All Equally

Human beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religion – everyone – should be loved equally. We are all sheltered by the same sky and we all live on the same planet Earth. A person of high ideals and morals is highly respected. What people value is not based on outside appearance.

A person’s outstanding abilities will naturally endow him with a good reputation. Admiration from others does not come from boasting or praising oneself. If I am a very capable person, I should use my capabilities for the benefit of others. Other people’s competence should never be slandered.

I will not flatter the rich, or despise the poor. I will not ignore old friends, only taking delight in new ones. When a person is busy, I will not bother him with matters. When a person’s mind is not at ease, I will not bother him with words.

If a person has a shortcoming, I will not expose it. If a person has a secret, I will not tell others. Praising the goodness of others is a good deed in itself. When people are being praised and approved of, they will be encouraged to try even harder.

Spreading rumors about the wrongdoings of others is a wrongdoing in itself. When the harm done has reached the extreme, misfortunes will surely follow. When I encourage another to do good, both of our virtues are built up. If I do not tell another of his faults, we are both wrong.

Whether I take or give, I need to know the difference between the two. It is better to give more and take less. What I ask others to do, I must first ask myself if I would be willing to do. If it is not something I would be willing to do, I will not ask others to do it.

I must repay the kindness of others and let go of my resentments. I will spend less time holding grudges and more time paying back the kindness of others. When I am directing maids and servants, I will act honorably and properly. I will also treat them kindly and generously. If I use my influence to make them submissive, their hearts will not be with me. If I can convince them with sound reasoning, they will have nothing to object to.”

The present assertions on loving each other and contribution to society are consistent with the emphases on “compassion” and “contribution” under the positive youth development approach. Besides, the expectation of not slandering the ability of other people is in line with the principle of respecting others in the positive youth development literature. Furthermore, the notions of kindness to others and forgiveness are also in line with the spirit behind spirituality. Finally, using reasoning instead of authority to make people submissive is consistent with the principles of modern psychology.

There are several unique emphases in this chapter. First, outer appearance is not as important as ideals and morals (i.e., non-material attributes are more important than material attributes). Second, young people should not discriminate against others based on their material possession and social status. Third, children should learn to praise the goodness of others but should not gossip about the rumors of others.

The assertions in this chapter have several implications for youth development and parenting. First, cultivation of a sense of love for others is important. Second, it is helpful to teach the children about the importance of inner virtues instead of outer appearance. Third, using one’s ability to serve the society is a good developmental goal. Fourth, accepting people with different backgrounds and treating them equally. Fifth, praising others and do not gossip about others’ faults (5).

Review of chapter 6

親仁

同是人，類不齊；流俗眾，仁者希。果仁者，人多畏；言不諱，色不媚。

能親仁，無限好；德日進，過日少。不親仁，無限害；小人進，百事壞。

“Be Close to and Learn from People of Virtue and Compassion

We are all human, but we are not the same. Most of us are ordinary; only a very few have great virtues and high

moral principles. A truly virtuous person is greatly respected by others. He will not be afraid to speak the truth and he will not fawn on others.

If I can be close to and learn from people of great virtue and compassion, I will benefit immensely. My virtues will grow daily and my wrongdoings will lessen day by day. If I choose not to be close to and learn from people of great virtue, I will suffer a great loss. People without virtue will get close to me and nothing I attempt will succeed.”

Three interesting observations can be highlighted in this chapter. First, the assertion that few of us have great virtues and high moral principles is consistent with the view that few of us can proceed to the post-conventional level (31). Second, it underscores the importance of moral courage of speaking the truth and not fawning on others (8). Finally, the teaching of being close to people with great virtue and compassion but staying away from people without virtue is consistent with the principle of “bonding” that healthy adults and peers are important to the healthy development of children.

Review of chapter 7

餘力學文

不力行，但學文，長浮華，成何人。但力行，不學文，任己見，昧理真。

讀書法，有三到，心眼口，信皆要。方讀此，勿慕彼，此未終，彼勿起。

寬為限，緊用功，工夫到，滯塞通。心有疑，隨札記，就人問，求確義。

房室清，牆壁淨，几案潔，筆硯正。墨磨偏，心不端；字不敬，心先病。

列典籍，有定處；讀看畢，還原處。雖有急，卷束齊，有缺壞，就補之。

非聖書，屏勿視，蔽聰明，壞心志。勿自暴，勿自棄，聖與賢，可馴致。

“Be Close to and Learn from People of Virtue and Compassion

If I do not actively practice what I have learned, but continue to study on the surface, even though my knowledge is increasing, it is only superficial. What kind of person will I be? If I do apply my knowledge diligently, but stop studying, I will only do things based on my own opinion, thinking it is correct. In fact, what I know is not the truth.

There are methods to study correctly. They involve concentration in three areas: my mind, my eyes, and my mouth. To believe in what I read is equally important. When I begin to read a book, I will not think about another. If I have not completed the book, I will not start another.

I will give myself lots of time to study, and I will study hard. If I devote enough time and effort, I will thoroughly understand. If I have a question, I will make a note of it. I will ask the person who has the knowledge for the right answer.

I will keep my room neat, my walls uncluttered and clean, my desk tidy and my brush and ink stone properly placed. If my ink block is ground unevenly, it shows I have a poor state of mind. When words are written carelessly, showing no respect, this shows my state of mind has not been well.

My books should be classified, placed on the bookshelves, and in their proper places. After I finish reading a book, I will put it back where it belongs. Even if I am in a hurry, I still must neatly roll up and bind the open bamboo scroll I have been reading. All missing or damaged pages ought to be immediately repaired.

If it is not a book on the teachings of the saints and sages, it should be discarded and not even looked at. Such books can block my intelligence and wisdom, and will undermine my aspirations and sense of direction. Neither be harsh on myself, nor give up on myself. To be a person of high ideals, moral standards and virtue is something we can all attain in time.”

Several observations in this chapter are consistent with the scientific literature. First, the urge to continue studying is in line with the principle of life-long learning. Second, the propositions on the methods of learning (involvement of mind, eyes, mouth and concentration) and devotion of time and effort are consistent with the work of educational psychology. Third, asking people when one has

questions is also consistent with the social support literature.

Regarding the key to studying, the assertions can be regarded as not comprehensive enough because besides effort, concertation and involvement, there are many other factors. For example, those with learning difficulties may exert effort without academic success. Besides, the suggestion that one should not read the books not written by saints and sages is not consistent with the contemporary view that one should read any books widely with different viewpoints.

There are four unique messages in this chapter. First, it focuses on the importance of practice and learning. Second, the emphasis on the tidiness in studying is quite novel. Third, the last assertion that one should not be harsh or give up on oneself is very humanistic. Furthermore, the promise that one can be a person with high moral standards is also empowering in nature.

The assertions have several implications for youth development and parenting: First, do not simply focus on the superficial study; practice is important. However, practice without studying is also no good. Second, never be harsh on oneself or give up. Third, have a belief that if one tries hard, high ideals and virtue can be attained.

Discussion

The pioneer review attempts to examine *Di Zi Gui* with reference to four issues: a) the consistency between the related assertions and the views of the contemporary youth development literature; b) the inconsistency between the related assertions and the contemporary views; c) the novel or alternative views on youth development and parenting; and d) the implications of *Di Zi Gui* for youth development and parenting.

Although *Di Zi Gui* was written several centuries ago, some of its assertions have striking consistency with the contemporary models of youth development and parenting. For example, the focus on physical health and character development is in line with the contemporary models on youth development and parenting (e.g., Australia National Health and Medical Research Council (38)). Hence, it can be

concluded that traditional wisdom does have contemporary scientific support. Nevertheless, some of the assertions, such as following traditions without doubt, one should only read sacred books and the de-emphasis of the rights of children are not consistent with the contemporary views of youth development and parenting. Furthermore, *Di Zi Gui* offers some novel ideas, such as the emphasis on the inner qualities rather than the external attributes of a person and the importance of social competence, such as not to gossip about others and accept the wrongdoings of others. Finally, *Di Zi Gui* has useful implications of the assertions for youth development and parenting.

Three observations can be further highlighted in the present review. First, *Di Zi Gui* shows the fundamental attributes of the youth developmental ideals and parenting of the traditional Chinese culture. According to Shek and Lai (39), traditional Chinese families had a strong emphasis on family harmony, as exemplified in the popular sayings of “*yi he wei gui*” (harmony is golden) and “*jia he wan shi xing, jia shuai kou bu ting*” (if a family lives in harmony, everything will prosper; a family will wither if there are a lot of quarrels). To achieve family harmony, every family member had the obligations and duties defined by the five cardinal relationships (14). With a specific focus on children, the children were taught about the importance of “*bai shan xiao wei xian*” (filial piety ranks the top in all behaviors). An ideal family in the traditional Chinese culture was characterized by “*fu ci zi xiao, xiong you di gong*” (kind father and filial son, affectionate brothers).

The assertions in *Di Zi Gui* are also consistent with the attributes of the traditional Chinese socialization practice summarized by Yang (16). These attributes included dependence training (children should obey their parents and depend on them), conformity training (interpersonal harmony should be valued but interpersonal conflicts should be avoided), self-suppression training (training of self-inhibition and self-sacrifice), humility training (one should learn to be humble), contending mentality (one should accept one’s situation), punishment orientation (harsh punishment for non-conforming behavior), and parent-centeredness (parents determine the socialization goals).

Second, the present review highlights a question that should be further examined – is the teaching of the traditional Chinese classics useful? With the advance of Western technology and industrial might, many people have held the belief that the traditional Chinese teaching is not useful. Some may even outright reject the traditional Chinese views and uncritically accept the usefulness of the Western ideas. However, there are two problems of a total abandonment of the traditional Chinese ideas. First, there is teaching in the Chinese classics which has been practiced for a very long time. As shown by the present review, such cultural wisdom is in fact consistent with the contemporary scientific literature. Second, when one views the Western theories and findings, it is important to ask how such ideas fit into the cultural context of China. For example, while the Western emphasis on the children’s rights is important, the duties and obligations of children are relatively neglected. At the same time, one should ask whether the traditional Chinese teaching can effectively be used in the contemporary world.

Third, to answer the question of whether the traditional Chinese teaching is useful or not, we have conducted research on two levels. For example, Shek and Sun (15) pointed out that Chinese parental control is a mixture of behavioral control (e.g., high parental expectation and monitoring) and psychological control (e.g., guilt induction). How this strange mixture might be translated to motivation to excel in academic excellence is an important issue to be addressed. Therefore, future research should focus on how the traditional Chinese teaching on youth development and parenting is aligned with the contemporary scientific theories and findings at the conceptual level.

Finally, it is interesting and important to ask how the elements of *Di Zi Gui* can possibly be utilized in the youth development and parenting programs. In particular, with reference to the growing emphasis on character education for young people, the teaching of *Di Zi Gui*, such as striving for excellence in morality and focus on the inner quality instead of the outer appearance of a person, has obvious practical implications. Most important of all, it is interesting to ask whether the children under the influence of *Di Zi Gui* thrive better than the children without the influence of *Di Zi Gui*.

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Ethical compliance

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