

Culture counts in making Chinese maths-smart

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QUT researcher Michael Mu looks at why Chinese Australians are high achievers in maths.

Chinese Australians consistently outperform their peers in mathematics and according to QUT researcher Michael Mu this is not only because of pushy parents or motivated students.

Mr Mu's research has found in addition to a strong emphasis on mathematics, Chinese [Australians](#) mathematical achievement is also passed down through generations.

Mr Mu, who is undertaking his PhD through the Faculty of Education, said Chinese [cultural identity](#) counted in mathematical success.

As part of his study, Mr Mu surveyed 230 young Chinese Australians relating their mathematical achievement to their level of association with their Chinese cultural dispositions.

"I found there is a trend showing Chinese Australians' mathematics learning is influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by the values and expectations that they get from their cultural identity," he said.

"It's not only about Chinese parents pushing their children at mathematics, or students putting in more effort, or the belief that [Chinese students](#) have a great interest in maths, it's much more deeply rooted in their [cultural history](#)."

Mr Mu said "habitus" or as it was more commonly understood as structures that generate, but not determine, certain cultural dispositions, was what pushed Chinese Australians to do well at [maths](#) - and it could be done consciously or unconsciously.

"The importance of mathematics is steeped in [Chinese tradition](#) and culture. It is part of Confucius ideas and beliefs," he said.

"Chinese traditions and beliefs play an important part in Chinese culture and they are passed down from generation to generation.

"Despite some possible imperfect intergenerational reproduction, Confucian way of being, doing, and thinking continues over thousands of years.

"This perception becomes the underpinning mechanism that leads to Chinese Australians' putting in more effort in mathematics learning and therefore better mathematics achievement compared to their counterparts."

Mr Mu's study is published as *"Does Habitus Count in Chinese Australians' Mathematics Achievement?"*

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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