Extraocular Image (China)

In the early 1980s, there were reports in China of experiments in which children repeatedy demonstrated an anomalous ability to recognize hidden images and words by touch alone. This article describes some observations by Chinese scientists of what Chinese parapsychologists term Extraocular Image.

First Reports

In March 1979, an item in Xinghua News reported that Tang Yu, of Sichuan, a twelve year old girl, was able to read words on paper when placed behind her ears, and that since then, dozens of children and adults with such apparent supersensory abilities had been discovered in Beijing, Shanghai, Henan, Hebei, Heilongjiang and other cities.1

Beginning in September 1979, the Chinese journal Ziran Zazjii (Nature Magazine) published a series of articles stating that a number of children in various parts of China had been found able to recognize written symbols and printed pictures and distinguish different colours not with their eyes but by contact with their ears, hands, armpits, or some other part of the body.2

Tao Kiang

In 1982 Professor Tao Kiang, professor of astronomy at the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, published a report on observations he was able to make during a visit to Beijing two years earlier. He called on Chen Shou-liang at Beijing University who invited him to take part in experiments with three girls and a boy aged ten to twelve. The first he describes as follows:

> Mr. Chen gave me a large pile of picture cards of the kind used in China to teach children to read. They are about 4 cm square and have printed colour pictures on one side and characters on the other. I took this pile of about 150 cards to an empty office across the corridor. I was alone there with the cards and a quantity of black plastic tins with close-fitting lids. I picked out four cards and placed them inside the tins and put on the lids. I returned to the lab and gave the tins to the children who then each had one hand inside a muff. I did not know which tin was given to which. The muffs were either black or navy and had strings fitted at the ends. The children put their other hands in and the ends were fastened. I took out my digital watch and started taking notes.

The transcript of the children's comments is as follows:

> 10.04 Muff test [begins].
>
> 10.05 A: Background is apricot yellow.
>
> 10.07 C: Background is grey. There is a black fish. Green water-plant.

> 10.07 A: Two children lying on ground shooting. One is a little girl wearing dark-blue ([no,]brown) trousers and red top. The other is a boy, blue clothes, dark-blue trousers.
>
> 10.07 B: Light-blue background. Two white turnips, one red turnip.
>
> 10.07 D: Pink background. One small boy in white is running.

When after three minutes the muffs were loosened and the cards extracted, the answers were found to be detailed and correct, although Participant C only saw part of her picture.

The cards were chosen by Kiang from a pool of 150, but were already familiar to the children. In the second experiment Kiang prepared his own samples using coloured pens. Kiang states that again the answers were produced quickly and were almost completely correct down to the last detail. For instance, the equation E = mc 2 written in different colours was described as:

> A blue English capital E, followed by a red 'equal' sign, followed by a black small m, followed by a green capital G … and also there is a small '2' a little higher up.

The erroneous recognition of ‘G’ in place of ‘c’ suggested to Kiang that the girl did not recognise the formula, in which case she might have inferred it correctly, and that she was reading what she ‘saw’.

In a third experiment, the participants were not allowed to handle the card within the muff, but were each given it within a tin whose lid was sealed with sealing wax. One was an image of the Sun, another was of the Moon, and a third contained the word ‘radio’. The children took longer with these, and were less sure of their answers, which Kiang learned was normally the case. One in particular remained uncertain until the experiment was terminated. It was then found that her tin was in fact empty, Kiang having mistakenly picked it up in place of the one containing the word ‘radio’.

Another feature of this experiment was that two of the participants, who were sitting next to each other, identified the image in the other’s tin.

The children by this time seemed visibly tired, and two further experiments failed.

Chi-Kung Jen

A detailed account was published in 1983 by Chinese-born physicist Dr Chi-Kung Jen, then a senior researcher at the John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.[3] Jen’s article describes incidental observations he and his wife made during a lecture tour of China in 1980-81. Neither had previously been aware of the growth of public interest in claimed psi phenomena.[4] During their visit they were invited to participate in three separate demonstrations of EOI.

First Demonstration (Hefie University of Science and Technology)

Dr Zhu Jin-Kang, a lecturer in radio engineering, and his wife brought their nine year old son Zhu Li to Jen's hotel to see if he could demonstrate EOI. This was the first time Zhu Li had attempted EOI. Jen's wife went into another room where she wrote the Chinese word for 'sun' on a piece of paper with a ballpoint pen. She then folded and sealed the paper into a small opaque pad and handed it to Zhu Li. He lightly traced the paper with his fingers, then said part of the word, and then said the correct word.

The same procedure was repeated successfully twice more, first with the Chinese word for 'level' (meaning level of water), and then for 'sky' (see Fig. 1: Chinese word chart, 1st line). When Jen asked Zhu Li what he was feeling he replied he felt a tingling sensation in his fingers when they were following the line of the Chinese character.

 Concealed Chinese words identified by Chinese children by anomalous non-sensory means

Figure 1

Second Demonstration (Hefie University)

Mr Jia Zhi-Bin, proctor of Hefie University of Science and Technology, invited three girls and a boy from the local elementary school, aged between nine and eleven, to repeat demonstrations of EOI they had previously given, this time while sitting in a row facing a large audience. More than one hundred pieces of paper, on which were written Chinese or English words or single English letters, in red, blue or black ink, were folded several times and sealed with glue. The resulting packets were placed in a pile on a large plate, which was brought in by an usher. Each child chose a packet at random and held it between their palms.

In less than a minute each of the three girls said they knew what was the word in their packet. They were told to write the word, and the colour they thought it was written in, on the front of the packet. These were then passed to Jen, his wife and an assistant, who opened the packets as the audience watched, compared the written answers with the original and announced the result. In each case the three girls were correct, giving male in red, Zhou in red, and see (colour not mentioned) (see Fig 1: second line). The boy, who was unable to identify the writing in his package became upset at having failed the test.

Following this demonstration, more children were chosen from among the audience. They in turn 'read' their hand-held packets correctly, giving the words broad in red; public (no colour); moon in black; strength (no colour) for in blue, and up (no colour). (Fig 1, lines 3 and 4) Others correctly read the English letters 'F' 'G' and 'M'.

After the demonstration Jen asked the participants how they knew the word that had been written, and in many cases in what colour. They said that as they held the flat paper packet between their palms, they concentrated their mind on the packet and while doing so they felt either a warm feeling or a tingling sensation in their palms that seemed to move along their arms into their head. An image then started

to form in their mind's eye, as a small coloured blur that became larger, clearer and sharper, until they could say with confidence that what they could now clearly 'see' in their minds was what was written in the package.

Third Demonstration

This took place when Jen and his wife accepted an invitation to visit the home of Yang Long-Shen, a former student of Jen and now a senior scientist at the Institute of Electronics, Beijing. Besides his family Long-Shen had invited two young sisters who were friends of the family, namely Wu Yan, aged fifteen, and Yu Po, aged ten, to see if they could demonstrate EOL to Jen and his wife (Yu Po had recently won first prize in a demonstration of EOL at the nearby Institute of Physics).

The test procedure was as follows: Mrs Jen went out of Yu Po's sight to write a Chinese word on a piece of paper. She then folded it several times and placed it inside a small hollow wax ball consisting of two halves that could be closed tightly together (often used in China as a container for medicine pills). The wax ball was given to Yu Po who held the ball in both hands behind her back. In less than a minute she said that she could see the word for 'Lord' written in red which was correct (Fig. 1, bottom line). This experiment was then repeated, but this time Mrs Jen placed the paper sample inside a small plastic box. This was handed to Yu Po who again held it behind her back and in less than a minute correctly identified it as the Chinese word meaning 'separate' written in blue.

At this point Dr Lu Bao-Wei, director of the Institute of Electronics, Beijing, joined them, intending to take Jen and his wife to his home for dinner. Having learned about the two successful tests he asked to test Yu Po using the same procedure, folding his paper inside a wax ball, and handing it to Yu Po. As before, she held it behind her back and within a minute said correctly that it was the word for 'central' written in red.

Later, Jen asked her how she knew with such certainty. She, as Wu Yan nodded in agreement, said that in her mind's eye she saw twelve different coloured spots as flashes that repeatedly swept from right to left, one spot getting brighter as the others faded away. Finally, this remaining spot, in the correct colour, became stationary and formed itself into the mental image of the concealed word. As soon as that happened she knew without any hesitation that what she 'saw' was the same as the word and the colour concealed in the packet inside the container.

Publication of Jen's Account

Jen's observations came to the attention of Dr Robert A. McConnell, an American physicist and parapsychologist, via a departmental colleague who happened to be Jen's son-in-law. McConnell asked Jen to write an account that could be submitted to the Parapsychology Review, published by the Parapsychology Foundation, New York. This was duly done; however, the journal declined to publish it, apparently because the practice of EOI did not fall within its definition of parapsychology.[5] Instead, McConnell included Jen's account in his 1983 book Parapsychology and Self Deception in Science.

Lee C Teng

In his book McConnell also refers to a letter, published in the Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, by the American physicist Dr Lee C. Teng (1981), then associate director for advanced projects at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Illinois, describing his observation of EOI demonstrations during a 1980 lecture tour in China, accompanied by his wife and son. Teng had been told of reports in China that children with 'exceptional faculties' were able to 'read' concealed writings with various parts of their bodies – under their armpit, between their toes, in the ear, and so on. When some Chinese physicists were visiting his laboratory they mentioned that an 18-year old girl was undergoing tests for EOI at the Institute for High Physics, Beijing, but at the time he thought no more about it.

While visiting the Institute for Modern Physics at Lanzhou, his hosts invited him to see a demonstration of EOI, arranging for the librarian of the Institute and his twelve-year-old son Su Peng to visit Teng's hotel. Teng was asked to go into another room and write something on a small piece of soft paper, which he was then to wrinkle into a ball and insert into Su Peng's ear. He writes:

> More amused than excited I dutifully went into the next room and wrote on three slips of soft paper – four Chinese characters on one paper, two meaningless geometrical diagrams on a second paper and some English letters on the third paper, then wrinkled them into little balls and put one in Su Peng's ear, feeling a little silly and rather guilty at playing along.

Initially, Su Peng seemed too tense to perform, so to get him to relax he and Teng's son started playing some card games. Suddenly,

> Su Peng stopped playing, took the pen in his hand, hesitated a little, and then started writing. We all gathered round to look. He quickly wrote down the four Chinese characters without mistake or hesitation. The paper ball was taken out of his ear, opened up and verified. I was speechless because I alone knew what I did in the next room, how I personally put the paper ball in his ear and how it was totally impossible for anyone to know what was in it – including myself because I had forgotten which of the three paper balls I had put in his ear.

Su Peng then quickly and successfully 'read' the other two balls.

There was then a pause while Su Peng worked off some energy by playing ping-pong with Teng's son, after which he felt sufficiently relaxed to undergo more tests.

> By then he was reading almost instantaneously as soon as the ball was put into his ear, although the complexity of the writings had increased to something ridiculous – latest physics terminology in English, complex physical and mathematical formulae, some in different colours which he identified correctly, and several were read upside down since he was unable to tell from the totally foreign material which was the right way up. Nevertheless, when turned the right way up his writing was entirely accurate.

Teng asked him what he experienced during the EOI process. Su Peng said that he had discovered his EOI ability quite accidentally when everyone in his fifth-grade class tried to do it for themselves after reading about it in a newspaper. He said that the image he saw in his mind's eye was sometimes blurry and sometimes seemed to come in and out of focus. When it was in focus, having stabilized, it was often clearer in intensity in his mind's eye than it looked after he had written it down, always appearing in full colour and flat writing without a wrinkle. He had also found that his ability to perform EOI quickly and accurately depended upon being in a happy and relaxed mood. When he was tense he found it difficult and it was often several minutes before an image formed.

On his return to America, Teng kept the slips he had written, together with Su Peng's written readings and photographs taken by his wife during the tests. He included two of his written tests and Su Peng's responses with his letter to the Society, but unfortunately these were not published.

Discussion

Teng's observations of successful EOI tests fully supports Jen's separate set of observations. The procedures were different but the results were the same.

Fraud?

A key concern is to know what controls were imposed on the demonstrations to obviate the possibility of fraud, and what confidence can be placed in them. The conditions as described by Jen and Teng would seem to exclude any form of sleight of hand enabling the participants to see what had been written before the sealed papers were opened. However, as is pointed out by Dr Peter Lamont, a psychologist and specialist in magic at the University of Edinburgh,[6] observers can be deceived in numerous ways, and this caveat must be borne in mind.

A test that would have helped confirm the results would have been for blank papers to have been used in some instances, without the participants' knowledge. A failure to perceive anything, a sign of failure to the child, would for the experimenters have helped confirm EOI as a genuine phenomenon.

Telepathy or Clairvoyance?

Assuming there was no deception the observations point to an anomalous acquisition of information that cannot be accounted for by sensory systems, with almost 100% accuracy. That would confirm EOI as a particular form of ESP, and one that is seemingly easily acquired by Chinese children within their culture.

The problem is then to determine which form of ESP was involved: a clairvoyant mode of direct 'seeing' of the concealed contents, or a telepathic mode of communication, where the child perceives the image as a memory in the mind of the person who wrote it down, anticipation.

Of the two, the form of the experiment would seem to make direct perception less likely, as the concealed word is not lying flat and face-up but rather is rolled or

screwed up, making the outlines impossible to make out. The clairvoyant faculty would necessarily involve an ability to unscramble the paper ball into a readable flat plane.

On the other hand, direct seeing interpretation is apparently negated by the experiment in which packages were picked randomly from a large pool, since the contents would be unknown to anyone present.

Telepathic Precognition

The possibility of precognition is also present in the bowl experiment. In this case, the child would become aware of what either the observers or the child herself will see at the moment in the near future when the paper is opened.

Potential Tests

A test could be carried out to determine whether the telepathic and clairvoyant (direct seeing) mode is active. Here, successful tests along the lines described above are immediately followed by a variation, in which a computer rather than a human creates the target image. The machine randomly chooses a symbol from a large pool and distorts it to simulate it being screwed up. In this indecipherable form it would then be printed out and placed in a sealed container before being handed to the child.

Repeated failure on the part of a previously successful participant to perceive a definite image would lend support to the view that it is a mental image of the object that is being perceived, not the object itself.

If the participant achieves similar levels of success with this method the direct seeing mode is not ruled out. However, it faces an added complexity, since the question arises of what exactly is being 'seen'.

Literature

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Zheng, S. (1981). Parapsychology – Is It Real? *China Reconstructs* 30, 50-51.

Endnotes

Footnotes

- 1. Spray (1980).
- 2. Kiang (1982).
- 3. McConnell (1983), 9-14.
- 4. Zheng (1981).
- 5. McConnell (1986), 6.
- 6. Peter Lamont kindly responded to an inquiry on this matter. He is a psychology lecturer at the University of Edinburgh and is a graduate of its Koestler Parapsychology Unit, with a PhD on Victorian beliefs about spiritualism. He is author of a biography of DD Home, *The First Psychic* (Abacus, 2006).