

# REINCARNATIONS

This article by an unknown writer has circulated widely over the past two years. Reader comments on Web sites on which it has been posted suggest that the article has struck a raw nerve over the wasted potential of China's youth in the present educational and social environment.

When God heard that China, with a population of more than a billion, was not home to any Nobel Prize winners,<sup>1</sup> he felt this was unacceptable, and decided to lend a helping hand. To that end, he arranged for Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel to be reincarnated in China.

Albert Einstein<sup>2</sup> made his appearance first. He was born to a professor at a national scientific institute, and both parents were



extremely well-read Chinese scholars. From early childhood, young Einstein demonstrated a rich imagination, but apart from the subjects he enjoyed, his school performance was very poor. He didn't graduate from secondary school, failing his exams in ten subjects and being held back three times. His parents took him to

be examined at the Peking University People's Hospital, where the doctors concluded that he was delusional, and that his I.Q. was only one percent that of a normal person. So Einstein was sent to a school for the mentally handicapped. When the parents thought about their son being retarded, the father, as a science scholar, suspected that his wife had had an illicit affair, and after numerous quarrels the couple divorced.

Little Einstein went with his mother. She decided to encourage him to learn other things, and taught him music, but it turned out that Einstein had no interest in music. Neither was he interested in art. He preferred to sit and think all day long, contemplating the stars in the sky and the vast cosmos, and concluding that time and space were related. As a child thinking such things, he was inevitably sent to a psychiatric hospital. The hospital set up a special research group to look

into this rare illness, and applied for a grant under the national "863" plan,<sup>3</sup> with a famous scholar who had returned from overseas heading up the project. They believed that research into the rare "Einstein Syndrome" greatly enhanced humanity's understanding of nature.

Thomas Edison<sup>4</sup> was naturally intelligent, and in math and sciences tested at the top of his class throughout primary and secondary school. But he didn't like politics, and failed his university entrance exams. His parents had no money to send him overseas to school, so the best he could do was find a job as a worker in a light bulb factory. Edison was particularly interested in light bulbs, but the factory management felt it would be ludicrous to set up a research laboratory for someone without a university degree. Instead, they assigned him to work as a light bulb business manager. Fortunately, he eventually found a wife, and they had a child and lived a happy, ordinary life.



When Charles Darwin<sup>5</sup> came into the world, he enjoyed a relatively uneventful childhood, and showed a particular interest in geography and biology while in high school. But in the Chinese education system, geography fell under liberal arts, while biology fell under the sciences.



Through excessive persistence he finally passed the entrance exam for a tourism college, with the intention of becoming a tour guide and seeing the world. But a degree in tourism carried little prestige, and was regarded as a second-rate diploma. In addition, he discovered that man had evolved from apes, and he refused to listen to the advice of his elders, and insisted on his own views. When people from above came to see him he didn't know how to behave, and his "monkey" theory was decried as a crime of slander. Since he couldn't make peace with the authorities, he was labeled as a person who intended to destabilize society through slander. He was sent to reeducation through labor to learn from the working people. After he came out he was sent to a coal mine, where he distinguished himself as a miner.

Gregor Mendel<sup>6</sup> grew up as a peasant. As he couldn't afford to attend college, he remained at home to tend the fields, and



cultivated a type of pea from which he was able to discover material called “genes.” This further excited his interest in cultivating peas, and his production level vastly outstripped that of his neighbors. But he had never attended college and had no diploma or any professor to promote

his work, so he couldn’t get anyone to publish or read his articles. He could only write down his experience with peas, which others regarded as mere pseudoscience. Fortunately, at that time Yuan Longping<sup>7</sup> was laboring over the problem of hybridization, and he frequently carried out field research. One day he stumbled across Mendel’s pea field, and finding the peas to be really special, he asked that honest farmer how he did it. He ate and lived with Mendel, and Mendel explained his ideas to him, which were a revelation to Yuan Longping. At a meeting of the United Nations, Yuan Longping declared, “I am a peasant. Peasants are my teachers, and all of my inspiration comes from peasants.”

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Although Mendel’s peas were excellent, there was no market for them, and he couldn’t make any money from them. A peasant’s burden is heavy; just getting enough to eat is already a problem, not to mention carrying out scientific research, and economic reforms made the task even more thankless. Mendel went south with other villagers to find work and became a manual laborer. He is now employed at a village enterprise in Dongguan, and remains unmarried.

Isaac Newton<sup>8</sup> had the best luck, but even though his achievements were exceptional, he had a strange temperament, and in high school his teachers entered a considerable number of negative comments in his reports. As a result, when his application at a well-known university was considered, the professors there decided that he had questionable thinking and character and unreliable politics, and they rejected his application.



He was only able to gain admittance to the physics department of a mediocre technical institute. He wrote many theses on classical mechanics, and raised some new theories, but his teachers didn’t like to see a student who so surpassed their own abilities and made them look like idiots, so they didn’t promote his articles, and the professional journals rejected them. Busy with writing their own articles, reviewing, collecting fees and compiling results, Newton’s teachers gave him little guidance in improving his articles, which were badly composed and failed to conform to publishable standards.

At one point, he used his own funds to participate in an

academic symposium in Beihai, Guangxi Province. Many scholars of national stature were present, and Newton saw this as a good opportunity to consult these learned men. None of the scholars had ever heard of the questions he raised. Newton had genuine personality problems, and he rather testily remarked, “Can it be that the science academy is no better than a pig farm?” With that, Newton was immediately hustled out of the conference. From then on, there was not a journal anywhere in the world that would publish Newton’s articles.

In the course of his career at the undistinguished technical institute, Newton managed to publish only one brief article on universal gravitation, which subjected him to derision from all quarters. He spent the last half of his life as a physics teacher, which at least allowed him to pursue his subject after a fashion. In this respect, he came out better than the others.

When God saw that none of these reincarnations had been productive, he became rather alarmed. Just then he noticed Dmitri Mendeleev<sup>9</sup> nearby.

God asked, “Say, Dmitri, would you be willing to help out China?”

Mendeleev said, “I would very much like to go to China!”

God asked, “What conditions would you require?”

Mendeleev said, “The failure of the others could be due to their not having studied enough. Especially if you don’t study overseas, your opportunities are much more limited. According to my observations, in China you have to obtain at least a Ph.D., and preferably you should come back with a degree from abroad, otherwise no one will pay you any notice. So it would be best for me to be born to a relatively well-off family, and to be able to study abroad.”

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God said, “That last part won’t do. I want to help China produce its own scientist to be awarded the Nobel Prize. India has been able to produce its Raman,<sup>10</sup> and China should be able to as well. But if you have any other requests, contact me any time. My cell phone number is 13678910.”

Mendeleev said, “I’ll definitely do that.”

Mendeleev was born to an educator’s family, and his own education was excellent. He was admitted to study for his



Ph.D. in chemistry at China’s Zhongyong University, and was assigned to the National Center Laboratory. His professor, a senior professor at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, had taken on an important national project, and there was plenty of research funding. Mendeleev was a smooth operator and got along very well with his professor.

In short, Mendeleev worked hard to excel in his reincarna-

tion, and his fame soon outstripped that of his professor. Identifying new elements and expanding the Periodic Table to 188 elements and confirming his results in the laboratory was no easy matter. But the managers of the laboratory were old backland revolutionaries deployed from above, and even though they had not even been educated to the high school level, they had very firm ideas of how things should be done, and were not interested in learning anything new. They were extremely arrogant. Mendeleev ran himself ragged and wore out his tongue trying to get the distilled water and other things he needed for his experiments, and ended up doing most of the fetching himself. To make things worse, China was expanding its doctoral programs, and Mendeleev had laboratory access for his experiments only once a week. If it happened to coincide with a time when the laboratory staff were out playing mahjongg, he just had to sacrifice his Party group study session. In addition, because Mendeleev was flaunting his abilities too much, his professors were also beginning to look askance at him, and with no overseas study under his belt, and still in school, he had no way to apply for funding himself.

Mendeleev used a satellite telephone to contact God and said, "God, what I need now is a laboratory!"

God said, "Okay, tell me everything you need." So Mendeleev provided a list. God's brow furrowed, and he said, "Aiyah, this is too professional! I don't understand any of it. Why don't you go and place the order, and I'll send you the money through a Swiss bank."

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Mendeleev was very pleased when he contacted the Swiss bank the next day and found that the money was indeed there.

In order to obtain foreign currency and purchase equipment through the normal channels, it was necessary to apply to the Science Division, the Education Department, the Finance Ministry, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and the Foreign Exchange Management Bureau. After considerable effort, Mendeleev finally bought some things.

Mendeleev went to God again. "It's no good, I can't use this stuff."

God said, "I know some people, you can contact them."

Mendeleev contacted a European science institute to establish a large laboratory, and also found suppliers.

The freight was delivered to China by ship through the Panama Canal. When the patriotic businessman Li Ka-shing<sup>11</sup> heard it was a freighter delivering goods for science in China, he offered a great deal of assistance at no cost, and said he would put out whatever effort was necessary to help Mendeleev. Mendeleev was moved to tears, and said he would surely not disappoint Mr. Li's trust in him, and would do his utmost for the Chinese people.

Not long afterward, an American fighter jet began following the ship. Then a military vessel suddenly blocked its way,

and the commander demanded the right to board and carry out an inspection. The Chinese Foreign Ministry protested the action, but the Americans suspected the ship was carrying equipment for the manufacture of nuclear weapons that might be used to threaten the security of the United States.

The Chinese government protested that as well.

The thorough "anti-terrorism" inspection carried out by the Americans was in fact aimed at stalling China's scientific development. The purchase of such a large quantity of expensive equipment had attracted official notice, and raised suspicions that Mendeleev was participating in a terrorist organization.

Finally, after the inspection was completed, the Americans released the freight and allowed the ship to reach China.

Mendeleev had spent so much money on equipment that he was imprisoned on charges of "possessing large quantities of money or property of unclear origin."

After hearing nothing from Mendeleev for a very long time, God began to miss him, and made the effort to locate him. Mendeleev tearfully upbraided him, "God, you scoundrel! Look what you've done to me!" Mendeleev summoned his rage for a last effort, tied a rope around a beam and went to see God.

Translated by Stacy Mosher

The original Chinese article can be found on the Web site of Peacehall.com: <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/misc/2004/09/200409091405.shtml>. The article has also been posted with minor variations on numerous other Chinese Web sites, including Sohu.com and Phoenixtv.com. The translator located what may be the earliest posting of this article in December 2002: <http://www.driverdevelop.com/forum/viewthread.php?tid=30108>.

### TRANSLATOR'S NOTES:

1. A number of ethnic Chinese have been awarded the Nobel Prize, but only as overseas residents or citizens. Gao Xingjian, born in Jiangxi Province, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000 as a citizen of France. Daniel C. Tsui, born in Henan Province, shared the Nobel Prize for Physics with two others in 1998 while at Princeton. Chen-Ning Yang, born in Anhui Province, and Tsung-Dao Lee, born in Shanghai, shared the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1957 while Yang was at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study and Lee was at Columbia University. Yuan T. Lee, born in Taiwan, shared the Nobel Prize in Chemistry with two others in 1986 while at Berkeley. In addition, three Americans of Chinese descent, Steven Chu, David M. Lee and Samuel C.C. Ting, were awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics with others in 1998, 1997 and 1976 respectively.
2. Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the German-born physicist who developed the theory of relativity, did not distinguish himself in school, and in 1895 failed the exam that would have allowed him to study for a diploma as an electrical engineer at a technical institute in Zurich. He began to publish articles on advanced theoretical physics during his spare time while working at a Bern patent office, without the benefit of close contact with scientific literature or colleagues. He received the Nobel Prize in 1921 for his work on the photoelectric effect. He was offered a post at Princeton in 1932, and eventually became a citizen of

- the United States. Shortly before his death, Einstein agreed to sign his name on a manifesto urging all nations to give up the nuclear weapons that his theories had helped to develop.
3. The National High Technology Research and Development Program of China, alternatively known as the “863 Program,” was launched by the Chinese government in March 1986 to enhance China’s international competitiveness in high technology. <http://www.863.org.cn/english/index.html>.
  4. Thomas Edison (1847–1931), born to middle-class parents in Ohio, was taught by his mother at home because he was considered disruptive in school. He developed an early interest in science, and by the age of 12 had begun engaging in entrepreneurial projects. While best known for his development of the incandescent light bulb, Edison also developed the world’s first research center, which ultimately facilitated the mass production and practical application of standardized electrical components. Edison was nominated for the Nobel Prize in physics in 1915 along with his rival, Nikola Tesla. He declined the nomination, apparently in order to deprive Tesla of the honor.
  5. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) originally studied medicine to become a doctor like his father, but repelled by surgery, he prepared to become a clergyman instead. He then accepted an invitation to serve as an unpaid naturalist on the H.M.S. Beagle during its science expedition around the world. His observations on that expedition spurred the research on which he based his theories of evolution and natural selection. His ideas created great controversy because of their conflict with religious beliefs, but Darwin was finally awarded an honorary Doctorate of Law from Cambridge University in 1877.
  6. Gregor Mendel (1822–1884) was born to a peasant farmer in Austria. Although Mendel was a brilliant student, his parents lacked resources to support his higher education, so he became educated as an Augustinian monk and taught natural science to high school students. Mendel had a natural interest in atypical characteristics of plants, and by breeding peas and mice at the monastery he developed the theories of heredity that became the basis for the study of modern genetics. Mendel’s work was not recognized by his scientific peers until the early 1900s, well after his death.
  7. Yuan Longping, born in Beijing, was assigned to teach crop genetics and breeding at an agricultural school in Hunan Province, where he began his research into hybrid rice in 1964. After being transferred to the Hunan Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 1971, he discovered the genetic materials that breed high-yielding rice. His research has won him numerous domestic and international awards and honors, and he was named a World Food Prize Laureate in 2004.
  8. Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727) was born to a wealthy family in Lincolnshire, England. He failed to distinguish himself at school, where he was described as “idle” and “inattentive,” but through the encouragement of an uncle, he attended Cambridge University. Before he was 25 years old, Newton began to develop revolutionary ideas in mathematics, optics, physics and astronomy, and laid the foundations for differential and integral calculus. Under the patronage of Isaac Barrow, Newton was appointed Lucasian Professor at Cambridge, and developed his law of universal gravitation. However, his career was impeded by poor relations with other scholars. Newton suffered two nervous breakdowns, and retired from research in 1693 to take up a well-paid civil service posting as Warden of the Royal Mint.
  9. Dmitri Mendeleev (1834–1907) was the youngest of 14 children of a school director who died when Mendeleev was very young. With his mother’s encouragement, Mendeleev overcame family hardships and poor health to distinguish himself in school. In 1895, the Minister of Public Instruction sent Mendeleev abroad to study and develop scientific and technological innovations, after which he became Professor of Chemistry at the University in St. Petersburg. While at the University, Mendeleev developed his periodic law of atomic mass, by which he arranged the 63 known chemical elements into a Periodic Table. He also became a popular social figure, and resigned from the university in 1890 when the Minister of Education rebuffed his involvement in student political movements. The Russian government appointed Mendeleev Director of the Bureau of Weights and Measures in 1893.
  10. Chandrashekar Venkataraman (Sir C.V. Raman) was awarded India’s first Nobel Prize for Physics in 1930. Other Nobel Laureates from India include Rabindranath Tagore (Literature, 1913—studied in London), Hargobind Khorana (Medicine, 1968—while at University of Wisconsin), Mother Teresa (Peace, 1979—born in Yugoslavia), Subramanian Chandrashekar (Physics, 1983—while in the U.S.), and Amartya Sen (Economics, 1998—while at Cambridge University). According to “God’s” stringent criteria, only Raman, who graduated from Presidency College, Madras, and served as Professor of Physics at Calcutta University, can be considered a “home grown” Nobel Laureate.
  11. Li Ka-shing is a Hong Kong billionaire who has cultivated excellent relations with the Beijing authorities.