

Transnational learning and Chinese sayings

Haedy Liu

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, US: hliu@umhb.edu

Chinese sayings within the context of transnational education have not been extensively explored within higher education. In this qualitative study, which utilized semi-structured interviews, data were collected from 24 participants to explore their transnational study experience. Chinese sayings, framed within a rich Confucian history, provide a culturally appropriate way for participants to understand their transnational learning experience. By using Chinese sayings and metaphors, the participants found meaning in their transnational education experience for personal growth and to strengthen their communities. The article provides a discussion of implications for higher education contexts and recommendations.

Keywords: transnational education; higher education; Confucianism

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies on transnational education have raised issues regarding its place in the internationalization of higher education. In China, recent trends towards internationalization have cultivated collaboration in cross-cultural research and dialogue. Although transnational education practices continue to develop in China, little research has been carried out to understand the experiences of transnational scholars within the framework of Confucianism. In a previous study (Liu, 2012), the author examined the overall transnational study experience of 24 university instructors from universities in Yunnan, China. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the Chinese sayings used by university teachers in that study were used to describe their experiences. The central research question is: how do Chinese sayings provide a means of reflection for transnational learning? Sub-questions are:

1. How did the Chinese sayings help them communicate their transnational studies as it pertained to their professional and personal growth?
2. What did participants do with their new knowledge as they re-entered their home context?
3. How did participants describe the challenges they faced upon returning home using Chinese sayings?
4. How do the Chinese sayings that participants chose to describe their transnational studies fit within Confucianism?

Qualitative data were collected utilizing semi-structured interviews to explore these questions. After significant engagement with the data and using a grounded theory methodology, themes related to Chinese sayings or metaphorical language emerged. These Chinese sayings were analysed using the framework of Confucianism to understand how the participants used these Chinese sayings to find meaning in their experience.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Although the number of studies about Chinese transnational study experiences, particularly studies concerned with following the return of students to China, has grown in the last decade, there continues to be a paucity of understanding of the overall implications of transnational study for China and other countries interested in internationalization. This study may have applications for Chinese students as they prepare to study overseas by providing an authentic perspective of the transnational experience. In addition, this study offers a creative and meaningful framework that students returning from transnational studies can use to reflect on their experience.

In other words, this study may provide insights for Chinese students preparing to study overseas in that the Chinese sayings that were used by the participants of this study offer a glimpse into the most salient aspects of the experience, namely the strengthening of both personal and community issues. These Chinese sayings may address the most relevant aspects of the transnational experience for Chinese students and may offer a point of commonality with respect to this experience.

In addition, the findings of this study may offer a uniquely Chinese construct from which to reflect on a transnational study experience. That is, Chinese sayings provide word pictures that are both powerful and robust and can provide a meaningful and creative construct for self-reflection. Rather than engaging in reflective writing upon return from a transnational study experience, perhaps programs can encourage participants to use Chinese sayings or other culturally-appropriate proverbs or sayings to encourage self-reflection. The transnational study experience can be transformative but self-reflection using non-western constructs, such as Chinese sayings, may offer an alternative framework from which to reflect.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Chinese transnational experience

Transnational education experiences vary significantly depending upon many factors, including individual learning styles, context of learning, length of time studying abroad and study location. Recent studies on Chinese students returning home after transnational studies have demonstrated the value of these studies, particularly for the students (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Kettula, Lampinen, Fei, & Jiang, 2013) and higher education instructors (Smith, 2009).

In one study, researchers found that Chinese students returning to China after completing their degrees in the UK reported significant changes that ranged from personal to professional. Of particular interest is the finding that returnees “felt that as a result of their study abroad experiences, they were more knowledgeable about their own Chinese backgrounds and home culture than those who never stayed abroad for a lengthy period of time” (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015, p. 958). Students returning to China commonly experience a shift in identity, having become more aware of the multitudes of dimensions associated with different cultures. This transformation of identity involves the examination of values, which may lead to a renewed sense of self. The participants in this study described a similar experience and used Chinese sayings to express many of their complex insights.

In another study (Kettula et al., 2013) Chinese participants used journals to reflect on a short pedagogical workshop developed cooperatively between a Chinese and Finnish university. The journals allowed participants to write their impressions in response to questions posed by the researchers. Although Kettula et al.'s study was for a brief experience, it highlights the value of using specific types of prompts to elicit the kind of self-reflection that may be valuable for those returning from a transnational study experience.

Transnational education in China

Transnational higher education in China has gained recognition within the broader concept of internationalization. The concept of internationalization is sometimes interchangeably used with that of globalization but the ideas, while closely related, are distinct from one another (Yang, 2002). Yang argues that internationalization for a university is “the awareness and operation of interactions within and between cultures through its teaching, research and service functions, with the ultimate aim of achieving mutual understanding across cultural borders” (p. 83). Globalization, however, in its broadest form is:

[S]ocial processes that transcend national borders. While the concept of globalization spans separate, overlapping domains, it is fundamentally an economic process of integration that transcends national borders and ultimately affects the flow of knowledge, people, and ideas. (Yang, 2002, p. 83)

Globalization is most often understood in strictly economic terms, while internationalization remains largely cultural, although economic factors certainly influence its development, especially in higher education.

The term “internationalization” of higher education has evolved into a number of models and definitions that have been described by numerous authors; such definitions have also sparked discussions about indicators that may measure outcomes of the “internationalization” at a particular university. Knight (2015) has described three main internationalization models: the *classic*, *satellite*, and *co-founded* models.

This study focuses on a transnational study undertaken by university teachers at Chinese universities within the classic model of internationalization. That is, all participants were enrolled in a formal graduate degree program at a university located outside of China, namely in the US, Canada, the UK and Finland. Knight (2015) describes this model as, “an institution that has developed multiple activities and partners, both at home and abroad, and involves a broad spectrum of intercultural and international academic, research, service, and management initiatives” (Knight, 2015, p. 109). However, Knight cautioned that such a discussion “will only be as strong as the inputs and process, and the three need to be examined together” (Knight, 2015, p. 109).

Classic transnational model in China

Transnational education in China has experienced quite a few changes since the mid-1980s when Deng Xiaoping's Open Door policy reforms opened China to the rest of the world. The most significant influence on the development of transnational higher education in China has been the influence of government entities, such as the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Education, on improving the quality of higher

education. Several pieces of legislation have been passed that call for greater cooperation with foreign partners in the area of education for transnational studies, including the 1995 *Education Act of the People's Republic of China*.

After the decade-long Cultural Revolution changed much of the education system in China, scholars were encouraged to study abroad in the hope that they might return with fresh ideas and usher in new educational reforms (Beijing University School of Education & Zhongshan University Institute of Higher Education, 2005). Although China has had a transnational education program for several decades, developments, such as China's entry into the WTO in 2001, sparked further rapid expansion of the program. Since the initiation of the Open Door policy, the growth and development of China's transnational higher education has been characterized by a confluence of local and global factors.

Huang (2003b) attributes the increased demand for university programs as one influence on the development of transnational higher education in China. There are simply too few universities to accommodate the increased number of students in China. For this reason, students are looking beyond China's borders for opportunities to study. However, with the rise of China's economic global strength, more and more Chinese students are returning to China following studies overseas. These forces have caused transnational education in China to develop into a complex system with both opportunities and challenges at the institutional and societal levels that, at times, is at odds with the stated transnational higher education policy of China (Hou, Montgomery, & McDowell, 2014). Despite the challenges, there continues to be a healthy growth in the number of Chinese students pursuing degrees overseas.

The *Open Doors Report* (2015) published annually by the Institute of International Education with support from the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, reported that, in the 2014-2015 academic year, the total number of international students studying in the US was 974,926, which is a 10 percent increase in the overall enrolment of international students from the previous year. The number of Chinese international students studying in the US during the 2014-2015 academic year rose from 274,439 to 304,040 a 10 percent increase over the 2013-2014 year. China makes up 31 percent of the overall number of international students studying in the US in the 2014-15 academic year. This percentage represents a steady rise in enrolments since the 2004-2005 academic year. On the back of this trend, universities in the US and China are creating new and innovative transnational education models and programs.

Satellite and co-founded transnational education in China

The backing of the Chinese government has encouraged the growth of transnational education in China. Huang (2003a) argues that internationalization not only includes scholars' transnational study experiences but also the cultivation of Chinese university influence on the curricula and policies of the universities of other countries. Establishing Chinese influence is being done, for example, through the establishment of Confucius Institutes on campuses throughout the world, particularly North America and Europe, which enables China to export its language and culture (Mooney, 2007; Starr, 2009). Huang (2007) defines China's model as "transitional" (p. 424) because China is moving away from predominantly importing higher education services and is attempting to expand its education services overseas, thus enabling increased internationalization abroad while retaining distinctly Chinese characteristics.

Collaborative initiatives have also encouraged Chinese universities to cultivate partnerships with foreign universities (Feng, 2013; Rui, 2008). Such models hold great promise but require significant oversight and regulation.

Given the increase in transnational education opportunities for Chinese students, both to study abroad and to study in foreign university partnerships within China, it would be useful to gain insight into how students involved in the classic transnational education experience frame their experiences upon return to China. In this study, participants often used Chinese sayings to describe their transnational study experience. These sayings are often embedded within Confucian values, so an initial overview of Confucianism may help shed light on these sayings.

Chinese sayings and Confucianism

Almost all of the participants in this qualitative study described their transnational learning experience using Chinese sayings or metaphors. Chinese sayings include *chéngyǔ* (成语, four-character idioms) and *yànyǔ* (谚语, proverbs). These sayings are commonly used in China because they provide profound and image-rich meanings and are often anchored in Confucianism. Some participants also used metaphors to describe their transnational experience. The participants of this study used these sayings to describe their transnational study experience, which they described using rich, artistic imagery that engages the soul with its emphasis on character or moral development. Participants of this study describe not only how that they grew personally and professionally, they also expressed a desire to bring these changes to their communities. In order to understand how Chinese sayings are used by the participants of this study, an overview of some of the basic tenets of Confucianism may be useful.

Confucian philosophy has greatly influenced the development of education and learning in China for centuries and, despite political and social changes in China in recent years, Confucianism remains deeply embedded in Chinese society. Confucius never actually wrote down his ideas but his students collected his sayings into what is known as *The Analects*. These collections of stories and sayings provide the best understanding of Confucianism. Two series of books, *The Four Books* and *Five Classics* (四书五经), contain the principles of government and the administration of society, and the maxims of personal conduct that form the foundation of the ancient civil service examinations used for centuries by Chinese dynasties.

Confucius regarded thinking and reflection as precursors to learning and as paramount to life itself when he said: “he who learns but does not think, is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger” (Analects 2, #15). Further, the concept of *ren* (仁), commonly translated as “benevolence”, must inform learning at a fundamental level. To better understand this Confucian concept, Zhang (2002) suggests considering the actual Chinese character for *ren*:

The character *ren* is composed of the graph for human being and that for the number two. It is the expressive of the relations that should pertain among human beings. Hence it has been translated as “humanity,” “benevolence,” “love,” and to bring out the sense of relationship, “co-humanity.” It is also the supreme virtue that encompasses all others and so is rendered “goodness,” “perfect virtue.” It is thus pre-

eminently a virtue of society rather than an internal matter of conscience alone. (p. 285)

The idea of *ren* (仁) is closely related to learning and is defined in moral rather than academic terms. The Confucian philosophy of learning encourages the pursuit of moral virtue, which leads to the attainment of knowledge. From the Confucian perspective, the pursuit of knowledge must be for the purpose of improving moral character with the view to society as a whole, not primarily for individual development. This concept explains why the participants in this study often use Chinese sayings that have few words but profound personal meanings.

Confucianism's emphasis on holistic thinking led to an education system that encourages improving the whole person, including the moral character of a person, not simply increasing knowledge. Chinese university instructors in this study use Chinese sayings to describe their transnational experience as a rich tapestry in which individual experience is often framed and cultivated within a larger community, which resonates with Confucian principles. Rather than viewing their experience as professional development, which in most cases was professional advancement also, many saw it as a way of strengthening their own moral fibre to benefit their communities. Wang and King (2008) have described the relationship between Confucianism and learning, particularly in relation to the metaphysical aspects of learning within a Confucian context:

To be exact, learning as the cultivation of one's inner experience(s), has a sacred purpose, that is to aid one to become a sage, a genuine person so that the genuine person should be free from four things: arbitrariness of opinion, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egotism. (p. 136-137)

Confucius taught that students should be active learners who could draw relevant lessons from whatever they studied and who could use few words to describe great truths:

The Master said, "I never enlighten anyone who has not been driven to distraction by trying to understand a difficulty or who has not got into a frenzy trying to put his ideas into words. When I have pointed out one corner of a square to anyone and he does not come back with the other three, I will not point it out to him a second time." (Analects 5:9)

Confucianism's emphasis on the cultivation of character in oneself and others, as well as its focus on simply-stated but profound truths provide a backdrop for understanding how the participants of this study use Chinese sayings, proverbs and metaphors to frame their transnational experience.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The original study focused on teachers who studied abroad in western countries in the context of transnational education after 2000, when significant transnational education reforms and initiatives took place in China. Transnational studies can refer to either studying outside of one's home country or studying at a foreign university within one's home country; though in this study participants were limited to Chinese teachers who studied abroad and did not include Chinese teachers studying in a foreign university "satellite" campus in China. The study is also limited to teachers from eight universities in Yunnan, China.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the challenges facing outside researchers in China remains gaining access to individuals who feel free enough to share their personal experiences in a safe environment, free from any external constraints, such as professional affiliation or institutional loyalties sometimes found in fields such as health care. Despite significant funding and backing of such agencies and institutions, researchers in fields such as education (Cook, 2008) and health (Aldinger et al., 2008) report that interviews with participants are sometimes affected by the presence of officials and the desire to make a good impression on “foreign experts.”

Understandably, Chinese teachers who have participated in an overseas study program funded by a government office or their *dan wei* (单位, work unit), would like to present their experiences in a positive light. The saying, “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you,” explains this idea, but the construct of “face” provides a more culturally-appropriate context of understanding this limitation. *Mian zi* (面子), is an Asian construct that has no equivalent in the West, but helps to explain why some participants may feel compelled to give an overly positive picture of an experience that has been paid for by a third party. Just as an individual can lose face, so can larger entities, such as institutions or countries, lose face.

To foster greater rapport with each participant, interviews were conducted in safe environments that are quiet, neutral and non-threatening places, such as cafés or tea houses. By assuring each participant of confidentiality and ensuring a safe environment in which to speak honestly, the interviews provided plenty of significant data. These data sources include visual materials, such as pictures, that teachers have collected to document their experiences.

METHODS

In order to examine and understand Chinese sayings within the framework of Confucianism, I chose three criteria for selecting participants in my study. First, the Chinese instructors in this study had at least five years of teaching experience in the Chinese context before engaging in transnational studies. This time allows for instructors to form their own pedagogical styles. Second, the instructors had studied overseas for at least one year and had been back in China for at least one year, allowing for sufficient time to overcome the culture stress they may have experienced in the foreign culture as well as re-acculturation into their own culture. This time allowed for instructors to reflect on a relatively fresh experience within the context of their home culture and environment. Of the 24 participants in this study, 23 studied in North America or the UK, and one studied in Finland (see Table 1).

Table 1: Study participants

Name	Gender	Age range	Years since transnational studies
Kun	Male	40-49	1-5
Chun	Female	30-39	1-5
Bao Yu	Female	40-49	6-10
Jing	Male	50+	6-10
Huang	Male	40-49	1-5

Name	Gender	Age range	Years since transnational studies
He Ping	Male	40-49	1-5
Liang	Male	40-49	6-10
Kang	Male	30-39	6-10
Da Xia	Female	40-49	1-5
DeShi	Male	40-49	1-5
Dong	Female	40-49	6-10
Feng	Male	50+	6-10
Gan	Female	30-39	6-10
Ju Long	Male	40-49	1-5
Fang Hua	Female	50+	10+
Shen	Male	40-49	6-10
Mei	Female	40-49	1-5
Mei Xing	Female	50+	6-10
Sheng Li	Female	40-49	1-5
Zhuang	Male	40-49	1-5
Yi	Female	30-39	1-5
Xiao Ping	Male	50+	6-10
Yun Qi	Male	50+	10+
Xiao Xing	Female	40-49	1-5

Participants

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 of the participants. All these participants hold a variety of positions at universities but were all instructors at one of eight universities in Yunnan, China. One interview was conducted over the phone and three participants answered questions via e-mail correspondence. Semi-structured interviews lasting at least 60 minutes were recorded using a digital audio recorder, transcribed into English or Chinese, and translated whenever necessary. Subsequent follow-up interviews, lasting 30 minutes or less, were scheduled to clarify any points that were unclear.

Once initial semi-structured interviews were completed, insights that emerged from those interviewed helped direct future interview questions more carefully. Questions in future interviews changed to accommodate emerging data from previous participants. The questions, however, remained open-ended rather than a yes-no format. This encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences.

As interviews were completed, I created memos about interviews with particular details of information that seemed potentially relevant. Observations following interviews included descriptions that were thick and rich (Geertz, 1973) that guided the subsequent analytic process of making categories and coding.

Once saturation was reached in certain categories, subsequent interviews did not include those questions but concentrated on clarifying nuances within emerging categories.

Data gathering and analysis

Interview data was supplemented by information from university websites, and, government documents on official websites.

Qualitative data analysis involved multiple steps in a process that Creswell (2007) has described as a “spiral” (Creswell, 2007, p. 150). Grounded theory was used as the basis for analysis, which Charmaz (2005) describes as a “comparative method in which the researcher compares data with data, data with categories, and category with category” (p. 517). Data analysis is a dynamic process that involves simultaneous but not necessarily sequential steps. As such, each turn of the “spiral” necessarily involved both analytical and interpretive lenses. The category “sayings and metaphors” emerged late in the process after further engagement with the data.

Interviews conducted in English were transcribed by Transcription Hub, and the interviews conducted in Chinese were transcribed by Flat World Solutions. Chinese transcriptions were translated into English using Kingsoft Powerword Translator 2007 and the website www.nckiu.com for unknown words or phrases, but were otherwise translated by the author, and checked again by various native Chinese speakers in the US and China.

The data was then entered and analysed by the author using NVivo 8 qualitative software, which facilitated the handling of large quantities of different kinds of data, such as audio files. In addition, NVivo 8 allowed for extensive note writing, memo writing, and frequency counts of codes as necessary.

Three types of coding were used (Strauss & Corbin, 2008): open, axial and selective. The analytic tools described by Strauss and Corbin (2008), such as asking questions, making comparisons, looking at the language and looking at emotions expressed by participants throughout the process of data analysis, were also used.

In addition to coding, memos written by the author provided visual records of analysis; the memos are products of the author’s analytic reflection and provided more in-depth thought than field notes. Memos were particularly helpful in understanding Chinese metaphors and sayings. These memos allowed engagement with the data throughout the whole process and enabled the author to revisit previously understood sayings in light of emerging patterns and themes.

Validation strategies

In order to establish credibility, several strategies were used in this study. Creswell and Miller (2000) advise the use of eight strategies but this study used just five: triangulation of sources and methods; member checks; thick, rich description; and prolonged engagement in the field. With respect to triangulation, multiple sources, such as personal artefacts, were used to help document and corroborate the instructors’ overseas studies experiences.

Member checks “whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members from whom the data were originally collected, are the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314) and also provided a means of establishing credibility. Member checks by email or phone were used throughout data collection and analysis. Rich, thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) provided detailed information that was also used as a validation strategy to increase transferability.

FINDINGS

All participants, as they reflected on their transnational study experience, often used Chinese sayings or visceral metaphors that highlighted the significance of *learning for a purpose other than personal growth*. That is, their transnational experience provided personal and professional growth that produced a desire to improve their communities. Several participants used the same Chinese sayings to describe their transnational experience. The sayings most commonly used reflect a sense of personal responsibility to change their communities not simply to gain professional expertise. The sayings and metaphors used by the participants throughout the interviews reveal that participants' transnational experience involved more than personal transformation. They viewed their transnational learning experience as compelling reasons to improve personally and in community.

Four significant sayings or metaphors emerged following data collection and analysis. These four themes, or strands, highlight specific Confucian values that are essential to understanding how participants found meaning in their transnational experiences.

Learning for individual strength: *Stones from other hills*

Several participants described their transnational studies as having helped their own professional and personal growth. This kind of learning from others is seen as a "treasure" and "nourishment" for one's culture. Bao Yu used a Chinese proverb, "stones from other hills may serve to polish the jade of this mountain (他山之石可以攻玉)," and explained that learning from others serves to "polish" her own treasures. In other words, her experience overseas served to polish her own life in various ways, including her teaching. This saying not only illustrates the value of learning from others to improve oneself, it also underscores the intrinsic value placed on learning to transform self that is key in a Confucian context.

Zhuang also viewed his transnational studies as a precious experience. When I asked Zhuang to describe the most important aspect of his experience, he expressed it this way:

Since I'm a teacher of English I think that's a good chance for me, even similar teachers of English to go to native English speaking countries to experience the lifestyle, cultural background and even language learning and application as well. That's a good practice and, very precious opportunity.

Further, Bao Yu explained that learning from other cultures is like the nourishment of food, quite a visceral description:

If you always have the traditional food, maybe the nutrition will be out of control, out of balance. If you eat different food, different flavour, that'll make you healthy. We should learn a lot from the outside world. So far we learned not enough. We should have more experience, more food to nourish our culture.

In order to maintain health, she argued, one must eat different kinds of foods. In the same way, trying different cultures can expand understanding and develop a healthier person.

Most participants described their transnational studies as enriching but extending beyond themselves. Many saw themselves as being simple and humble connectors between the West and China. Da Xia described her feelings by using a metaphor:

I think for me, it is just like a bridge, but I think I am just a little bridge, just a little wooden bridge. I can, with my eyes, I can see a lot and then when I came back and I can share those things with my colleagues and with my students. But I know it's not the same thing as ways to show off something.

Da Xia looked down to the floor as she described this to me, but I had the sense that her words resonated with power and strength yet without prideful boasting, which is consistent with a strong Confucian value of personal humility. Many participants communicated a sense of confidence as they explained their choice of proverbs and metaphors.

Learning for individual strength: *Strong points to offset own weaknesses*

Another saying that several participants quoted during our interviews was: “learn from others’ strong points to offset your weakness” (*qǔchángbǔduǎn*, 取长补短). Participants quoted this common Chinese saying to explain how they viewed transnational studies as a way of learning from other perspectives to strengthen individual qualities. Like many of the participants, Liang described this dynamic kind of learning as strengthening:

Objectively speaking, the western education system does have many features and good qualities, in many ways that China can learn from, but it must not and cannot copy. After all, the conditions are very different. The scientific attitude is, “learn from others' strong points to offset your weakness.” This is an appropriate proverb.

This idea echoed with many participants in their description of their transnational studies. That is, rather than simply learning for individual professional development, participants felt a commitment to bring the experience that changed them to their communities.

Learning for community strength: *Metaphor of guide or coach*

Nearly all participants described their experience with the saying, *quchangbuduan* (取长补短, learn from others’ strong points to offset your weakness) but they also used this saying to describe how their transnational experience strengthened their communities. One participant, Mei Xing, used the term “coaching in wisdom” to reflect how this change had an impact on her position and influence at her university. Mei Xing described how knowledge and wisdom are different and how she felt she had grown in wisdom, which strengthened her university community:

We have some teachers who are very proud of their knowledge. Knowledge is sometimes ... it's just nothing, but wisdom is very ... it's different. So if I'd teach the teachers, okay, if I were to find a course or set up a course to train these teachers to teach them, then I would say, yes, coaching in wisdom.

The imagery of a coach, while not unique culturally, shows a level of connectedness and emphasis on character development that is fundamental from a Confucian perspective.

Most participants regarded their experience as an opportunity for growth in wisdom to benefit a greater whole, not merely their personal ambitions. For example, Ju Long shared that he gained greater respect for his students as a result of his transnational study experience. As a result, he engaged his students in more dialogues following his studies. Zhuang adjusted his teaching to meet his students' expectations, "I did some study on the needs and wishes or expectations of students in learning English. So I adjusted my teaching strategies to meet those designs or expectations."

Yunqi used the metaphor of a teacher/guide as he considered how he had changed in his teaching. He said, as a guide, he now considers how to "propose a dialogue or collaborative partnership" with his students. As participants describe the change in their teaching, many focused on the changes in their character and how this has affected their view of teaching and learning. Kang described it this way:

I think the most suitable and effective influence is on the students because my teaching style, my thinking style, which have been affected by western culture, can improve their character very quickly. I am not only teaching my students science and technology, but also how they change their thinking in different way, how they improve their character.

The emphasis on improving character resonates with Confucian values that emphasizes holistic learning that transforms every aspect of life. Xiao Xing described a change in "the attitudes to life and to the way of learning and teaching." She explained further: "The benefit is direct to the students, directly to the students. I can change a bit of my teaching method and I think the students, hmm, may get some benefits for this change and this kind of change."

Learning for community strength: *Rivers run into the sea*

Many participants used sayings and metaphors to frame their transnational experience to communicate individual transformation for the purpose of transforming their communities. Bao Yu explained this concept to me by using a Chinese proverb, *hai na bai chuan* (海纳百川, all rivers run into the sea) found in the *Dao De Jing* (Hinton, 2002, p. ch. 32), an ancient book historically attributed to Laozi, a famous Chinese philosopher who lived in the sixth century BC. Bao Yu explained that the proverb means that just as rivers flow into the sea from many sources so learning can be described as a confluence of diverse cultural, philosophical and spiritual ideas. She explained further that this proverb helped her to frame her own experience as a process of building to form a larger, more significant picture of learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study show that participants used a variety of Chinese sayings and metaphors to provide a framework from which to negotiate and draw meaning from their transnational learning experience. These Chinese sayings and metaphors are, not surprisingly, drawn from Confucian elements of moral character and community. However, what is surprising is the personal sense of power as described by strong imagery that they gained from their personal moral growth as a result of their transnational experience. Chinese sayings and metaphors that emerged related to power and strength despite the challenges associated with their experiences. Their transnational learning

experience is characterized by two main ideas: their transnational experience was viewed as beneficial to themselves and their respective communities; and the Chinese sayings using imagery of power and strength commonly cited by participants provides a meaningful framework to understand the transnational experience.

First, these sayings and metaphors provide a culturally-appropriate context to describe benefits for both personal growth and communities. Specifically, these Chinese sayings and metaphors reflect a strong Confucian perspective of learning that embraces personal learning for the benefit of moral character and to improve a larger community. The Confucian philosophy of learning encourages the pursuit of moral virtue and, in so doing, other outcomes, such as the attainment of knowledge, will naturally follow. This contrasts with the Socratic method of learning espoused in many North American and European contexts. That is, from the Confucian perspective, the pursuit of knowledge must be for the purpose of improving personal moral excellence with the view to society as a whole and not primarily for individual development.

Nisbett (2003) argues that the differences between Asian (those cultures that have been influenced by Confucianism) and Western (those cultures from western European descent) educational systems stem from the contrasting philosophical underpinnings of Confucius and Greek philosophers respectively. Specifically, Confucianism's emphasis on harmony and holistic thinking has led to an educational system that encourages more than the transmission of knowledge and places an emphasis on the whole person. Consequently, university teachers may view transnational studies as an opportunity to not only improve their own professional skills but also develop their overall moral character.

Secondly, the imagery of power and strength that the participants of this study described were greatly transformative in that many of the participants returned with a strong sense of empowerment to change their communities, despite the length of time that had passed since their return. This transformative sense of power gained by the participants, especially the women in the study, provides a tremendous incentive to cultivate transnational studies. This transformative power is the kind of goal that Knight (2013) has described as being a goal within the context of internationalization. This process of personal internationalization is perceived and processed through Chinese sayings and metaphors. Rather than consider such a study experience as exclusively being tied to professional advancement, it may be viewed as a way of strengthening and transforming a person.

Nearly all the participants in this study experienced some degree of personal or professional transformation after their transnational studies – often through self-reflection, which is common in Confucian contexts. Participants were also aware of their personal weaknesses and strengths, particularly as they compare and contrast experiences in China with that of the study country. They become more sensitive to the differences within education systems, particularly in the area of personal and professional freedoms.

The findings of this study suggest that part of the transnational learning process for Chinese students involves engagement with imagery to find meaning for their experience. For example, participants in this study used images that suggest a valuable or “treasured” experience. One participant, Bao Yu, used imagery suggesting a life-giving experience, “like the birth of a baby.”

The implications of this study suggest that Chinese sayings and metaphors may offer another construct to understand the transnational learning experience from a non-Western perspective, particularly for students studying in areas with significant differences in cultural, linguistic or spiritual contexts from their own home country. This construct may provide another type of prompt for self-reflection following a transnational study experience.

The findings of this study offer two possible applications for institutions. First, universities need to find ways to engage the imagination of students prior to and returning from transnational studies. In this way, engagement with literature, such as sayings or metaphors, can be used as a framework to understand the transformative process of transnational studies. Further, universities can foster environments that engage with culturally-appropriate literature of both contexts to bridge connections that may emerge following transnational studies.

Second, institutions of higher education interested in encouraging transnational study experiences for their students need to pay attention to the imagery that may be associated with a transnational study experience. To that end, universities may need to encourage students to use sayings or proverbs in the process of self-reflection following transnational studies.

More research is needed to understand how these Chinese sayings and metaphors may provide a way for students to engage their imagination to find meaning in their transnational studies following return to their home countries. Engaging the imagination in sayings, proverbs and metaphors of other cultures, like the Chinese, may offer lessons for the West that may cultivate more robust transnational learning experiences in higher education. Such sayings allow individuals to reflect on life, and this may be the most valuable and transformative aspect of transnational education.

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APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW (CHINESE)

知情同意书: 面谈

参与者名字: _____

我授权_____或任何指定的研究助理就“我的跨国教育经历”这一研究主题，向我收集信息。

我知道此研究的目的是收集中国大学教师海外留学的相关经历，我会被问及有关我跨国教育经历的问题并可能会参与小组讨论，我所参与的时间总计大约不超过 5 小时。

我知道我可以选择不回答任何令我尴尬或反感的问题。

我知道我的参与是自愿的，在任何时候我有权拒绝或中止我的参与而不会有惩罚或利益损失。

我知道如果这项参与会给我带来一些过度的焦虑或压力，或我对此研究有疑问或作为参与者就我的权利产生疑问，而这些都是由于此参与过程所引起的话，那么海笛刘可提供咨询，并对在研究参与中不太可能发生的人身伤害事件，也可提供有关的医疗救助。研究结果将由研究者对所有参与者使用假名保持其私密性。没有我的书面同意，我个人的研究结果将不予发表。

任何面谈的录音会被录制，但其运用不会导致个人身份的暴露或人身伤害。

这项研究的潜在益处是帮助跨国教育领域的人们获得对中国大学教师跨国教育经历的了解。

签名

日期

此同意书一式两份，请签署一份并附上你的回应返还给研究者，另一份你可保留作证。

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEW

Participant's name: _____

I authorize _____, and/or any designated research assistants to gather information from me on the topic of my transnational learning experience.

I understand that the general purposes of the research are to gather data related to the experiences of Chinese university teachers who have studied overseas, that I will be asked to answer questions related to my transnational learning experience, and possibly participate in group discussion, and that the approximate total time of my involvement will be no more than five hours.

I am aware that I may choose not to answer any questions that I find embarrassing or offensive.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate or discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

I understand that if, after my participation, I experience any undue anxiety or stress or have questions about the research or my rights as a participant, that may have been provoked by the experience, _____ will be available for consultation, and will also be available to provide direction regarding medical assistance in the unlikely event of physical injury incurred during participation in the research.

Confidentiality of research results will be maintained by the researcher by using pseudonyms for all participants. My individual results will not be released without my written consent.

Any audio recordings of interviews will be transcribed and will not be used in a manner that could cause personal identification or harm.

The potential benefits of the study are to help others in the field of transnational education gain an understanding of the transnational learning experiences of Chinese university teachers.

Signature Date

There are two copies of this consent form included. Please sign one and return it to the researcher with your responses. The other copy you may keep for your records.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Why did you choose to study overseas?
2. What were some difficulties you encountered overseas and upon returning to China?
3. How have you balanced new knowledge with local or indigenous knowledge once you returned to China?
4. How has your transnational educational experience changed you professionally and personally?
5. What do you think is the role of your transnational learning experience in your own university?
6. How have your transnational learning experiences changed your attitudes and perceptions about the current Chinese and western education systems?
7. How have your transnational learning experiences affected your attitudes and perceptions of internationalization of higher education in China?
8. If you could choose a metaphor to describe your experience, what would it be?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (CHINESE)

1. 您为什么选择出国留学？
2. 出国留学时遇到的具体困难是什么？
3. 您怎样来平衡新学的知识和当地或本土的知识间的关系？
4. 您的留学经历对您的职业和个人生活有何影响？
5. 您认为自己的留学经历对您所在的大学有什么样的作用？
6. 您的留学经历是否、怎样改变了您对当前中国教育体系和西方教育体系的看法和态度？
7. 您认为自己的留学经历怎样影响您对中国高等教育国际化的态度和观念？
8. 如果您可以选择用比喻的方式描述您的经历，您将如何描述