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Integrating Reflexivity: Negotiating Researcher Identity Through Autoethnography

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Abstract

This article illuminates how reflexivity and autoethnography can be integrated into scholarly inquiry. As such, this inquiry focuses on the process of negotiating researcher identity through autoethnography. It presents the author's internal struggles throughout a research investigation on the perceived conflict between Western science education standards and Confucian learning traditions that arose as a result of education reform in Taiwan. The researcher's learning and cultural experiences in Taiwan and Canada and their relationship to the research inquiry are examined using an autoethnographic methodology. In particular, various tensions are explored, including the role of insider knowledge and ethical practice in social science research. The researcher's reflective journal and ethnographic writing are presented to demonstrate the trajectory and evolution of her perspectives on Confucian traditions over the course of the research investigation. A rich discussion of establishing researchers' identities is also provided.

Keywords: Autoethnography, science education reform, researcher identity, Taiwan, Confucian learning traditions

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Introduction

I am a Taiwanese woman who grew up in Taiwan and came to Canada in 2012 to pursue graduate studies in education. My journey to study commenced in 2014 after a prolonged struggle with subjectivity in my master's research project.

In 2013, I began an examination of Taiwan's science education reform policies from 1990 to 1994 for my master's study (Huang, 2014). I interviewed three policymakers who formulated the reform policies and 10 secondary science teachers in Taiwan. In my role as a researcher, I found myself caught between the conflicting positions of the policymakers and the teachers. Specifically, my initial findings suggested that the policymakers I interviewed believed that Confucian traditions have obstructed scientific innovation and inquiry-based learning in Taiwan. They also perceived Confucian traditions as a cultural burden in Taiwanese society. However, the teachers I interviewed felt pulled in two directions by the contradictory concepts of Confucian learning culture and the new reform initiatives. They viewed Confucianism as a valuable cultural asset that should be passed on through education.

The competing perspectives of the policymakers and teachers made me attentive to the relationship between my life events and academic writing. As a learner in Taiwan, I have witnessed the profound impact of Confucianism within my family[1] and how Confucius' values have brought together people of different social and religious milieus. In particular, Confucius[2] strongly upheld the value of *ren* [benevolent rule or loving others] in creating the ideal harmonious human; he also valued the concept of *li* [respecting others] as a moral code to maintain social order (Li, 2003). Because of my cultural experience, a part of me shared the teachers' perspective that these values must be preserved and passed on through education.

At the same time, my opposition to Chinese traditional customs, such as traditional discipline in class and submission to our teachers, motivated me to investigate cultural issues in science education in Taiwan. My zeal for scientific values such as wonder, innovation, and respect for nature induced me to support the Western approach to science education that promotes critical thinking and questioning. Therefore, I also concurred with the policymakers that societal values shaped by Confucian traditions might have restricted change in Taiwanese learning culture.

During the research process, it became clear that I could not ignore my dichotomous view of Confucian traditions. I constantly encountered struggles between my cultural experience and the motivation for my research. Countless times during the interviews, I had hesitated, unsure of what to ask or how to follow up because I was afraid of revealing my own bias. I also wrestled with guilt during the data analysis phase because I saw myself as betraying my cultural experience by

[1] My mother and her family believe in a local Taiwanese religion infused with the worldview of Buddhism and identical behaviours of Taoism. My father and his family believe in Christianity.

[2] Confucius (551 B.C.E–479 B.C.E.), also known as Kongzi or Kong Fuzi, is recognized as wan shi shi biao (萬世師表), meaning the model teacher of every age in Chinese history. At the time of Confucius' birth, the central authority in China was declining, and all dukes and princes under the federal government were trying to recruit philosophers along with military and political consultants to defend their kingdoms. Confucius began spreading his ideology to his students, who came from many different regions in China to seek knowledge and to study with him. He accepted students regardless of class, gender, or social status, and thus became the first teacher to make education available to all citizens in ancient China (Nivison & Van, 1996). By the end of his lifetime, his philosophy had become the mainstream value system, and he had gained thousands of apprentices and followers. Confucius believed that everyone should be devoted to self-cultivation and practising ren and li in order to promote harmony. Confucius' legacy and his central philosophy—treat others how they wish to be treated—survive today, and the publication Analects of Confucius is mandated to be taught in secondary and post-secondary schools in Taiwan.

undertaking research that upheld Western models. Hence, I struggled to draw conclusions that might lead to the destruction of beliefs in Confucius' values.

While delving into my unreconciled views on Confucian traditions, I began to wonder what cultural experiences have shaped my researcher identity and academic ways of knowing, and have driven my research inquiry in the past and present (Clandinin, 2007; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005). In what ways, if at all, did these experiences and my role as an insider affect my interpretation of the data and writing of the final text (Hamdan, 2009; Taylor, 2011)? Thus began my journey of self-discovery to make sense of my identities through writing reflexive ethnographies.

The Call of Autoethnography

"Autoethnography calls to me" (Pathak, 2010, para. 2) because it allows me to use personal experience to critically examine my cultural practices (Ellis, 2004). The stories of autoethnographers are not merely personal narratives or autobiographies; the goal of an autoethnographic story is to connect "the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political" (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). While many methods, such as narratives of the self (Richardson, 1994) and personal experience methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), attempt to study the researcher self. Ellis (2004) described the autoethnographical approach as being self-conscious while exploring "the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (p. 38). In other words, as Ellis and Bochner (2003) noted, autoethnographers look back on the self (auto) and critically examine the self–other interactions (ethno) in order to uncover the underlying autobiographical experience that shapes their research practice (graphy).

Through autoethnography, storytellers and readers can share the "historic situation," "social structure," and "moment of experience" (Denzin, 1997, p. 39). In addition, autoethnography breaks down the boundary between story giver and story taker, as it creates space for collaboration and ultimately allows them to reach mutual understanding. For instance, through reading Carolyn Ellis' (2004) autoethnographies, I was invited, as a graduate student and novice researcher, to join her community in incorporating the self into my own research and academic writing. I thus found autoethnography particularly suitable for this research inquiry because it allows me to overcome my concern about revealing myself in my research because the researcher's self is at the centre of autoethnography. Autoethnographic writing thus provides me with a way of acknowledging the embodied reality of my cultural experiences.

I conceptualise autoethnography as a space where researchers' personal and professional identities are evolving and constantly interacting. In this space, I allow my personal self to acknowledge my insider knowledge and feel the complexity of my cultural experience; I then turn the reflexive lens on myself and welcome my professional self to use an autoethnographic approach to write about my lived experience. Describing my dilemmas of feeling caught between the Eastern and Western worlds during my research inquiry, I use childhood stories to illuminate the connections between my cultural and research practices. As I have assembled artefacts and excerpts from the reflective memos I collected during my master's research, my researcher identity has gradually come into focus.

Data from multiple sources (i.e., visuals, my reflective memos, and my field notes) helped me to address the research questions guiding this study (Holliday, 2002). I used a number of qualitative analysis tools and techniques for data analysis, including thematic analysis (Creswell, 2007), which involved categorising and clustering salient themes emerging from my reflective diary. This approach allowed me to identify common patterns in the memos and allowed me to explore relationships

among my reflective pieces to make meaning of my researcher identity (Denzin, 1997). Three themes emerged through thematic analysis: researcher's experience relevant to the research inquiry, concern about subjectivity while doing qualitative research, and a learning process of becoming a reflexive researcher. I also employed the constant comparative method to draw out patterns of similarities and differences (Holliday, 2002; Maxwell, 1996). In particular, constant comparative analysis helped me to make meaning as I compared my true experience of the world with research practices in an attempt to make sense of my researcher identity.

Throughout the meaning making process, I maintained a journal to record a true reflection of my interpretations and to examine the logical process that brought me to understand my reflective experience. I was fully aware that a key aspect of qualitative inquiry is to encompass my reflective and recursive processes, allowing me to sculpt the research findings and conclusions. I knew that I must disclose any bias that might lead me simply to attempt to convince myself that I had made everything fit (Creswell, 2007). To increase the trustworthiness of this study, I constantly discussed and critically examined my interpretations during the analysis and writing process with my colleagues.

I provide an intimate portrayal of how my thinking about Confucian traditions has evolved through autoethnography. I write this story to share my reflexive process with those who have also had to negotiate multiple researcher identities. In doing so, I hope to add to our growing understanding of how researchers might negotiate their identities during research inquiry, potentially leading to a sense of positioning.

The First Step: Am I *Taiwan-ren* or *Zhongguo-ren*?

What information about me, as a researcher, must be included in my academic writing? This question arose as I started writing the reflexivity chapter of my thesis. I was stuck at the very first sentence: "I am . . ." Should I identify myself as Taiwanese (台灣人, pronounced *Taiwan-ren* in Mandarin) or Chinese (中國人, *Zhongguo-ren*)? I hesitated, wondering how I could avoid revealing my uncertainty about who I am.

Because of the ambiguity of Taiwan's political status (Rigger, 2011), I vacillated between describing myself as a Chinese learner from Taiwan or a Taiwanese learner from an independent country. Internationally, the island of Taiwan has been recognised as part of the Republic of China (ROC) or as Chinese Taipei. This delicate reality forced me to follow my heart in making a precise statement of how I identify myself: I am Taiwanese. However, my growing concern about using a politically correct name for Taiwan in academic writing pulled me in another direction. As a result of this identity confusion, I turned to the histories I had been told during my childhood, in order to trace the source of my uncertainty as the first step in consolidating my research identity.

I have vivid memories of my grandmother sitting beside me on a grey, cylindrical stone chair as we waited for my school bus. She told me how the Japanese established a public school system in Taiwan that allowed all girls her age to go to school, like me (Ching, 2001). Citizens like my grandmother were identified as Taiwanese islanders (本省人, *bensheng-ren*), descendants of early Fukinese and Cantonese settlers who had migrated from the mainland before the 1890s, during the Ming or Qing Dynasty.

In 1945, the Japanese colonisers returned the island to the ROC, the Nationalist government in mainland China. Thus, islanders of my grandmother's generation experienced both Japanese

colonisation and the social changes after the Chinese Nationalist government took control over Taiwan. Following more than 50 years of separation from the mainland during colonisation, the fundamental feeling of "otherness" has been deeply ingrained in the mentality of the Taiwanese islanders (Fleischauer, 2007).[3] For them, mainlanders (外省人, *waisheng-ren*, officials, and civil servants of the Nationalist government) were like another occupier striving to marginalise them. Grandma told me how difficult their lives became under the Nationalist government because most of the food and daily essentials were shipped to mainland China to support the army in fighting the communists. Social issues and postwar inflation built up a palpable sense of disappointment in the Nationalist government amongst the Taiwanese islanders (Lai, Myers, & Wei, 1991). Hence, cultural differences, language barriers, and political divisions intensified islanders' hostility to the mainlanders.

For a long time, I could not understand why Grandma sounded disappointed when she talked about the Japanese government's retreat. I began to make sense of her nostalgia as a teenager, when we learned about the 228 Incident.[4] In 1947, opposition to the Nationalist government turned into a large-scale uprising. Propagating a Taiwanese identity distinct from the mainlanders, students, and social elites initiated the first attempt at a Taiwan independence movement. However, the uprising failed when the Nationalist army began armed suppression—known as the 228 Incident (Fleischauer, 2007). During that time, Nationalist soldiers entered every household to arrest or execute islander elites as well as those who supported rebellion (Lai et al., 1991). Never saying anything about this historical event, Grandma only mentioned that she and her sister had to give up all their Japanese clothes and textbooks because "the soldiers did not like those who read Japanese books" (Author, reflective memo, May 22, 2014).

The notion of otherness amongst islanders became even more apparent through the trauma of the 228 Incident. However, when the Nationalist government lost the civil war in mainland China in 1949, the Nationalist president, Chiang Kai-shek, retreated to the island of Taiwan. Consequently, although Taiwanese society had not yet recovered from the damage of the 228 Incident, a large number of mainlanders, including Nationalist officials, soldiers, and civil servants of Kuomintang, followed President Chiang. This form of national construction left little space for rapprochement between the Taiwanese islanders and the mainlanders (Lee, 1999).

I once asked my parents where our ancestors came from. My father's only reply was this: "Your grandfather used to say, 'He would cut off ties with whoever married a mainlander'" (Author, reflective memo, May 22, 2014). Although disappointed with his response, I knew this was a taboo subject, both at school and at home. After all, citizens of my parents' generation were prohibited from discussing politics under Taiwan's martial law. This could explain why we seldom talk about politics in my family.

In recent years, my father has begun to tell me his stories, such as his encounter with retired Nationalist soldiers during his military service. As he described it, the soldiers came with President Chiang Kai-shek, "naïvely thinking that they would return to *their* homeland in the coming days [emphasis added]." However, when President Chiang Ching-kuo (son of Chiang Kai-shek) eventually identified himself as Taiwanese rather than Chinese (Kagan, 2007), "these retired soldiers cried like children who had lost their way home" (Author, reflective memo, May 22, 2014). Indeed, for

[3] They were influenced by the Japanese policies of assimilation; they had been educated in Japanese and were nostalgic about this period (Chou & Ching, 2012).

[4] My high school history teacher referred to it as a massacre, and when reading the textbook aloud, always said "this massacre," even though "the 228 Incident" were the words written in the book.

mainlanders, maintaining a distinction between being Taiwanese and Chinese was the only way to keep hope alive that they would return to the motherland, mainland China.

As a child listening to those who lived the experience, I might have made different meanings from their narratives than I would have as an adult. Nonetheless, recalling my memories of these times as an autoethnographer brings a new dimension to my understanding of Taiwan's history and educational development. Perhaps the stories told by my family have helped me see a clear distinction between being Taiwanese and Chinese. Because of this sense of cultural roots, I feel comfortable identifying myself as a *Taiwan-ren*.

Realising a sense of belonging has helped me to make sense of my research inquiry: I came from Taiwan and I am Taiwanese; therefore, I am interested in understanding the discourse around science education in the context of Taiwan with the hope of making a contribution to the country in which I grew up. Based on this discovery, I continue to investigate my researcher identity through personal narrative and reflexivity within the research process. In the next section, I attempt to answer these questions: What does it mean to be a researcher and, at the same time, a Taiwanese learner, educator, and newcomer in North America?

Educational Development in Taiwan During My School Years

In 1987, the year before I was born, Taiwan's policy leaders lifted the martial law after 38 years. Under the martial law regime, which began in 1949 and was known as the White Terror period, large numbers of social elite, including educators, writers, artists, lawyers, and scholars, had been imprisoned or executed for what was perceived as opposition to the totalitarian Kuomintang—the party established from the Nationalist government (Lai et al., 1991).

In 1949, the Kuomintang believed that the military government was critical in promoting nationalism. The president believed that establishing a unified national identity was the first step in the country's development, due to the antagonism between mainlanders and islanders after the 228 Incident. The result was that divergent political philosophies were suppressed during this regime. The Kuomintang controlled all education sectors, including teacher training institutions, curriculum publishers, and school systems, to suppress political dissidents and inhibit communist activities and discussions of government policies (Tien, 1989).

To consolidate a national identity and establish a sense of cultural pride in Taiwan's people, the Confucian doctrine of humanity (i.e., Confucius' virtues and benevolence) and traditional Chinese ethics (e.g., loyalty, filial piety, harmony and peace, fraternity and faithfulness) were upheld in all educational settings (Lorenzo, 2013). This strategy can be seen in the fact that studies of Confucianism and the Analects of Confucius were mandatory in the curriculum throughout the years of my education, from 1994 to 2006. In addition, as the following vignette elucidates, discipline and social conformity were emphasised during my school years in order to cultivate nationalism in students.

Vignette I: A box of stamps—the military model of education.

In 2013, I returned to Taiwan to interview my participant teachers. The school environment was not much different than I remembered. But what caught my attention was a box of stamps on the participant teacher's desk (Image 1). "Are you still using stamps in students' communication books?" I asked. Excited about my observation, the teacher enthusiastically told me the history of his box of stamps, which had been a gift from his teacher.

Image 1: A photo of the box of stamps taken by a participant teacher as visual evidence.[5]

However, the box of stamps brought back different memories for me. The following vignette, from my researcher journal, offers glimpses into the social, historical, and educational background of Taiwan in the 1990s.

> *I cannot recall what we did during the first day of school, but I always remember how amazed I was whenever my schoolteacher opened the box of stamps sitting on her desk. The box was made from wood, with a glass-like lid. It looked heavy, but I wished I could have a box like that for my collection of coloured pens.*
>
> *I still remember vividly the day when I first got a "Likes to talk" stamp in my communication book. Every morning, we had a ceremony of raising the national flag, where all of us stood at attention, singing the national song, and saluting the flag with our right hands beside our heads. Once, the boy standing beside me and I were caught talking during the flag hoisting ceremony. As our punishment, we were made to stand in a half squat for the rest of the period while the principal gave a speech. It was a good lesson for me, because my mother seemed disappointed in me when she saw the "Likes to talk" stamp in my communication book. Mother quietly signed beside the stamp to show that she was aware of my misbehaviour; she then walked into her room, where she stayed for the whole night. I was puzzled, as no one cared to explain why we should salute and stand at attention to a flag.*

[5] The photo is modified to protect participants' actual names and his institute.

> *The stamps effectively communicated various messages about our behaviours in school to our parents, such as "Good," "Ordinary," "Needs to improve," "Good luck," "Forgot to bring books," "Forgot to bring tissues," "Didn't do homework," and "Late to class." We would get a reward if we managed to collect one hundred "Good" stamps in our homework and communication books. Interestingly, I always have a picture in my mind of all the schoolteachers carrying their boxes of stamps, running around the campus and awaiting any opportunity to stamp messages in our communication books. In the six years of my elementary school life, I learned the ways in which we could easily gain the "Good" stamps. It was like a game between my teachers and me; I always won. (June 18, 2013)*

The box of stamps symbolises for me the nationally controlled education of my school life. Discipline was highly emphasised in our daily routines. We were addressed and recognised by our student identification numbers instead of our names. Officers of military education, who overlooked student affairs, supervised and evaluated our behaviour in school. Girls were not allowed to have their hair touching their shoulders; boys had to have crew cuts. When we saw teachers or officers in the hallways between classes, we had to stop and salute them. In every classroom and on the school playground were photographs of President Chiang Ching-kuo and Dr. Sun Yat-sen—Taiwan's national father. At the start and end of class, we saluted not only our teachers, but also President Chiang and Dr. Sun.

Numerous studies have suggested that East Asian countries (e.g., Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore) have similar education environments because Confucianism dominates societal values and has profoundly shaped the learning traditions (Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2005). One commonality, for instance, is that teachers are highly respected in Confucian-heritage cultures (Chou & Ho, 2007). Students, therefore, tend to willingly obey their teachers. In interactive classrooms of the West, however, this behaviour is considered a sign of passivity (Biggs, 1998). Drawing on these discussions, some scholars have concluded that teachers' beliefs about preserving Confucian traditions in these societies might lead them to substantially resist contemporary pedagogy (Baron & Chen, 2012; Chou & Ching, 2012).

Nonetheless, based on my personal experience, I would describe the sort of discipline seen in Taiwan as the military model of education, rather than the influence of Confucian traditions. Confucianism and Confucian heritage have shaped my cultural experience in different ways, which I describe later in this paper. Now, I present a memory that illuminates the social and educational changes that occurred in Taiwan; these experiences have motivated my research into Taiwan's science education reforms.

Vignette II: A stack of handouts—educational reforms.

During my high school years in the late 1990s, the Taiwanese government made earnest efforts to reform educational systems and implement inquiry-based pedagogical approaches in response to global trends in science education. For me, the memory of stacks of handouts symbolises my high school life and the burden on teachers to maintain the traditional education system.

> *When I was in high school, teachers kept a stack of handouts from several traditional, ministry-approved textbooks. Even though educational reforms were beginning to be implemented, we, the students, were still being bombarded with handouts and exam-*

> *practice handbooks. Although the new curriculum emphasised active learning and application of knowledge, the national exam still focused on evaluating our factual knowledge. On the news, politicians proposed their own visions of education policies; however, it seemed to me that they threw out ideas just to test the reactions from teachers and parents.*
>
> *Being trapped between the changing education policies and the reality of the actual classroom, my classmates and I felt like guinea pigs undergoing experimentation in the name of education reform. Because we were uncertain about our education, most of us went to "cram schools" every night until 10:00 p.m. We actually ended up trusting cram school teachers more, because they gave us surefire ways to achieve high exam scores. We were also constantly told to ignore the news regarding the latest curriculum guidelines and only focus on the preparation practice for the university entrance exams. Indeed, I came to learn that no matter how we felt about memorising formulas without fully understanding them, this was the only stepping-stone to the best university in Taiwan. Even though I decided to put more effort into studying my handouts from cram school, I began to question the purpose of public schools and wondered why schoolteachers did not teach like the cram school instructors. Teachers in cram schools would give us standard answers to exam questions and help us organise the most relevant information to memorise it quickly. (Author, reflective memo, December 19, 2013)*

Throughout my high school years, I remember politicians in the media talking about Taiwan's economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s as a miracle (Woo, 1991). They asked citizens to be proud of Taiwan's incredible economic growth, considering our ambiguous political position between mainland China and America.[6] While I buried myself in my studies, headlines on the evening news told of yet another new strategy, proposed by scholars who had been to the United States, to create Taiwan's second economic miracle.

Since the end of martial law in 1987, many Taiwanese scholars, scientists, and political activists who had moved to North America during the White Terror period to promote Taiwan's independence and democracy from overseas had returned. Moreover, social changes and the influence of global economies had forced Taiwanese education planners to realise that Taiwan's science education needed major reform to support the advancement of industrial structures (Law, 2004). Rather than the traditional approach to vocational training, Taiwan's manufacturers now required diverse talents to enhance scientific productivity and technological innovation.

The return of talent began to make an impact on education development in the 1990s. The most remarkable example was Dr. Yuan-Tseh Lee, the first Taiwanese Nobel Laureate in molecular chemistry (Law, 2004). Upon his return from the United States in 1994, he led Taiwan's Council on Education Reform until 1996 and was the minister of education from 1999 to 2002. My teachers often motivated us to study hard and become the next Dr. Lee.

Against the backdrop of political and social change, the huge influx of returning scientists played a crucial role in education policy planning (Law, 2004). Of the 31 scholars on the Council on Education

[6] After World War II ended, the ROC lost the civil war, which drove the Nationalists to Taiwan and other islands. Due to tensions between the United States and Russia, the Truman administration resumed economic and military aid to the Nationalist Party of Taiwan in order to stop a communist invasion. This support lasted until the United States formally recognised the Communist Party of China in 1979.

Reform, 13 had received postgraduate degrees in North America. The committee was mandated with creating a constitutional change in the educational system to improve Taiwan's international competitiveness (Ministry of Education, Taiwan, 2003). In particular, the Western approach to science education was introduced first in the primary and secondary science curriculum (Chou & Ching, 2012).

As a student, I sensed my own resistance to the reformers and witnessed my teachers' frustration. Having been influenced by the discourse around teachers' resistance to education reforms, I came to Canada to pursue a graduate degree, hoping to find solutions to improve Taiwan's education systems.

Negotiating Researcher Identity: The Process Unfolds

When I came to Canada as a Taiwanese learner, I became aware of the influence of one's cultural heritage on their epistemic practice. Comparing my learning experience to that of North American students, I realised that my silence in class was not commonly perceived as the process of thinking and learning (Li, 2003), as I had been told in Taiwan. As more differences in our learning behaviours became apparent, I became frustrated—especially when I saw teachers in Canada engaged and become overjoyed with hands-on science activities that could help them explain concepts easily in class. I can only remember my science learning experience as memorising tricks to quickly answer the exam questions and do well on the national exam.

Consequently, I often contested traditional teacher-centred methods and educational values in the Taiwanese society, seeing them as the result of Chinese students' lack of independent thinking skills and scientific innovation in the beginning of my graduate studies. While trying to adjust and cope with my cultural shock in the education setting, I was also drawing on these experiences as a starting point for my research inquiry. Thus, for my master's research I investigated the perceptions of Taiwanese policymakers and science teachers about the reforms and their implications for practice.

During the first round of interviews, I was surprised that all the policymakers confirmed my belief that the Chinese culture dominated by Confucian traditions *is* the main obstacle to science education reform. Interestingly, though, none of the teachers mentioned that their educational philosophy was based in Confucianism. This was a constant juggle for me as a novice researcher, because I thought that I might be seen as asking leading questions. Therefore, I tried to convince myself that this was my own bias, and I refrained from asking the teachers about their perspectives on Confucian epistemologies. I sorted through my feelings in one of my memos:

> *I believe that teachers are heavily influenced by the Confucius' traditions, but they did not mention any values related to Confucianism. Is it because Confucianism was an innate influence that even teachers themselves did not recognise? . . . How could I determine whether their teaching practices are based on Confucian epistemology or constructivist approaches? (July 18, 2013)*

Even during the second round of interviews with the teachers, my attitude towards Confucian traditions remained unresolved and constantly came into my thoughts. It often occurred to me that the policymakers were right that Taiwanese teachers are influenced by Chinese traditions and Confucian values, which has led them to resist the reforms. The following reflective memo, written during the data analysis phase, illustrates my concern about my bias:

> *I used to have the same perspective as these policymakers; I thought the traditional learning culture and Confucian traditions were the primary obstacles to scientific advancement. However, I somehow disagree with this view now because I feel that the policymakers used Western standards of teaching and learning to assess Taiwanese teachers' and students' cultural learning behaviour. . . . Am I doing the same? (September 18, 2013)*

I remained concerned about my bias even after I had finished the interviews. The conceptual lenses through which I had been examining my findings and my reflexive understandings evolved as I began looking critically at the trends emerging from my conversations with teachers. In particular, when I revisited the transcripts and teachers' journal writings, I pushed myself to look closely and experience the stories told by each teacher: the frustration and their early teaching, conflicts between their mentors and their preservice education, negotiation between parents and administrators, equality of urban resources, support in professional development, expanding educational infrastructure and new directions for education. This is when I realised that a number of their teaching practices fell into traditional and contemporary approaches, even though most of them asserted their opposition to the educational reforms. As I repeatedly revisited the data and my interpretations, the shifts in my own thinking about Confucianism became apparent.

Revisiting my researcher journal—travelling between the Eastern and Western models.

At the last stage of data analysis, I found that Confucian values might have positively influenced teachers' engagement with constructivist pedagogies.[7] This discovery provoked me to go back to my researcher journal to criticise the assumptions and biases that I brought to my research. My thinking began to shift when I reviewed the following memo:

> *In 2012, I visited the secondary school that I had attended in Taiwan. When I was there, the school board was hiring new teachers, so there were many novice teachers lining up for the opportunity to demonstrate their teaching abilities. Something that stood out . . . was that most of the candidates were carrying large suitcases. The suitcase mystery was solved when a teacher opened her suitcase prior to her teaching demonstration. I was amazed to see all kinds of materials for classroom activities, but no handouts. Instead of getting handouts, students did hands-on activities and engaged in discussions in a candidate's demo lessons. . . . Not that long ago, I was taught not to speak in class, but now I saw this novice teacher encouraging students to interact with each other. I asked an interviewer, an administrator in the same school, if teachers really use this approach in their regular classroom practices. The examiner answered, "Not really. This is not teaching; novice teachers always try to be creative in the beginning." (December 29, 2013)*

The suitcases symbolise my learning experience in Canada, where the classroom environment is more interactive and student-centred. When I wrote this memo, I drew on the body of literature about teacher resistance to education reforms (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Olsen, 2008). Writing about my conversation with the school administrator after the teaching demonstration, I sought to describe my belief that certain societal values remain firmly entrenched and continue to constrain the possibilities for change in Taiwanese classrooms.

[7] At this stage, I began to notice that some of the teachers' view of Confucian learning principles was in fact compatible with contemporary approaches that focus on providing meaningful education to all children, meeting the individual needs of the students and nurturing their unique talents.

Repeatedly revisiting my researcher journal shifted my attention from the suitcases to other characters. Putting myself into the examiners' and school administrators' shoes, I realised that it was not Confucian traditions that have obstructed scientific innovation and inquiry-based learning in Taiwan. Rather, changing an educational system is complex and requires time for the stakeholders to readjust their roles.

Indeed, reflecting on my experiences in high school, the discussions on how science teaching should be reformed in Taiwan seem revolutionary. The examiners and school administrators who had been trained in a system based on the military model under political repression might have less tolerance for new teachers' experimenting with nonconventional methods. Hence, the transformative period at the hands of a newly democratic government might have precipitated a culture of insecurity and distrust between school administrators and education reformers in Taiwan.

A new understanding of my cultural practice vis-à-vis Confucianism.

Once I had revisited my learning experience and critically examined my cultural experience, I learned to distinguish the original Confucian doctrine of humanity from how it was used by the totalitarian Kuomintang government as a political tool to promote Chinese nationalism. In particular, the original Confucian doctrine of humanity was grounded in *ren*, benevolent rule or loving others, and *li*, respecting others.[8] According to Confucius, when everyone in society practises these virtues, a harmonious society and peaceful world can be created (Li, 2003). However, the Kuomintang government embedded Confucian values in its political ideology of establishing a Chinese cultural root, and used Confucius' values as justification for the military model of education. For example, students and citizens had to respect public servants, such as teachers and government officials. The practice of respecting others became a norm that emphasised social conformity and submission to authority.

Therefore, my initial understanding of Confucian learning traditions was in fact infused with the military-based customs that emphasise discipline in class and submission to authority. Consequently, I had been convinced that Confucian learning traditions impeded scientific advancement and progress in Taiwanese society, as Confucian values have profoundly shaped the epistemic culture in Taiwan's educational systems. This may also explain why Taiwanese advocates targeted Confucian ethics and traditional Chinese virtues while initiating political and educational reforms in the 1990s. The policymakers I interviewed might believe that eliminating Chinese influence through de-Sinicisation is the key to creating a distinct Taiwanese identity and promoting an independent Taiwan (Hao, 2010).

Final Note: An Ongoing Transformation

In this autoethnography, I have illustrated the process through which my researcher identity has evolved. I started by attempting to resolve my internal conflicts, which resulted from my incompatible views on Chinese traditions and the heritage of Confucian values. Through reflexivity, I entered the process of negotiating between my cultural experience and my research inquiry. The investigation suggests that I was in fact opposed to the military model of education, as well as to the

[8] According to Confucius, to practice *ren* and *li*, people should treat others how they wish to be treated. He also encouraged learning from the past and studying classic literature, because he believed that learning helped to cultivate one's virtues. When everyone in society practises Confucius' virtues, children respect elders, siblings, and friends are kind to each other, citizens are grateful to their government and governmental officials love their citizens (Li, 2003).

ways through which Confucius' virtues were used as a political instrument to promote Chinese nationalism. This discovery highlights the ethical responsibility of researchers.

Inspired by Maxwell's (1996) concept of writing "researcher experience memos" (p. 29) throughout the investigation, I wrote reflections on my personal experiences and emotions, and the expectations that were relevant to my master's research project. Many scholars have encouraged academics to study the self while engaging in qualitative inquiries (Collins & Gallinat, 2010; Gamelin, 2005). Knowing one's becoming, as Clandinin (2007) asserted, allows researchers to make sense of their experiences, actions, and reactions within certain social realities. Indeed, I came to realise the value of writing researcher experience memos when these reflective pieces later became useful resources as I tried to situate myself in my master's research inquiry. Attarian (2011) described this process as using "reflexive and interpretive tools to explore the historicity of self and its actions, and to reflect on constructions of identity and agency" (p. 157). That is, through reflecting on their own stories, researchers can construct, uncover, negotiate, and further establish their researcher identities. An established research identity is vital for social scientists to situate themselves between real and research worlds. Only in doing so can we bring theories to life as well as bring life back to the theories.

While not every researcher has experienced the internal struggles I outlined above, similar experiences in different spaces and times can bring different perspectives and new stories to light. By sharing my experience, I hope that this work can find other researchers who hover on the precipice of knowing and are searching for guidelines on how they should act so as not to bias their research inquiries. By understanding the self, I also hope to prompt others to consider the question of who they are and what constitutes their researcher identity, in order to expand and enrich their positions as researchers now and in the future.

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