

Understanding the Process of Internationalization of Curriculum Studies in China: a Case Study

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Introduction

Internationalization has been considered not a uniform stance on what we think curriculum is or may become, rather, a ground work that each of us, across the nations, with our own intellectual histories, sources, and influences, can construct our own understanding of curriculum studies; this ongoing conversation is based upon each nation's curriculum issues, ideas, and traditions as they relate to reconceptualization of curriculum (Pinar, 2003). Indeed, international conferences on curriculum studies, publications of curriculum works of international scholars in this field, and the ongoing dialogue and interaction between and among international curriculum scholars have engendered a worldwide "complicated conversation" (Pinar, 2004a) that cannot be reduced to a globalized vision or position. Book series on curriculum studies have introduced the unique intellectual histories, cultures, and commitments of countries such as South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, and China (Pinar, 2010, 2011b, 2011c, 2014; Kumar, 2012). In addition, individual works have presented multifaceted views on how curriculums are understood by different cultures and nations (Aoki, 1986, 2005; Moon, 2013; Wang, 2014).

While a number of scholars have articulated their vision of a worldwide curriculum that includes works from different countries and in which content and context are actively engaged, how such internationalization functions in different contexts has yet to be explored, especially with regards to the aspiration or direction of such works, and in what ways they might serve to influence the formalization of the field. In the *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, Pinar (2003) explained the interconnected nature of intellectualization and institutionalization with regards to curriculum work; an institution, in his regard, involves our professional and scholarly engagement and includes associations, societies, journals, and conferences. Thus, when examining process in a local context, one must consider how local intellectual work serves to constitute and functions within the process of institutionalization. Many of us in the field of curriculum studies have consented to the method of *currere*, and embrace the notions of fluidity, continuity, and relationality in curriculum work; such characteristics can also be applied to the nature of process. In examining such process, I ask the following questions: What forces mobilize or sustain the process of the internationalization of curriculum studies in this local context? When local cultural and curricular efforts meet the international, how do they work with, through, and around the process of "complicated conversation"? What is the nature of such a process?

To explore such questions, I chose the curriculum studies center at South Central Normal University in China; this institution is now at the forefront of Chinese



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curriculum studies and has a unique and noticeable presence in the field. I adopted a basic qualitative research method, including 10 semi-structured interviews with participants at this center, field notes, and online data collection. The overall themes of this research include the political forces, social realities, and intellectual works that serve to mobilize the internationalization of curriculum studies; traditional Chinese cultural wisdom and curriculum consciousness serving equally as dialogue capital; and the nature and structure of the process of the internationalization of curriculum studies in China as unbounded and democratic.

The Internationalization and Curriculum Studies: A Review of the Literature

Internationalization is not a uniform stance on what a curriculum is or may become; rather, it is a complex interweaving of what each of us, across the nations, with our own intellectual histories, sources, and influences, brings about our own understandings of the concept of curriculum and curriculum studies; it is an ongoing conversation grounded in each nation's curriculum issues, ideas, and traditions (Pinar, 2003). The primary goal of this complicated conversation is to construct our field worth of schoolteachers and students who labor to understand themselves and the world they inhabit (Pinar, 2002, referenced in Trueit, 2003). It has also been argued that the internationalization of curriculum inquiry is a collaborative effort among scholars of different locales in which they negotiate trust and contribute to the field by reframing and decentering their own knowledge traditions (Gough, 2002). However, I would argue that decentering requires an acknowledgment of what the center is; this, for emerging fields in non-Western curriculum studies, may pose a challenge and result in deferred development or a focus on local wisdom and traditions. What is important about this decentering is that curriculum practitioners from different traditions not only must recognize – but also honor – difference, and engage in a continuous dialogue and back-and-forth interplay (Trueit, 2003).

For example, Paulo Freire's notion of *conscientização* (e.g., critical consciousness), has been linked to the reconceptualization movement in the US and its thought-provoking questions about the consciousness of self and restoration of humanness (Johnson-Mardones, 2015); such consciousness delimits us from the oppressive social, political, and economic elements of reality (Pinar, 1979). Conversely, such back-and-forth interplay is also reflected in research on everyday life in Brazil, a concept imported from the US (Kumar, 2012), in terms of their responses to technocratic curriculum issues. This international interplay of ideas, conceptions, and questions is set on the global landscape but locally grounded; each conception cannot be directly translated into the new context. No one can remain untouched once the internationalization movement has been set motion. As Lopes (2015) has argued "We cannot escape of it... If we read, the translation happens. If we are read, we are translated, and this process allows us to exist as producers of texts and as the authors of curriculum field" (p. 1). Translation cannot be taken merely as a literal term, because we cannot evade the social, political, and cultural circumstances in each context. In China, such translation in curriculum studies must consider curriculum reform and its intellectual history (Zhang, 2014).

In the process of understanding the other, one must also be cautious of simplistic explanations of particular nation-state's curriculums, culture, and education; they should not be considered to be universalized or a collective form of curriculum. (Moon, 2013).



Also in this context of interplay and understanding, we need to recognize that certain forms of curriculum-related wisdom are still nascent, not already there to be found but in the process of becoming. Curriculum scholars may have to unpack their own cultures and intellectual histories, and renew their own visions of culture and tradition, especially when such traditions are marginalized within their own national curriculums. In addition, such interplay does not suggest that different forms of knowledge share a comparable significance or an equal exchange. We need to ground the internationalization of curriculums within the larger context of the internationalization of education, and in the even larger and more widely accepted concept of globalization. One cannot ignore the complications globalization engenders, which reflect nothing of univocality and instead highlight global interconnectedness and its unpredictability (Smith, 2003). For example, Paraskeva (2013) underscored the waves of internationalization serving to engineer non-Western epistemic forms to cease to exist, even though this was not the intent of the internationalization movement. Thus, articulating one's voice, culture, history, and practice, and endeavoring to share them through conversations, becomes even more complicated, with no agreed-upon ends in the next phase of the process. Rather than seizing upon these unpredictable goals, we should instead embrace a field of becoming. It will be particularly beneficial to examine the process by which one might truly articulate the intellectual and epistemic forms of various traditions and wisdom in their unique contexts as they see in the interplay between intellectualization and institutionalization (Pinar, 2013).

Internationalization and Curriculum Studies in China: Background

International influence on Chinese curriculums can be traced to the turn of the 20th century; at this time, the impact of Western thought on Chinese curriculum reform was recognizable. For example, John Dewey's pragmatism and democratic education, William Kilpatrick's project method of the 1920s, and Russian educator Ivan Kairov's formal stages of instruction pedagogy of the 1950s were all incorporated into Chinese education. The early internationalization of Chinese curriculums was intertwined with the idea of modernization (Zhang, 2014) and reflected early on in China's aspirations regarding science and democracy, which were usually viewed through the lens of Western rationality and objectivism. This internationalization was mostly a top-down or centralized practice in that the government assumed a major role in promoting these educational beliefs and practices.

Since the Chinese government began the policy of "going-out and brining-in" in the early 1980s, the strength, breadth, and variety of influences has become much stronger and more comprehensive. The Chinese government not only provides financial support for Chinese scholars attending overseas academic institutions, it also supports a large number of international educational events, projects, and activities within Chinese borders. From elementary school to college, Chinese education has been actively engaging by participating in exchange student programs, hiring foreign teachers, inviting international speakers, and translating international books. The traditional public school model has also been interrupted and diversified through homeschooling, international education, and private academic institutions. Chinese education is now diversified in content, format, funding, and goals.

The field of curriculum studies began to take shape in response to efforts at curriculum reform in 2001. The Chinese government launched a comprehensive curriculum reform effort aimed at transforming the nation's curriculums, systems of pedagogy, and understanding of the nature of learning, which has engendered a new



round of internationalization with regards to curriculum work. What is notable this time around is the more comprehensive and continuous work of the curriculum scholars at East China Normal University (ECNU). Led and heavily influenced by Professor Zhong Qiquan, a substantial number of graduate students from ECNU have become prominent leaders and made considerable contributions to the field. ECNU also hosted the first international curriculum conference of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (IAACS). The close and continuous exchange between North America and ECNU, as well as with other curriculum scholars in other Chinese universities, has been accomplished through conferences, seminars, lectures, and cross-cultural cooperative research. These scholars have had a considerable impact on the shape and direction of Chinese curriculum studies. For example, they have introduced to the canon subjects such as a post-modern perspective on curriculum studies, currere research, and feminist and autobiographical research methods (Doll, 1994; Miller, 2006; Pinar, 1976; 2004); all have been embraced by emerging Chinese curriculum scholars. China enjoys an atmosphere of embracing the new, the modern, and the “international,” which historically has mostly meant the Western. For example, since 2000, Chinese scholars and students have studied and translated a wide range of foreign curriculum-related works, and published a significant body of research on concepts related to postmodern curriculum theory, constructivism, multiple intelligence theories, and phenomenological curriculum models (Zhang, 2014). As a result, the field of curriculum studies in China is considered distinctive and dynamic, even by its own curriculum workers (Pinar, 2014).

What is unclear, however, is how, in this mixed environment of dynamic internationalization, the field of curriculum studies can mobilize and take shape. If the early 20th century’s internationalization is characterized by modernization in that sociopolitical, economic, and cultural context, what are the forms and nature of this new internationalization of education in general, and in curriculum studies in particular? As the internationalization of curriculum studies is aimed at bringing more cultural and intellectual history to this complicated conversation, one also needs to be mindful of the circumstances that prevent deeper curriculum-related dialogue and exchange. One such circumstance is created by curriculum scholars themselves, as Zhang (2014) has argued: “Most curriculum scholars and students are busy providing prescription to schools and show little interest in understating curriculum as an academic field with [a] long intellectual history” (p. 17) in China. For those who have moved from the “how” to the “what,” in what ways can they contribute to internationalization in terms of both wisdom and intellectual history, and what kinds of interplay can they create?

South Central Normal University is now at the forefront of curriculum studies in China; this is the result of the Chinese government’s “going-out and bringing-in” policy, curriculum reform, the intellectual work of their scholars, and interactions with the international curriculum studies community. Their aspiration is to promote internationalization through cross-cultural cooperative research and introduce cultural wisdom to the world (Zhang, Zhang, & Pinar, 2014). Over the years, this university’s research team has played a central role in the following: initiating complicated conversations about curriculum studies both within and outside of China by introducing international curriculum works into Chinese curriculum studies, organizing emerging curriculum scholars to venture out of China, involving graduate students in international work, inviting local school teachers to participate in international dialogues, and voicing their own visions of Chinese curriculum reform.



Method

Research Participants

I used purposive sampling to identify participants involved in the internationalization of curriculum studies at South Central Normal University. An email containing the recruitment letter and consent form was sent to potential participants; 10 agreed to be interviewed. These participants, including graduate students and faculty members, had all interacted with the content, context, and process of curriculum internationalization in one way or another. There were six males and four females. Nine were graduate faculty with ranks including lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor; one was a doctoral student. Their time at the university ranged from two to 20 years. Eight participants had either studied or researched as visiting scholars at universities in North America and Australia. Most could comfortably use academic English in written communications and conversation; nine preferred to use Chinese in their interviews, and one chose English. Though most conversations were in Chinese, English terms were used intermittently, especially for key concepts employed by the international community, such as “understanding curriculum” and “discourse.” All individuals had actively participated in conferences, seminars, or workshops that comprise the internationalization process of curriculum studies in China.

Research Design

A basic qualitative research method focusing on inductive reasoning was adopted for this study as a means of understanding how the participants made sense of their experiences, and how they constructed meaning related to the process of internationalization. My major research questions included: What forces mobilize or sustain the process of internationalizing curriculum studies at this university and in China? When local cultural and curricular projects meet international studies, how do they work with, through, and around the process of “complicated conversation,” and what is the nature of such a progress?

In the course of this study, I interviewed professors and graduate students involved in the process of internationalizing curriculum studies at this university, observed classes and an elementary school that is part of the university’s internationalization effort, and participated in courses and other curricular activities. The data collected, including interview transcripts, field notes, online data, and documents, were triangulated to assess the relationships among and credibility of the results. Field notes and online data provided contextual confirmation useful for documenting the salient points emerging from the interview, and facilitated the data analysis. The interviews served as my major data source, because interviews are “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2015, p. 14); they are essential “when we are interested in the past events that are impossible to replicate” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108) and thus were important to my research on this phenomenon. I conducted 10 semi-structured face-to-face interviews, all of which were audiotaped. Nine interviews were in Chinese, and one was in English (which was the interviewee’s choice).

The data analysis began concurrently with my conducting and transcribing the interviews; notes and thoughts were jotted down as they occurred to me. Such



rudimentary analysis occurring while the researcher is in the process of collecting data is both important and necessary (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After all of the transcriptions were completed, I read and reread them and identified key words. I employed an analytical coding for the meanings and interpretations of meaning derived from these examinations (Richards, 2015). I also considered issues of interpretation and translation related to cross-language qualitative research such as language differences, barriers, or the use of third parties in cross-language interviews (Squires, 2009; Temple, 1997; Temple & Edwards, 2002). However, since my participants were insiders in the world of curriculum studies and were fully aware of the languages used, and I am fluent in both Chinese and English and can comfortably switch between the two, such cross-language concerns made no noticeable differences in communication or meaning making. In addition, because I used multiple sources of data collection (triangulation) to increase credibility, the codes identified in the interviews were checked against the field notes and online data. After I located the codes in Chinese, I translated into English the entire sentence containing that code in order to contextualize the meaning.

The recurring patterns and themes across the interviews were then uncovered, and the themes gleaned from the codes were constructed.

Findings

After the preliminary coding of the interviews, the codes that most directly addressed my research questions were selected and grouped together as categories. An inductive approach of exploring and confirming strategies was adopted to analyze the meanings, patterns, and interrelationships. Themes were identified based upon the participants' particular voices and perspectives (Patton, 2002). Below, I discuss the central themes that resulted from the thematic analysis. These themes are categorized as forces mobilizing the internationalization of curriculum studies, the local response to the internationalization process, and the nature of that process.

Forces Driving Internationalization

Government policy and support serve as the political force. Government policies driving internationalization can be seen from multiple perspectives. First, curriculum reform policy drives K-12 teachers to seek international wisdom. Second, the Chinese government provides funding to support young scholars' international academic activities.

The *Curriculum Reform of Basic Education* issued by the National Ministry of Education in 2001 (National Ministry of Education, 2001) specifically called for school-based and localized curriculums, a topic that the participants linked to several other issues arising from the internationalization process. A school-based curriculum was perceived as a driving force for K-12 teachers, administrators, and curriculum scholars, motivating them to design and develop curriculums that are situated within local contexts. However, in many ways, because of a lack of curriculum consciousness, such practices devolve into worksheet practice or the mere addition of contents. For example, Wei pointed out:

The school principals are concerned more about classroom instruction; they lack ... curriculum development leadership. Together with teachers, they gradually turn curriculum development into worksheets, or merely add content and texts



However, there were some teachers who, while developing their own school-based curriculums, began to explore outside of their particular school. They attended conferences or professional development workshops, seeking new ideas and teaching strategies from the international community. The curriculum conferences hosted by South Central Normal University offered one of such avenue for their exploration. Lan, who had facilitated these conferences for several years, said:

Quite often, you have teachers who really want to learn something new about curriculum studies, too. I think this has something to do with ... curriculum reform. After 14 years, we launched this reform. I feel lots of teachers are quite familiar with all those theories, but they may have trouble ... integrating these theories into their own practice. So when they feel confused, they [see] this chance [the conference]. 'Oh, look at those speakers.' They may already know some of [the keynote speakers], so they ... may learn something new.

Policies on school-based curriculums have not only driven teachers and school leaders to explore new possibilities to enrich their own teaching, especially those from the international curriculum community. Such policies have also awakened teachers' curriculum-related consciousness, though they still focus much of their effort on how to teach.

Since the turn of last century, the Chinese government has sent thousands of young scholars to visit and study at overseas universities, mainly in the US and Canada. This was reflected in the participants' experiences. Of the nine participants, eight had visited American, Canadian, or Australian universities for one to two years. As a result of learning about what their international counterparts' research and practice processes involved, they began examining their own work and practices through a different lens. What philosophies and scholarship these scholars were exposed to during their visits to the West had a great deal to do with the scholarly work their sponsor universities conducted. For example, Qing visited a university in the Midwestern part of the United States; the professor she collaborated with had a research interest in homeschooling, which had a significant impact on Qing. After she returned to China, she began to investigate homeschooling there. To her surprise, there were thousands of Chinese students being homeschooled. She noticed that many Chinese students were homeschooled due to religious beliefs, which was similar to many households in the US. However, in many other cases, the reasons for homeschooling in China were more complicated. She explained:

There are many many Christians [voice lowered] in China; about 60% [of the] homeschooling population are Christians. Others include some exceptional kids whose parents are highly successful business leaders or highly educated; another kind ... are those with learning difficulties or those kids whose parents themselves did not have a good educational experience at school so they decided to opt their kids out.

Chinese curriculum reform and "going-out" policy have encouraged scholars and teachers to explore within and without their individual experiences by researching others. However, while this policy may advance international exchange, it could also restrict it. Wen was concerned about the sustainability of international work. She said, "if some conditions change, the sustainability of internationalization is unknown."



Although Qing, Lan, and Wen had all visited international universities and attended international conferences overseas, the new 2015 funding policy placed a tighter control on their international activities. Passport and reimbursement regulations now restrict scholars from active international engagement. Luckily, beyond the government, there are existential realities that mobilize scholars to engage in the work of internationalization.

An increasingly international society serves as a social force. Blooming Chinese economic development due to worldwide economic globalization has made China increasingly international and diversified. The 2010 Chinese census reported nearly 600,000 foreigners residing in China from more than 190 countries; they are attracted by employment opportunities and a low cost of living (Song, 2015). The growing number of international students and workers have contributed to the linguistic, cultural, and ideological diversity of Chinese society. This has, though, posed certain challenges for Chinese schools and education policies. Jun, a scholar studying such educational policies, made note of the phenomenon:

Migrants from other countries reside in many cities in China. China is gradually becoming internationalized. China is a big country, with plenty of opportunities. For example, there are many migrant workers in the city of Yiwu, [in the] Zhejiang province. One of my students had studied the educational experiences of the migrants' children, including people from Africa, [the] Middle East, and India.

Another perspective concerning the examination of the internationalized nature of Chinese society is the growing number of religious groups; this, too, has posed ideological challenges. Qing lowered her voice when she mentioned the term "Christians," indicating that religious beliefs are not openly discussed. As seen in Qing's research, many Christian families have opted out of China's basic education system, choosing their own curriculums to educate their children:

There are different homeschooling approaches. Some of them teach the children at their own home. Some are helping each other. Some even receive international help and use international curriculums.... They also have ... regular conferences on homeschooling.

Qing called this phenomenon a grey area. That is, according to Chinese law, children must receive a basic education; however, this has not been enacted. The Chinese government may not have given enough thought to how they would deal with the growing trend of internationalization.

The process of internationalization, interexchange, intercultural communication, and dialogue leads unavoidably to my second research question: When local cultural and curricular processes meet international systems, how do they work with, around, and through the "complicated conversation" that results, and what is the nature of that process?

Complicated Conversations Within and Beyond

There are quite a few findings that address the research questions. "Complicated conversation" is based upon equal dialogue and the development of cultural and curriculum consciousnesses as the basis of dialogue capital, the crucial role of



curriculum scholars in the interexchange, and the critical importance of theory in practice.

Complicated conversations lead to an equal dialogue for mutual benefit and acceptance. “Complicated conversations” are highlighted by the vision of an equal dialogue between Chinese wisdom and international scholarship related to curriculum studies. The main goal of Chinese scholars is to have an equal voice in this international discussion. However, their “voices” are still developing, as is the process itself. The participants in this research shared strong opinions on an equal exchange between the local and the international, which they believed should not be limited to format; content and two-way communication are of primary importance.

Qing observed:

I found many times that internationalization is simply understood in a superficial way. For example, equating hosting an international conference with internationalization by inviting international scholars ... However, such communication is an important model; that is, what we think they brought to us. I think the curriculum studies team led by Tao is beyond this stage, because they have the capacity to internationally interexchange, and such interexchange is mutually beneficial.

Wei, who had conducted multiple studies locally and collaborated internationally, believed that the value of an such international dialogue was not as a means of comparison, but rather as a platform for embracing each other’s views. “I am not saying Confucianism is better than Nel Noddings, but the purpose is to find a dialogue platform, let conversations ... take shape, and accept each other.”

Jun, a scholar studying educational policy, also emphasized equal dialogue as the primary purpose of the “going out” policy. He noted:

The international exchange between China and the international community has been inclined toward sending students and money overseas, or supporting international students by providing funds for them. I think for a truly equal dialogue, foreign students should come here to study, even if that means they have to fund themselves.

The financial support for foreign students that Jun discussed comes from programs sponsored by the Chinese government and administered by the China Scholarship Council. Their website lists different kinds of scholarships that foreign students can apply for if they hope to study at a top Chinese university (<http://www.csc.edu.cn/Laihua/scholarshipen.aspx>). A student can apply for a scholarship even if he or she has not yet been admitted to a university.

Developing cultural and curriculum consciousnesses as dialogue capital. Curriculum and cultural consciousnesses are viewed as dialogue capital; thus, Chinese traditional culture should be one source of such consciousness. Feng expressed the following:

If a country does not have curriculum capital, how can one join the dialogue?
What we need most is to establish our own cultural capital. Where is the capital?
It is located in the traditional cultural wisdom.



Traditional cultural wisdom in China is reflected in different schools of thought. For example, the most well-known are Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Of these three, Confucianism has been the primary source for scholars engaging in curriculum-related conversations. Deng, a scholar whose research interest is citizenship education, realized that he must involve Confucianism, which he believed to be a foreign concept, in his effort to introduce the concept of citizenship:

I chose Confucianism because it is widely accepted by common people. For a cultivation of virtue, if we use Western discourse to explain, it is easy for intellectuals to understand but laymen will not. Only using the language that they are familiar with will cause them to accept [it]. For example, if we emphasize virtue, if we do not stress filial duty, it will be very difficult for them to accept [it].

Wei, a scholar studying ethics, viewed curriculum development and design as an ethical system of decision making. He frankly admitted that he did not begin from a point within Chinese traditional culture. Rather, he began his research on ethics using Nel Noddings's theory of caring. Later, when he realized that teachers' classroom practices were reflections of cultural values, he began to incorporate Noddings's framework of caring into existing Confucian classroom values in order to rethink and explain the daily ethical decisions made by teachers. He noted:

Because in Chinese history the united cultural vision is Confucianism ... ethics is Confucian ethics. The ethics of teaching is consistent with this national and cultural ethics. There was no conflict between social and educational ethics.

In the attempt to create a dialogue and in the actual international dialogue process, scholars have acknowledged a deeper understanding of how traditional culture requires careful and objective examinations of the meanings and flux of traditional Chinese culture. Tao, as the leader of the team, pointed out:

We need to recognize the advantages, characters, and shortcomings of Chinese culture. Overly emphasizing traditional culture will likely ... induce populism. For a country where there is no [authoritative] religion, populism easily incites national sentiment. Nationalism will lead a country to conservatism, and eventually it becomes a closed society. We have to objectively treat traditional culture as centering around Confucianism and working with Taoism and/or other schools of thought.

Chinese culture is never fixed; it is always changing. Its meaning is diversified over time. It is scholars who make conscious cultural and curricular choices when they face different traditional wisdoms.

The role of curriculum scholars. Curriculum scholars as dialogue executors and cultural and curriculum consciousness articulators are regarded as those who advance Chinese curriculum consciousness and cultural enlightenment. Tao called them pioneers whose research framework is located in constructive and postmodern theoretical foundations; they constitute and bear the mission of a collective cultural enlightenment. Their interaction and intercultural communication with the international audience actually contributes to their own formation as curriculum scholars. Tao stated:



We need overall cultural consciousness. In the field of curriculum studies, the scholars whose works are situated in the constructivism and postmodernism frameworks are the curriculum pioneers. They proposed their own understanding of what a curriculum could be. They broke through the notion of curriculum as regulations or as a universal principle. As a result, they liberated culture, made people realize that curriculums can be related to psychology, to age, and to culture. In the international interexchange, we become more aware of our own cultural consciousness, and we articulate our own understanding, I think this is the value of internationalization.

The role of the curriculum scholar can be seen in their participation in government policies, which have a significant impact on classroom practice. Qing noted:

I think scholars have great impact on policy. Many influential policies are drafted by these scholars, with Chinese features. But I think they are progressive. It depends on the scholar, not the government officials or some other beneficiary groups with special interest.

Scholars share their research with the international community, but also closely connect with school teachers because of their involvement in government policies. Theory-into-practice was emphasized by many of my participants.

Theory-into-practice. Integrating theory-into-practice requires a shared vision. Theory includes international educational theories and concepts, and traditional Chinese wisdom. In Lan's account, one major reason that many K-12 teachers attend curriculum conferences is they are interested in how to "translate theories into practice." Theories need to be practical and useful. According to Xiao, the sole graduate student interviewed in this study, this is a concern that many graduate students share. She explained:

As a student involved in curriculum conferences where international scholars share their research and perspectives, I felt they really opened my eyes. Many questions I had not thought about before. I also want to know how teachers teach in other countries, but Bill [the invited speaker] does not like us to ask ... questions.

Integrating theory-into-practice for scholars taking a deeper look at international perspectives and traditional Chinese wisdom means "having one's own stuff" and "critiquing actions." Wei considered internationalization to be beyond the direct translation of others' theories. He stated:

Completely adopting Western perspectives for local realities will not work out very well; completely using Taoist perspectives may not meet today's needs since China is closely related to the international community. At this time, as Chinese curriculum researchers, how we can develop local cultural consciousness, our knowledge about these local issues, and knowledge about international related researches that are important for us to dialogue [about



and] integrate, and then [use them to] propose our new stuff?

For Jun, practice is action, especially with regards to other scholars' intellectual activities and projects. He gave the example of PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment). Students in Shanghai have topped tests in mathematics, reading, and science, among thousands of secondary school students around the world. Jun stated:

I think a researcher is a person who records and critiques. But it starts from action. I can criticize PISA, for Shanghai cannot represent China. But because they are doing so, I have the opportunity to critique their doings. The goal is to see the changes of policy, describe its process, and share with other researchers.

Tao, as the leader of this group, took the idea of theory-into-practice as one of his missions and a major part of internationalizing curriculum studies. He noted:

Our work is a highly open. We dialogue on theory, practice, and internationalism. There are dialogues between teachers, students, and the curriculum, and we also provide a theoretical framework for such dialogues.

I visited one of the local schools in which Tao was conducting research projects. A school motto—Children Inquiry—stood out when I entered the school building. The school's principal, Ms. Chen, happily met me. She discussed the history of their collaboration with South Central Normal University, and it seemed to me that the relationship was very positive and productive. She informed me that children at this school had the opportunity to explore topics that interested them and that went beyond their regular classes. I had observed a third grade classroom. In my field notes, I described the following:

When I entered the classroom, there were about 12 students in the classroom; they were attentively watching a video on marine animals. They looked very involved and some of them did not even know I walked in. After the video, a group of four students shared their knowledge and research with their classmates.

Integrating theory-into-practice is highly appreciated by school teachers. In this process, they are not the receivers of knowledge, but the co-creators of new curriculum possibilities. Practice is multifaceted; it involves policy, reform, curriculum making, teacher research, and student inquiry.

After examining the forces driving their work to internationalize curriculum studies, the participants also shared their views on the nature of the process.

A Free, Flexible, and Democratic Process

The last major research question of this study addressed the nature of the internationalization process. What are the characteristics of this process? What kinds of processes make "curriculum studies" internationalized? Upon reflection, the participants shared ideas regarding concepts such as "free" and "unstructured," "democratic," and even ambiguity to describe the flow of the process.



For several years prior to this research, Lan was actively involved in organizing conferences and working with keynote speakers. Her observations of the process included that it was:

Quite free. It is not like we have to organize this way or that way. We tried to do it constantly, given the condition of each year. For example, because of [a] conference in Ottawa [the IAACS Conference], we [had] two conferences in the same month, so we had to be flexible and ... skip th[at] year.

The flexibility is also reflected in moving conferences to different locations, collaborating with other interested partners, and reaching out to potential participants not in the curriculum studies group.

We just had another conference in Zhejiang University [in] October ... I remember the classroom was quite full, 50 or 60 interested people, most of them ... teachers. We can tell from the discussions after.

Jian also shared his view, which was motivated by the pursuit and result of the ongoing process of internationalization. "Our involvement in the process takes a democratic nature. Tao encourages everyone to present and share their research, but he does not force you." For Wei, however, the process involved ambiguity. "But how we develop and operate the internationalization of curriculum studies is not clear for the time being."

Perhaps it is the democratic quality and inherent ambiguity that make the impossible possible. The question is: Who is obligated or authorized to participate in this internationalization dialogue? Given the academic culture, worldwide rankings, and unique areas of specialization, breaking down boundaries and hierarchies might animate more exchange and prompt further ventures. This is not a clear-cut structure that linearly defines who belongs or who should leave. There is a thread that participants mentioned, but they did not explicitly connect it to the process in terms of who can be a part of this internationalization, including both institutions and individuals.

Discussion

If mere conversations about others' histories, cultures, and intellectual wisdom can be complicated, certainly the process of internationalization is far from straightforward or linear. The fluid platform of internationalization has been shaped on this moving globe by driving political and social forces, increasing cultural and curriculum consciousnesses expanded during interexchanges, the role of scholars, aspirations for an equal dialogue and enunciation of individual voices, and the free and flexible structure. Such a platform is enmeshed in a robust matrix rather than a duet of intellectualism and institutionalization. All things in this flux impact the direction, function, and meaning of this internationalization, while simultaneously constituting one another. To unpack the intricacies of this process, a nondual vision if we are to study this matrix. I will elaborate on this claim below.



Curriculum Vision through the Attainment of Intellectual and Cultural Capital

Chinese traditional culture is seen as the capital that scholars must develop if they are to engage in an international dialogue and affect curriculum reform from within. What is noteworthy is that of the three major traditional wisdoms, Confucianism has received the most recognition and is most actively engaged. Reflecting Chinese mainstream values, Confucianism takes precedence in scholarly work; this is not surprising because scholars find it inspirational as a thought system and laymen use it as a life philosophy (Zhang, 2008). It is also consistent with the Chinese government's ideology on collectivism as a morality (Yu, 2003). Yet traditional cultural capital is not static content to be grasped, for students in China do not lack traditional cultural knowledge. They begin learning poems, articles, and stories layered with traditional culture as early as preschool. For example, I have seen that traditional culture as content, in the format of visual story, is illustrated on the street level, such that laymen can read and ruminate on it.

In the instance I recorded, an elder was reading a story on the wall. Two young men were passing by on their bicycles. On the left side of the wall were two simplified Chinese characters: 诚信 (honesty and trust). The middle image on the wall told the story of how an ancient reformer built trust among the people. On the right hand side were the words: "promoting traditional Chinese culture." Engaging traditional culture in curriculum studies is a way of creating a curriculum vision and embodying it in intercultural exchange and dialogue on an international platform. The development of traditional Chinese cultural capital cannot be separated from the current context, social order, and culture. From it, a curriculum vision will take shape while practitioners engage new problems arising from these complex situations.

Traditional culture is viewed as fluid and mutating over time, but it must be attended to with objectivity and open-mindedness in order to avoid populism and nationalism; this was emphasized by Tao. Nationalism poses the danger of "suppress[ing] difference internally and aggression internationally" (Pinar, 2011, p. 51). National sentiment in China should not be viewed as an isolated concern in the process of internationalization; it may indicate the failure of equal dialogue or act as the other side of an equal dialogue, a point the participants made. I am a Chinese native, but I have lived outside of China for more than a decade. The clamor of "equal dialogue" still echoes, especially when that dialogue, interaction, or exchange is with a Western partner who is usually perceived as having more control.

The concept of "equal" is particularly salient in arguments made by historically marginalized countries or groups. For example, the women's rights movement aimed for suffrage and racial desegregation. These goals reflect the historical imbalance of power and appreciation that made marginalized groups aware of their powerlessness in dialogues and exchanges with their more powerful counterparts. In academia, the concept of equality also refers to the unbalanced production of knowledge and discourse, as Tishkove (1998) pointed out in his international anthropological research. "U.S. Social science has a dominant position in today's world research community in terms of the number of practitioners, the resources allocated to them, and the influence of their disciplinary methodologies" (p. 1). I would add that language can signify dominance and power. English has been the dominant, if not the only, language used in academic exchange. As participants have pointed out, the ability to have an equal dialogue includes the easy use of good academic English. Cultural and curriculum



consciousnesses must acknowledge such challenges and how they contribute to an unequal dialogue.

Compared with the call for a complicated conversation, the emphasis on equality calls for a recognition of the existing unbalanced discursive practices in international discussions and the importance of valuing each other's ideas. The emphasis on equal dialogue is also important for solidifying non-Western epistemic forms, as Paraskeva (2013) has stated, and understanding the limits of our colonized worldview, as Ng-A-Fook (2007) has argued.

Inter-causality and Interpenetration of Curriculum Vision and Institutionalized Practices

The internationalization of curriculum studies in China reflects an interpenetration of intellectualism and institutionalization that is discernable from the interplay among scholarly research and institutionalized practices such as curriculum conferences, seminars, school-based curriculum efforts, teachers' active involvement, and theory-into-practice. I have used the concepts of interpenetration and inter-causality from Chinese Huayan Buddhism to describe the nature of internationalization in China. The Huayan worldview and metaphysics denote "mutually non-interfering phenomena: reality realm of phenomena [*shi*], reality realm of noumenon [*li*], reality realm of the non-interference between noumenon and phenomena, reality realm of the non-interference among phenomena" (Park, 2008, p. 161). Here, interference indicates conflict, and Buddhism does not deny a temporary conflict between phenomena; however, conflict is not the nature of the relationship between phenomena. Park further notes that these four realms are not ontological states; rather, they are hermeneutical devices used to describe the relationships among noumenon and phenomenon and their structures. Instead of viewing noumenon and phenomenon as independent and discrete, they should instead be seen as interdependent and inter-causal. Such inter-causal interdependence, as Hershock (2012) argues, is not "a contingent, external relationship; it is constitutive or internal. Ultimately, all things are irreducibly relational in nature" (Hershock, 2012, p. 36). The Huayan worldview and metaphysics developed the dharma-dhatu dependent origination (法界缘起) theory. The infinite interfusion of noumenon (*li*) and phenomenon (*shi*), and the inter-causation and dependent co-origination of the reality realm of *li* and the reality realm of *shi* make it possible to see the self and other relationships as non-dualistic, interdependent, and interpenetrating: a dynamic self-other because it has interpenetrated self into the other.

Government policies and forces (noumenon, *li*) constitute emerging curricular explorations, theoretical inquiries, and various questions; curriculum conferences, seminars, and presentations (phenomenon, *shi*) constitute scholars' research agendas and questions. Unlike curriculum work before 2001, current curriculum studies situated in the new internationalization movement manifests a robust interpenetration of policy and practice, theory and practice, or a multifaceted interpenetration of curricular *li* and *shi*. Curriculum scholars as agents constitute government reforms. The current field of curriculum studies in China does not reflect a top-down approach or linear diffusion from the government, as it has in the past; social realities and curriculum scholars' own cross-cultural research have influenced the dynamic process of internationalization and constituted its own curriculum reform. The process is less about the goal to achieve and more about forming relations that are inter-causal and interpenetrating; gone are the days of disciplinary boundaries, ranking and size hierarchies, and school theory and practice dichotomies.



Pinar (2003) viewed the first stage of internationalization as an “intellectual project of self-understanding” (p. 30). What I see in the process, the self, regardless if it is traditional culture or curriculum consciousness, does not exist to be discovered or retrieved; rather, it is temporal and co-emerges with the inquiry process itself, a function of transition and interdependence. The impermanence of self indicates that self-understanding must be considered contextualized in arising conditions, a Heideggerian existential self of “being-in-the-world” in the process of internationalization that is probably more relevant here; a self existentially inhabits, dwells in, and forms an inter-causing relationship with the process. The self co-grows with the process, and its attainment and actualization is a function of the process (Nobo, 1986). That is, Chinese cultural enlightenment and curriculum consciousness are not preexisting; they are actualized as the result of an ongoing inter-causative process.

One particularly intriguing element of this research is that most of these participants (for example, Qing, Jun, Deng, and Wei) did not identify themselves as curriculum scholars because they had their own research interests and were in different disciplines. However, their work unavoidably reflected curricular concerns, asked curricular questions, and took on curricular challenges constituted in the process of internationalizing curriculum studies. What they investigated and were involved in, and their participation in the unstructured process of internationalization itself, made them think like curriculum scholars and perform curriculum inquires. Thus, we can say that an interpenetration was at work.

Like many other countries, China has its own way of ranking universities and providing funding to support research productivity and programs, for example, the well-known projects 211 and 985. Universities that are members of these projects receive significant funding and other kinds of support from the government, which may have a side effect of preventing other small universities from increasing their research productivity and participating internationally. Interviewees for this research saw such rankings and school sizes as posing a glass ceiling that kept schools at lower ranks from becoming involved and participating in international work. Both Wei and Wen indicated such a challenge. Wei mentioned, “we are a small university,” and Wen pointed out that Tao’s vision had really opened their eyes. He asked young scholars to have a dialogue directly with the international community rather than limit themselves just because they are in a regional school.

Later, when China cut back the 985 and 211 projects, the perishing of its process and completion of certain missions created opportunities for smaller universities. Although rank, discipline, funding, and even language barriers posed challenges for South Central Normal University, their work on the internationalization of curriculum studies truly broadened the visions of many young scholars; many had no prior opportunities to “go out.” Such a process reflects the nonlinear nature of curriculum work and the formation of the field, but South Central Normal University carried on the mission of internationalization in a different way. Thus, institutionalized practices such as conferences and seminars have provided a platform for Chinese scholars to share their research and contributed to their intellectual wisdom.

Conclusion

This study examined the forces driving and mobilizing the internationalization of curriculum studies, how intercultural interchanges work, and the particular nature of this process in China. Government policies and the reality of an increasingly internationalized Chinese society have shaped the present circumstances. In order to



have an equal dialogue with various epistemic forms and traditions, Chinese curriculum scholars feel an urgency to develop their own cultural and curricular capital. As a result of this international dialogue, they have developed a double lens (e.g., traditional wisdom and international vision) not for comparison, but for a deeper understanding and exploration of local curricular issues. Unlike internationalization in the early 20th century, today's internationalization, in the context of economic globalization and demand for equal dialogue, has taken many forms; it gradually but steadily assembles, folds, and unfolds.

The process of internationalization in China does not reveal a sequential and linear course with a past, present, and future. These events are interrelated, but not necessarily progressive. The nonlinear nature of the internationalization of curriculum studies in China makes it difficult to see where it starts and stops, because it can start anywhere and a single cutting event cannot destruct the system. Curriculum scholars' continuous engagement with both traditional and Western wisdoms, the manifold of such curriculum work, emerging international conditions in China, exchanges between local and international centers of thought, and teachers' eagerness to learn new things have all helped to constitute the process of internationalization of curriculum studies. This fluid platform is enmeshed in a matrix where the flux of interrelated events mobilizes the substance, direction, and function of each.

The ongoing process of internationalization of the field of curriculum studies in China does not delineate a clear picture of where the process is going, but it simultaneously delimits boundaries and opens up new opportunities and alternatives. Although there are various challenges that scholars must overcome to express their ideas on an international platform, much more distinctively Chinese curricular work is on the horizon.

Notes

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