

Re-Imagining and Transforming the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World:

Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and Learning

by

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ABSTRACT

The notion of a teacher is an archaic, dynamic, and diverse concept that is embedded in and therefore revealed in the various complex and coexisting cultural and national contexts, ways of teaching and learning, and the entanglements with beings in multiple worlds. However, under the fundamental impacts of westernization, coloniality, and modernization in the Anthropocene, the concept of a teacher has been endowed with narrow colonial, human-centric, politicalized, as well as vocationalized and secularized connotations. It has been oversimplified to a profession, while other possible interpretations have been omitted and marginalized at the same time. My dissertation questions the implications of the gradual narrowing down of the concept over time and reexamines the concept of a teacher with the aim of ontologically broadening the scope of different connotations and embracing more diverse and inclusive forms as well as contexts of being a ‘teacher.’

In response, this dissertation traces the history, evolution, and cultural contexts of the notion of a teacher in ancient and modern China. It explores the concept of a teacher ontologically through multiple historical and theoretical frames, including decolonial theory in comparative education and several conceptual constructs in Taoism, Confucianism, and posthumanism. Guided by these frames, I introduce innovative (post)qualitative methodologies in data generation and collection, referring to collective re-membering activities, reanimating sense, and speculative fabulation experiences (Haraway, 2013) in terms of “teaching without words/actions,” “sitting and Wu,” and “Ge wu zhi zhi.” This dissertation is designed as a multi-scenario, multi-sense, and multispecies ethnography, and the fieldwork was conducted over three months of

summertime in 2022 in a small town and a modern supercity in China. Using a diffractive analysis of memories, stories, and experiences with multiple participants, I attempt to broaden the concept of a teacher by presenting a variety of coexisting conceptualizations of the term and bringing into focus multiple ways of teaching, learning, and being a teacher.

DEDICATION

给我的葫芦哥哥，我自己，还有这些年的岁月。

To my beloved Calabash brother, myself, and all these years.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xvi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
Simplified Concept in Complex Contexts: Problem Statement.....	4
The Relevance of Research.....	6
Purpose of Research.....	8
Research Questions.....	9
Dissertation Overview and Potential Contributions.....	10
My Narratives and Reflections: Positionality.....	13
2 LITERATURE REVIEW: TRACING HISTORIES OF ‘TEACHER’ IN CHINA	16
From Primitive Society to Wartime: The Cultural Image of Teacher.....	16
From Qin to Qing Dynasty: Being Selected As Officials.....	24
Late Qing Dynasty to The Republic of China (1912-1949)	28
The Opium War Period.....	28
Westernization for Self-strengthening Movement Period.....	33
The Period of Constitutional Reform and Modernization.....	37
The Republic of China (1912-1949) Period: Turbulent Days.....	43
1949-1976: People’s Teacher.....	49
After 1978.....	56

CHAPTER	Page
Two Emphases of Teacher As A Social Job.....	58
The ethics and morality of a teacher.....	64
“Issues” Related to Teachers.....	67
Capitalization of The Profession and The Gender of Teachers.....	69
Related Literature.....	72
What’s Next?	75
3 FRAMING ‘TEACHER’ IN CONCEPTUAL DIALOGUES: MULTIPLE THEORETICAL LENSES	76
(Western) Comparative Education: A General and Plural Analytic Frame....	76
Rewesternization.....	77
Reorientation to the Left.....	79
Dewesternization.....	80
Decolonization.....	82
Spirituality.....	84
Coexistence and Intersections	85
Connecting to Teachers.....	86
Taoism: Dialectic View in A Correlative Cosmology.....	88
The Tao.....	89
Nature.....	93
Relationship Between Humans and Nature.....	95
Literature on Education and Teachers.....	98
Confucianism: An Integral, Relational, and Harmonious View.....	101

CHAPTER	Page
Relationality.....	102
Harmony in Relations and Self-cultivation.....	104
Study Things and Know the Reasoning (Ge wu zhi zhi, 格物致知)	108
Literature in Educational Studies.....	111
Connecting to Teachers.....	113
Posthumanism: Anticipating Pluriverse, Sympoiesis, and Common Worlds in the Anthropocene.....	116
Anthropocene and Posthumanism.....	116
Pluriverse.....	117
Sympoiesis.....	120
Common Worlds.....	123
Connecting to Teachers.....	125
Similarities and Differences Among Frameworks.....	126
Unity.....	127
Interconnectedness.....	128
Coexistence of Multiplicity.....	129
Differences.....	130
Conclusion	132
4 METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCH DESIGN: EXPLORING ‘TEACHER’ IN INNOVATIVE APPROACHES	133
Literature on Teachers in Different Contexts.....	133
Studies Conducted in Western Contexts.....	134

CHAPTER	Page
Studies Conducted in Eastern Contexts.....	136
Studies in Comparative Education.....	138
Studies in Posthumanism.....	141
(Collective) Memory as Methodology.....	143
Re-animating Senses (Sounds) as Methodology.....	150
Speculative Fabulation Experiences.....	155
First Speculative Experience: Teaching Without Words/Actions.....	160
Second Speculative Experience: Ge Wu Zhi Zhi.....	163
Third Speculative Experience: Sitting and Wu.....	166
Determination of Research Design.....	171
Scenario A: Re-membering and Speculative Fabulating.....	172
Participants.....	172
Step 1: Memory and Re-membering.....	174
Step 2: Speculative Fabulating and Reanimating Listening/Hearing in A Natural Environment.....	177
Collective Data Analysis Procedures.....	181
Scenario B: Speculative Fabulating in Modern Schools.....	185
Participants.....	185
Step 1: Observation.....	187
Step 2: Sitting and Wu, and Reanimating Natural Sounds.....	189
Step 3: Interviews.....	191
Diffraction Analysis.....	193

CHAPTER	Page
The Outline of Findings.....	200
5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: ENGAGING WITH ‘TEACHER’ IN MEMORIES, SILENCE, SOUNDS, AND STORIES	202
Recurring Memories Across Three Generations: Becoming-with A Teacher..	203
Memory Series: The Young Girl Becoming-with Teachers.....	203
Recursive Themes: The Tao, Relationality, and Shared Emotions in A Sympoietic Remembering of A ‘Teacher’ Concept.....	215
Transient Silence in The Classroom and In-service Teachers’ Pressure: A Transitional Section.....	222
Transient Silence in The Classroom.....	223
Interactions in Class.....	223
Human Teachers’ Dominance in Class.....	227
In-service Teachers’ Pressures And Anxieties.....	230
Sounds and Sitting Still As The Teacher: Decomposing Pressure Through The Sonic Conversations.....	235
Conversation 1: Riverside In The Early Morning.....	236
Conversation 2: Right After Noon In The Neighborhood Garden.....	240
Conversation 3: Riverside In The Afternoon.....	245
Conversation 4: Midmorning In The Neighborhood Garden.....	250
Conversation 5: The Big Rock Deep Inside The Street Garden, After Rain.....	255

CHAPTER	Page
“Teachers” Reconciling With The Self: In Tianrenheyi, Harmony, Pluriverse, And Common Worlds.....	260
A Collection of Stories: What if/And if ____ Becomes Our Teacher.....	264
What If A Cat Was A Teacher?	267
Postscript: The sense of boundaries.....	268
Postscript: Developing a relationship and noticing the utilitarian mindset.....	271
Postscript: Re-memering to love and be grateful.....	277
What If We Learned From Our Own Bodies?	278
Postscript: Natural learning rhythms.....	280
What If Students Were Teachers?	280
Postscript: My “little teachers”	283
Postscript: My reflections on the teacher as a relationship.....	287
What If Seashells Were Our Teachers?	289
What If The Rabbit Was A Teacher?	291
Postscript: Rabbits as my teachers? Of course!	293
What If Disciplinary Knowledge Was A Teacher?	293
Art.....	293
Postscript: Who could be the teacher?	296
Biology.....	296
What If Our Children Were Our Teachers?	298
Postscript: My child as a reminder.....	301

CHAPTER	Page
What If The Trees Were Teachers?	301
Postscript: Being inspired by trees.....	304
What If Our Life Experiences Were Our Teachers?	304
Housework and self-reflection.....	304
Japanese elders' life attitudes.....	306
Postscript: What and how they taught me.....	309
What If The Taiji Sword (Taiji jian, 太极剑) Was A Teacher?	310
What If An Insect Was A Teacher?	313
Postscript: The meaning of life and being a teacher.....	315
What If A Mother's Love Was A Teacher?.....	316
Postscript: Mutual love.....	318
What If The Willow And The Snail Were Teachers?.....	318
What If The Sky And The Clouds Were Teachers?.....	325
What If Amitabha Buddha Was A Teacher?.....	330
What If Plants Were Our Teachers (With Three Generations)?	333
What If The Influences of Deeds Were Teachers?.....	339
Throwing trash.....	339
Organizing the platform and asking questions.....	340
My colleagues.....	342
Imitating the teacher.....	345
Last Words In Findings.....	350

CHAPTER	Page
6	IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION: RE-IMAGINING TEACHERS: DIVERSE AND MIXED WAYS OF TEACHING, LEARNING, AND BEING 351
	Limitations.....356
	Implications.....357
	Postscript: Regarding The Dissertation As A Teacher.....360
	The Last Fable.....364
	REFERENCES370
APPENDIX	
A	FAMILY MEMBERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ENGLISH VERSION 405
B	FAMILY MEMBERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – CHINESE VERSION 409
C	FAMILY MEMBERS CONSENT FORM – ENGLISH VERSION 413
D	FAMILY MEMBERS CONSENT FORM – CHINESE VERSION 417
E	SEMI-STRUCTURED PROMPT FOR RE-MEMBERING BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS – ENGLISH VERSION..... 420
F	SEMI-STRUCTURED PROMPT FOR RE-MEMBERING BETWEEN FAMILY MEMBERS – CHINESE VERSION 423
G	IN-SERVICE TEACHERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ENGLISH VERSION 426
H	IN-SERVICE TEACHERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – CHINESE VERSION 430
I	IN-SERVICE TEACHERS CONSENT FORM – ENGLISH VERSION ... 433
J	IN-SERVICE TEACHERS CONSENT FORM – CHINESE VERSION ... 437

APPENDIX

Page

K	SEMI-STRUCTURED PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH IN-SERVICE TEACHERS – ENGLISH VERSION	440
L	SEMI-STRUCTURED PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH IN-SERVICE TEACHERS – CHINESE VERSION	445
M	PROTOCOL FOR FIELD NOTES IN REMOTE OBSERVATION – ENGLISH VERSION	450
N	PROTOCOL FOR FIELD NOTES IN REMOTE OBSERVATION – CHINESE VERSION	452
O	DEMOGRAPHIC FORM – ENGLISH VERSION	454
P	DEMOGRAPHIC FORM – CHINESE VERSION	456
Q	TRANSLATION CERTIFICATE	458
R	LETTER OF EXEMPTION REVIEW APPROVAL	462
S	LETTER OF CONTINUING REVIEW APPROVAL	465
T	LETTER OF CONTINUING MODIFICATION REVIEW APPROVAL ..	468
U	LINKS TO RECORDINGS OF NATURAL SOUNDS	471

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. The Percentages of Female Teachers in Different Levels of Schools.....	71
2. Methodology Design	172
3. Basic Information of In-service Teacher Participants	186
4. Information of “Sitting and Wu” with In-service Teachers	191

LIST OF IMAGES

Image	Page
1. The Front Door of The Old House	175
2. Sundries in The Box	176
3. Ding in Her School Period	205
4. Ding and Miss M	206
5. Ding's First Day at Work With A Colleague	205
6. Wei and Miss Z	210
7. The Square Table Where Wei Spent Time With Her Family in the Old House	210
8. Archived Books and Documents in the Old House	212
9. The Desk Used By Family Members to Read and Write	212
10. The Bookshelf and An Attached Desk Used By Yu in Her Childhood	212
11. Riverside in The Early Morning	238
12. Riverside in The Early Morning	238
13. The Huge Modern City, Shenzhen, and Its High-rises, Seen From Shenzhen Bay	240
14. The Source of the "Fishy Smell"	240
15. The Place of Meditation with the Construction Site Behind	240
16. Right After Noon in the Neighborhood Garden	242
17. The Place of Meditation on the Little Hill	244
18. The Distant High-rises and the Busy Highway Drawing Boundaries	244
19. A Glass Platform Where the In-service Teacher Chose for Planned Rest and Meditation Next Time on Her Own	245

Image	Page
20. Riverside in the Afternoon	246
21. The Lush Forest in the Park	249
22. The Running Water and the Hidden White Bird in the Park, with the Tall Buildings Behind	249
23. The City was About to Rain	250
24. Midmorning in the Neighborhood Garden	251
25. The Sunset Over the Mountain in Our Meditation	253
26. The Sea on Overcast Days	255
27. The Sea on Daytime	255
28. The Sea At Night	255
29. The Sea View Seen By the Participant When She Took A Walk on Normal Days	255
30. The Big Rock in The Afternoon	257
31. The Big Rock in The Morning	257
32. The View From Where We Meditated, “The Trees and Forests All Over the Mountains and the Buildings in the Distance”	259
33. The View From Where We Meditated, “The Trees and Forests All Over the Mountains and the Buildings in the Distance”	259
34. Caicai’s Cat, Mimi, Was Sitting on Her Laptop	273
35. Caicai’s Cat, Mimi, Was Sleeping on Her Lap	273
36. The Possible Mated Male Cat	274
37. The Mother Cat After Her Parturition	274

Image	Page
38. The Family: Childhood Wei, Her Mom Ding, Her Father, and Her Brother ..	276
39. Grown-up Wei and Her Mom, Ding	276
40. “Be Careful With the Glass” (in Chinese) Written on the Outer Side of the Box By Xinxin	282
41. Wei With Her Classes of Students	284
42. The Seashells Meng Picked	291
43. Wu Kept Flowers in the Plastic Bottle in the Math Teachers’ Office	295
44. “The Biggest Tree” Wang Has Ever Seen	303
45. The Clothesline Pole	305
46. The Taiji Sword With Sundries in the Corner Behind the Door	312
47. The Insect in the Cup	314
48. The Willow	320
49. The Willow	320
50. The Snails	324
51. The Snails	324
52. The Wheelchair Ding Insisted on Using	325
53. The Snail on Ding’s Window Screen	325
54. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town	329
55. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town	329
56. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town	329
57. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town	329
58. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town	329

Image	Page
59. The Shape of the Yin-Yang Symbol in the Clouds Above the Town	329
60. The Sunset of the Town	330
61. “The Quiet Silver-blue Sky at Dusk, With a Layer of Light Clouds Flowing”	330
62. “The Quiet Silver-blue Sky at Dusk, With a Layer of Light Clouds Flowing”	330
63. The Red Tape Drive	331
64. The Pot of Aloe Vera	337
65. The Left Pots and Cactus on the Balcony	338
66. The Left Pots and Cactus on the Balcony	338

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Mom, what is a teacher?” A three-year-old girl raising her head and blinking her eyes, asked.

“It is a profession in schools, teaching with national certification. See, I am a teacher. Grandma was also a teacher. We teach students knowledge in classrooms,” said mom casually, thinking about all the annoying things at work.

“Then what is a certification?” The girl curiously asked again.

“It is a piece of paper or a booklet, with your name written on it and a confirmation that ‘you are qualified to be a teacher in schools.’ I could show you when we get back home.” The mom answered with a little more patience this time, because she hoped her daughter would not have more “boring” questions on this topic.

The girl quietly nodded her head, but then shook her head firmly.

“What? Disagree?” Asked mom, noticing her daughter’s strange reaction.

“Em... I don’t have a certification, and neither do my turtles. But we teach others!” The girl said it hesitantly, but gradually raised her voice.

“Who did you teach? And what did you teach? And what is the matter with your turtles?”

The girl’s mom felt both annoyed and amused.

“The other day, I taught my little parrot to speak. I said ‘go to sleep’ to him and I put my hands next to my ears, tilting my head. I closed my eyes. My parrot spoke! He made a similar sound as me! And after a while, he also closed his eyes! His head also tilted onto his side!”

“Okay, then why are your turtles teachers?” Mom smiled.

The girl saw her mom becoming interested in her story, beginning to tell it confidently, “the big turtle taught the small one to walk! When the big one stretched out its legs, the small one did it as well, and followed to climb! And, and...” the little girl said excitedly, “the snow teaches me about coldness! The candy teaches me about sweetness! The meals teach me about deliciousness...”

“Alright, alright! You will know and meet real teachers in the school in a few years.” The mom answered with a wry smile.

The little girl bowed her head and mumbled to herself unconvincingly, “They are my real teachers!...They just don’t have certifications. They don’t even have a school in their worlds...”

This dissertation starts with a playful story of a girl and her mom discussing a simple question: What is a teacher? It was created based on a memory of a conversation between me and my mom a long time ago in my childhood, and now, it was brought up again to open the journey of exploring the concept of a teacher. The word ‘teacher’ is one of the most archaic ones in the vocabulary of Chinese culture. It has many appellations across dynasties and societies, such as “Xian sheng” (先生, “mister” in English), “Jiao yuan” (教员, “instructor” in English), “Yuan ding” (园丁, “gardener” in English) as well as “La zhu” (蜡烛, “candles” in English), all using praising metaphors for teachers’ selfless dedication. Furthermore, “Lao shi” or “Jiao shi” (老师/教师, “teacher” in English) is the most common name in present China.

The meaning of the word ‘teacher’ has also undergone various shifts and transformations throughout Chinese history, from ancient China to modern China, based

on the temporal and spatial discourses inscribed in its changing sociocultural contexts. Some scholars (Zhang, 2006) have argued that the distinctive transformation of the notion ‘teacher’ is closely related to traditional culture, undergoing changes along with the culture of sage, bureaucracy, and public servant, while others (Zhang & Zhang, 2010) connect the evolution of the notion and identity of the teacher with the economic form of human society, including the pre-industrial economy, industrial, and informational economy.

However, this fluid and archaic concept – with its many diverse connotations – has been gradually narrowing down in the historical and cultural contexts of the conceptual transitions. In modern China, the notion ‘teacher’ basically refers to human beings who have nationally authorized and professionally licensed certifications, regard teaching as their social job, and work in public or private schools (Baidu Baike, 2022). In educational contexts as well as academia, the connotations of this concept are predominantly connected with modern schooling, formal education, and professional development. Defining a ‘teacher’ as merely a social profession implies that its diverse connotations must be confined by the current social life and habits which represent a relatively short historical time and limited space dominated by the human species. Considering its cumulative and multiple connotations in ancient times and across history, today’s interpretation of a ‘teacher’ has lost its diversity and some other significant but subtle elements of meaning, thus becoming disconnected from other possibilities beyond modernity. This also means that the supposed perspectives, frames, and methods of perceiving and understanding a ‘teacher’ have eroded as they have become customized to fit the goals of modernity. Hence, the root of the problem starts here.

Simplified Concept in Complex Contexts: Problem Statement

Since modern times in China, a national teacher qualification mechanism has been established by the government in line with similar mechanisms in Western countries. In addition, several rules and regulations have been formulated and executed to further stipulate teacher morality and conduct. However, problems with teacher conduct have not ceased in China. The root of the problem needs to be elaborated on here. After a series of transformations in meanings and connotations of what it means to be a teacher within the different historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts, the concept of a teacher has become relatively complicated. Moreover, those transformations have not been as natural and peaceful as they may have seemed to be. Instead, the connotations of a teacher have become cumulatively rich and diverse, while simultaneously carrying the elements borrowed from western educational systems and selectively ignoring other alternative connotations, thus shaping the concept in a particular direction. To date, the changing content and connotations of the concept ‘teacher’ have not been examined, presented, and reconsidered along with the changing cultural contexts. Rather, in present-day China, the concept has been endowed with narrow, colonial, westernized, human-centric, politicalized, as well as vocationalized and secularized connotations, while other possible interpretations have been erased, omitted, and marginalized at the same time. In contrast, the requirements for teacher professional identity have infinitely escalated to remedy the lost traditional connotations and in response to the expectations for successful modern governance and politics.

From Confucianism to modern China, however, some features of a (good) teacher and a noble intellectual embedded in traditional Chinese society have not been readily or completely peeled off in the transformation of society, schooling, and knowledge forms. Meanwhile, new characteristics of and requirements for modern school teachers – traveling from western countries and Soviet modernity – have been plugged into the original local concept. Additionally, new cultural and political requirements for the individuals' morality and cultivation – born in the current political and administrative settings – mingle with the historical features of the teacher profession. Those hybrid assemblages are attached to this thin connotation – teaching as a social profession – which requires teachers to serve as a workforce in a modern profession while simultaneously fulfilling historical, cultural, political, and moral expectations. In other words, teaching has become a modern social profession, which is constantly updated by adding new requirements for both current and prospective teachers. Yet, the everyday impressions of the 'teacher' and the teaching profession more broadly continue to root in the broader traditional socio-cultural role of teachers. This thin connotation – a social profession – with its multiple expectations has gradually become dominant in the public perception, marginalizing and weakening other connotations as “unnecessary.” Yet, I argue that it is precisely these “unnecessary” connotations that have the potential to bring into focus the entanglements and relationships beyond modern as well as beyond the human world.

To put it in a simpler way, the assertive implementation of modern teacher education and qualification reforms, which have been borrowed from western countries and reinforced the modern notion of a 'teacher,' is both difficult and problematic. This is

because the definition of a teacher has been oversimplified and narrowed down to a job and its related requirements in such a complex context. Furthermore, imposing extra cultural and political requirements on the teaching profession on the basis of modernized definitions as well as westernized teacher education and selection systems is also problematic. It is because the simplified concept has simultaneously become overloaded with different connotations, implying a contradictory and split logic inscribed in the modernity and coloniality that ontologically divides the teacher into professional roles, moral roles, cultural roles, and more. Besides, it is also problematic to merely consider human teachers in multiple and diverse worlds, while ignoring other species because the taken-for-granted and seemingly clear boundary between human beings and other species does not naturally exist. In this sense, the process of learning does not only happen in the regular classroom and the role of teaching is not always confined to human beings. In response to the above problematic assumptions, policies, and practices, I propose to reconsider the concept of a teacher from broader, multiple perspectives.

The Relevance of Research

This research is motivated by two main reasons. First, both the concept ‘teacher’ and the practice of teaching in modern China have become a crossing point where multiple cultures and connotations meet, intersect, and interact. That means, this concept, along with its shaping and shifting connotations, bears influence from diverse forces. However, the changing connotations of the concept have been neglected in the everyday use of the term. Besides, the reasons behind the changes in meaning have not been critically considered within the practical and cultural contexts of teaching. Instead,

teacher roles have been reduced to a social profession, the modern educational systems of cultivating this profession, and a stack of extra moral requirements coming from different political goals and orientations. Practically, it results in the mismatch between people's expectations of a qualified teacher and teacher's reality—in-service public-school teachers, who have passed the exams of qualification, holding the professional qualification certification, and have a high social reputation, might still violate rules and even laws or act in indecent and non-exemplar ways. To essentially face this problem, rather than piling up additional requirements on the teaching profession or attempting to single-dimensionally “solve” it, there is an opportunity to redefine, re-experience, and thus broaden the concept of teacher – as well as present its diversity of connotations – from multiple perspectives.

Second, despite the growing research about the concept of a teacher as a social profession and efforts to improve teacher education and qualification systems in China, there is not enough research that explores the term ‘teacher’ beyond the existing conceptualization frame that defines it as a profession. What remains to be explored is the transformative connotations of a ‘teacher’ in China from more inclusive and diverse lenses, such as Chinese indigenous philosophies, posthumanism, and comparative education. Instead of taking the concept of a teacher for granted in the modern educational system, it is important to begin the work of tentatively re-examining, re-defining, and re-presenting this concept to answer the following questions: What alternative frames could be used to define the concept of ‘teacher’? And how could we bring into focus other possible but often ignored connotations of a teacher?

Purpose of Research

Considering the fluid concept of a ‘teacher’ and its rootedness in increasingly more sophisticated, yet narrowing cultural, national, and international contexts, this dissertation will reexamine this concept through multiple historical and theoretical frames with the aim of broadening the scope of different connotations of a ‘teacher.’ More importantly, findings from this study have the potential to question the implications of the gradual narrowing down of the concept over time (e.g., through the westernized accreditation system, the implicit binary hierarchical logics, human exceptionalism, and epistemic universalism), and will invite multiple visions and interpretations of how the notion of the teacher could be redefined and re-contextualized in the future.

In this context, this project intends to explore the fluid concept of a teacher and tentatively re-present and redefine this concept in terms of extending its existing connotations from decolonial and comparative educational perspectives. That does not imply the denial of ‘teacher’ as a profession in modern schooling or the separation of the concept from its historical and cultural concepts of coloniality/modernity. Instead, it attempts to decenter the taken-for-granted assumptions which, in fact, propagate and reinforce the dominant, powerful, and systematic Western logics of modernity. It also attempts to position the concept of ‘teacher’ at the crossroads of diverse cultures and contexts, which enables potential strategies to escape the trap of epistemic universalism as well as ideological dualism, while recognizing the essence of pluriverse in merely one concept. In other words, by decentering the universally accepted connotations and allowing unfamiliar perspectives to enter the context and perform their own diverse

uniquenesses, this study aims to embrace more diverse and inclusive connotations as well as contexts of a teacher and thus ontologically broaden this concept.

That is to say, the purpose of this study is to (a) break the dominance of the perception that the concept of a teacher is merely and habitually interpreted as a profession; (b) delink the connotations of a teacher from the Western, modernist, socialist/capitalist, and political coloniality by examining them through decolonial perspectives; and (c) challenge the hegemony of human-centrism and open possibilities for more-than-human worlds in conceptualizing the teacher notion. In this process, this study is guided by and based on the following assumptions:

- the integrity of a teacher as one individual, the integrity and interdependence of humans and non-human beings, and the integrity and interdependence of multiple worlds, rather than the separation of those;
- the coexistence as the essence of multiple worlds, worldviews, definitions, beings, and epistemologies, in order to question the implicit homogeneity, stereotypes, universality, and binary hierarchical logics;
- the engagements and relationality between human and other-than-human worlds;
- the interwoven and multidimensional contextualization of teacher's connotations.

Research Questions

The proposed dissertation study will address the following research questions:

How could the notion of 'teacher' be broadened, redefined, and re-imagined beyond the Western modernist frameworks to bring into focus - and into dialogue - multiple perspectives?

- a. How can we approach this goal ontologically? (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, posthumanism, etc.)
- b. How can we engage in this process epistemologically? (Memory work, re-animating senses, learning from objects and phenomena, sitting meditations, and silent self-cultivation)

Dissertation Overview and Potential Contributions

In writing this dissertation, my goal is to present how I attempted to broaden the concept of ‘teacher’ ontologically and epistemologically. Hence, chapter 2 is a historical literature review of the notion ‘teacher’ in China, focusing on the transformations of its connotations, cultural contexts, and related policies. It aims at preparing readers in understanding the history and backgrounds of the concept of ‘teacher’ and how the narrow modern connotation of it - a profession - gradually became prominent in China before we step into the adventures of reimagining ‘teacher.’

Questioning the narrow connotations and reasoning behind them, I adopted broader and diverse perspectives and methodologies to frame and conduct this study. Chapter 3 offers a comparative elaboration on multiple lenses and constructs as my theoretical framework(s), which targets the problematic situation of the narrowing-down ‘teacher’ concept mentioned in the literature and serves my ontological goal of this study. I brought indigenous frames in Chinese culture and posthumanism into the theoretical spectrum as decolonial and spiritual choices in multiple trajectories (Mignolo, 2011). Chapter 4 first examines methodologies in studies about the ‘teacher’ notion in Eastern and Western contexts as well as in comparative education and posthumanism. Then,

applied to my diverse theoretical lenses, it outlines my innovative methodological approaches and specific methods in exploring the notion ‘teacher.’ In adopting (collective) memory activities, re-animating senses, and speculative fabulating experiences, the research was designed as a multidimensional ethnography. Here, I also explained how my multi-scenario, multi-sense, and multispecies ethnography was conducted and generated across three months of the summer in China in detail.

Re-presenting the diversity of the notion of a ‘teacher’ emerging in data, Chapter 5 provides an in-depth tour of the multiple ways of conceptualizing ‘teacher’ and various dimensions of teaching and learning in different worlds. It travels across beings, species, times, and spaces through our memories between my family members, silence in modern classrooms, in-service teachers’ narratives of their daily work life, imaginary conversations connected by natural recordings, and an abundant story collection about “what-if teachers.” In this colorful space, participants of humans, beings beyond humans, and non-beings responded to my appeal of broadening and re-thinking the concept of ‘teacher’ and walked me through the dazzling worlds of “teachers.” The concluding chapter recapitulates the key points of this research, explains the limitations and implications, and leaves a post-positionality for my own as a retrospection. I closed this chapter as well as the whole dissertation with a created fable to remind of future possibilities of conceptualizing the ‘teacher’ notion.

Therefore, this dissertation study contributes to the existing and future studies of the teaching profession in the following three aspects. First, it attempts to conceptually jump out of the box, blurring the boundaries of taken-for-granted, fixed, and widely accepted connotations of the concept of a ‘teacher.’ Rather than studying this concept

with the goal of perfecting the professional system, it innovatively argues that the concept of a teacher needs to be re-examined, re-defined, and broadened ontologically because merely defining it as a social profession in modern schooling excludes diverse alternative cultures, contexts, and experiences related to the notions of a teacher and the multiple dimensions of its conceptualization.

Second, this dissertation makes a theoretical contribution by gathering multiple perspectives together and organically synthesizing them to innovatively explore the concept of a teacher through diverse lenses. Instead of following one single theory or one school of thought, applying different theoretical frames enables this research not only to investigate and present the research questions from different angles and levels but also to explore the complicated assemblage of multiple voices and future possibilities in rethinking this concept. More importantly, instead of applying dominant and popular (western) epistemologies, this study chooses to include Chinese indigenous philosophies and posthumanism as decolonial elements in the framework. This seemingly mismatched combination in frames avoids the trap of colonization and creates innovative and promising theoretical sparkles.

Last, this study introduces innovative methods and methodologies in data collection and analysis. Some of the methods, such as “teaching without words/actions,” “self-cultivation,” “Ge wu zhi zhi,” “sitting and Wu,” and reanimating senses have not been applied as techniques for collecting data in (western) academia before, either because they may not have been regarded as “scientific” enough previously or because some ways of perceiving and experiencing the world have not been widely recognized and universally acknowledged. Although most of these research methods are still fairly

uncommon, this research bravely and innovatively takes the initiative to propose and practice them, aiming to bring marginalized and entangled elements in human and more-than-human worlds into our consideration of the concept of a teacher.

My Narratives and Reflections: Positionality

I come from a family of three middle school teachers—my grandparents and my mother. This family background enables me to have a deeper observation and understanding of the concept of a teacher as a profession. For example, all three of my family members have some common experiences, such as having regular hours of rest and work, being serious in speech and manners, having infinite faith in their own “truths,” and being strict with their students and children. My mother, as a parent and a teacher at the same time, took care of me strictly, carefully, and extensively for about twenty years. In other words, my family members have brought me up as teachers. As a child growing up in an urban environment in a family with a stable household income, access to good education, and strict ideas about the importance of education, I performed well in countless exams and obtained the chance to higher education. In general, I exist in a position of privilege in both modern schooling and family education in China partially because my close family members chose teaching as a profession.

However, except for the privileged position that my teacher family has provided, deeper experiences with professional teachers have also encouraged me to critically rethink the concept of a teacher. From the very beginning as a teenager, I started to instinctively resist the rigorous and careful control of my mother, which was embodied by questioning the only “truths” they told me in life, problematizing the thoughts of

finding the only right answer for every question in my education experience, and also rethinking my “past-obedient-and-introverted self.” Following graduate education and life experiences in diverse contexts (i.e., studying in different countries and areas, immersing myself in less modern and less-educated areas, and ways of learning other than schooling), which were obtained because of my privileged position, I started to realize that there are multiple epistemological and ontological choices available to us. More importantly, engaging with multiple alternatives has empowered me to gradually separate myself away from the ideology and epistemology which firmly believes that there are “absolute” universal truths and answers to every problem in this world, and then to problematize the taken-for-granted role or identity that conveys and reinforces such epistemologies – i.e., the teacher profession. I dove into the derived institutions and mechanisms of cultivating professional teachers throughout history and in modern schools in China, thus becoming aware of the narrowing definition of the teacher notion in specific historical times and contexts and its current definition of a human social profession of schooling.

Besides, I also acknowledge my own privileged position as a human being, which is the most dominant species in most aspects of life, which relegates other species in the more-than-human worlds to a subordinate position, resources for human development, or as the “researched objects” in studies. What I design to study will be regarded as “real” research in academia because I am a well-educated human being who can act, talk, learn, and do research in common sense. Yet meanwhile, I should never forget that being able to live and “do” is entirely based on the existence of other beings and non-beings in the world—every breath I take, all the food I eat, all the data I collect and analyze, and all the

information I get. I have more abundant time, space, and resources as a human being to learn how to live better without worrying about my survival (because of other species), while other beings and non-beings are unable to have their own voice. I am interdependently alive in the entanglements with other humans and more-than-human worlds. And human beings, as the least knowledgeable about how to live and survive on Earth, have become the dominant group of teachers in most aspects of life.

The critical reflection and criticisms may come across as ungrateful complaints because my power and opportunity of criticizing the narrow, human-centered concept of a ‘teacher’ in my research are exactly the advantaged base offered by the dominant position of human beings and dominant connotations of teachers. I want to clarify here that this criticism – and my research more broadly – do not target specific individuals or particular notions of teacher professionalism. Rather, I aim to open the space for more inclusive discussions about expanding the meanings of the teacher concept at a macro level. That means I am eager to explore what has contributed to the dominant connotations of the teacher concept and how. I am also more curious about how to break this dominant perception in terms of introducing alternative voices, perspectives, and even species while preventing the injection of more power forces including myself into strengthening the inscribed hegemony. Although I am a well-educated human being who may also choose teaching as my profession and have the power of educating others in the future, I would still take advantage of this power to enable other kinds of “teachers” to have their own role in education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: TRACING HISTORIES OF ‘TEACHER’ IN CHINA

This chapter presents a review of how the concept of a teacher has evolved in Chinese history. It is designed to offer a historical and cultural context and to enable the researcher and readers to have a deeper intensive understanding of the changes in meanings of what it means to be a teacher. It also aims to offer a general landscape of the concept’s current status and for readers to have a better understanding of my motivations for this research. Because of these intended goals, I will focus on some historical and cultural elements of the concept of a teacher in both ancient and modern China, its crucial transformations of connotations, and some current dominant accounts of this concept. To be more specific, I will elaborate on the following elements: (a) What were the definitions of teachers, and when and how did the meanings change over time; (b) How were the changes in concept related to different social or cultural contexts; and (c) How were teachers selected and/or recognized in these respective connotations/context?

From Primitive Society to Wartime: The Cultural Image of Teacher

This section will start with the ancient origin of teaching and teacher-related activities and the cultural dimension of the term ‘teacher’ in ancient Chinese history. As one of the most crucial cultural marks, the expectation was that individuals in teacher-like roles would enlighten others with their own noble virtues and personalities. Afterward, the Tao of being as a “Shi” (士, “scholars” or “intellectuals” in English) was also integrated into the cultural elements of the term ‘teacher’ as the examples from Confucius and Xuncius philosophies will illustrate.

The concept of a teacher or teaching activity was closely bound up with the survival of tribal society in ancient times. In particular, the dissemination of labor skills and the teaching of life experience was the responsibility of experienced clan elders and leaders who were concerned with the survival of human beings and the inheritance of culture. Those elders were regarded as individuals who were able to teach others in the clan to farm, recognize lands, and seed time. Huainanzi (Chen, 2016) notes that Yao, one leader of ancient Chinese clans, guided his people fishing in the water, cutting wood in the mountains, grazing in the valley, and farming in the land so that people took him as their teacher of agriculture. *Shi Zi* (1891) also records that in the times of Fuxi, there were plenty of animals in the world, so the people were taught by the leader to hunt. The above examples indicate that educational activities and those “part-time teachers” are basically generated in the process of productive labor and survival (Zhang, 2015). At this time, because males and females undertook different responsibilities in the natural division of labor, the distinctions of gender status and ratio in the role of educator were not obvious (Wang & Wang, 2020).

Entering the slavery society in ancient China, from Xia Dynasty (2070 B.C.) to Qin Dynasty (221 B.C.), teachers assumed more of a cultural identity in the society. Although this cultural function was always inscribed in the concept of a teacher throughout Chinese history since Xia Dynasty, it was saliently pure during the slavery society because a complete feudal system had not yet been established and teachers had not been classified as officials.

This cultural connotation of a teacher is reflected in two aspects. First, teachers were expected to be capable of moralizing the public with virtue and propriety (Ding,

1990). During those dynasties, rulers paid special attention to virtue and courtesy in terms of appreciating talents and believing that only virtue and courtesy could moralize the ordinary people to submit to the leader. In this context, individuals who held relatively broader and more profound knowledge with high prestige could be respected as “teachers.” For instance, social education on virtue and courtesy concerns understanding human decency and fulfilling the filial duty. The learning content of “Xia, Shang, and Zhou was the same, which was all about understanding human decency” (Zhang & Chen, 1991, p. 12). The Chinese character, jiao (教, “teach” in English) in the inscription on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C. to 1046 B.C.) also has the character representing “filial piety” on the left side. By the time of King Cheng and Kang of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1043 B.C. to 996 B.C.), the education of “Six Arts” appeared with its basic principles of “intimacy” and “respect” to parents and the king (Zhang & Chen, 1991, p. 18). In other words, the identity of a teacher had not been explicitly distinguished socially in those times, while one central role of deeply appreciated and respected individuals was helping the rulers to moralize and civilize people with noble virtues and manners.

This role in moralizing others also disclosed an implicit requirement for the appreciated individuals—strict inspections of the selected individuals’ own morality. In order to strengthen individuals’ moral practices, regular behavior assessments were conducted. Sun (1996) gives an example of selecting officials in the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C. to 771 B.C.), describing that the central government required that “if people had moral principles and virtues, make them educate the others” (p. 21). In this context, the teaching role in the villages was usually held by retired officials or

knowledgeable elders with moral integrity. Besides, there was a strict school inspection system in Western Zhou Dynasty. Yao (2009a) also mentions that the king of Zhou visited the places of educating people four times a year, and during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (770 B.C. to 221 B.C.), rulers put great emphasis on the virtue and etiquette of the selected individuals in teacher positions and their exemplary roles in front of the public.

The second aspect of a cultural connotation of a 'teacher' in the slavery society was the doctrines of pre-Qin philosophers positing as "Shi" (士, "scholars" or "intellectuals" in English). "Shi" refers to a scholar, a general and collective designation of Chinese ancient literati intellectuals. Different from today's scholars, other than learning knowledge, spreading culture, and respecting the king politically, "Shi" followed the doctrine or the "Tao" (道) in life philosophy. That is, they had their own system of theory about how they should behave and deal with a myriad of things and had formulated their aspirations for and expectations of specific social identities. The reason for including "Shi" in the concept of a teacher is not only because of several representatives of their philosophies being considered the earliest teachers in Chinese history (Nie & Zheng, 2007). It is also due to their conceived expectations that teachers and doctrines of being "Shi" are pursued as the cultural mission of literati by generations of Chinese intellectuals and evolved into a concrete cultural segment of the connotations of a 'teacher'. Here, two philosophers and their teacher-related expectations will be briefly introduced.

One of the representative philosophers, Confucius (551 B.C. to 479 B.C.), proposed a Confucian exemplary individual, a.k.a., Junzi (君子), as his doctrine of being

a teacher. Junzi engages in strenuous self-cultivation through observation and practice of “Li” (禮, “ritual propriety” in English). Junzi symbolizes the ultimate moral conduct of filial piety, moderation, diligence, respect for education, and propriety” (Wu, 2012a). For instance, Confucius said in the Analects (Confucius, 2016, Chapter 23):

Exemplary persons seek harmony, not sameness; Petty persons, then, are the opposite.

Exemplary persons associating openly with others are not partisan; Petty persons being partisan do not associate openly with others.

Exemplary persons are self-possessed but not contentious; They gather with others but do not form cliques.

Based on this concept of Junzi, he argued that individuals who are teachers should perform elegant modesty externally, benevolence and integrity internally, and forge ahead and connect with people intimately regardless of being poor or wealthy (Confucius, 2016). Specifically, he believed that a teacher should be modest and elegant, and follow the appropriate etiquette rules. He described, “A person who has simplicity more than literary, would be rude; If he has literary talent more than his simple nature, he would also be vain. The combination of literary talent and simplicity would be named Junzi” (Chen & Xu, 2011, p. 68). Besides, he cared about students with love, considered his students as his own children, and believed that teachers’ prestige status and students’ respect for teachers were endowed by students. Other than knowledge, one significant connection between students and teachers was affection which, he argued, was built upon benevolence (Confucius, 2016). He emphasized integrity for both teachers and students.

His doctrines required teachers to set themselves as examples to their students in all aspects because “if they behave themselves properly, people will carry out orders even if they do not command; if they do not behave themselves, people will not obey them even if they command” (Confucius, 2016, p. 23). He also asked the students to be honest and insist on justice in the learning process even in the presence of the teacher, instead of being accommodated or concessional (Confucius, 2016). Lastly, Confucius believed that a teacher should not only be insatiable in learning, constantly refreshing knowledge, and continuously self-cultivating, but also be tireless in teaching patiently and skillfully (Confucius, 2016). In his opinion, the spirit of ceaseless life and unceasing endeavor should become the typical virtue of teachers.

Another philosopher Xunzi (313 B.C. to 238 B.C.) offered a slightly different argument about the role of the teacher and its figuration from what Confucius depicted about Junzi. He described the teacher as having an ice-cold impression and supreme status in front of students and the public as unviolated rules instead of benevolent scholars. He equated teachers with heaven, land, ancestors, and lords, believing that those constituted the basis of life and governance. Xunzi included teachers in the basis of life and governance for its fundamental roles of correcting and realizing “Li” (礼, “etiquette” or “ritual propriety” in English) to uphold peoples’ thoughts as well as behavior and maintain social stability. He stated, “Rites are used to correct the behavior and thoughts; Teachers are used to correcting the rites” (Fang & Li, 2011, p. 303). He continued assuming that if there were no teachers, there would be social chaos without moral rules and standards. Other than the necessities for society, for the individual, “if a clever person has a teacher educating him and studies hard, he will soon rise to fame;

Otherwise, he might become a thief” (Xunzi, 2015, p. 26). On the premise of the theory about the original evil of human nature (Xunzi, 2015), he asserted that education aimed to transform students from being evil to being kind with the help of teachers. Hence, in the relationship between teachers and students, he emphasized that students should obey teachers unconditionally because teachers represented the doctrines and rules people should follow. He alleged, “It is treason to not respect your teacher when making arguments and teaching students, and a wise ruler will not use betrayals who do not respect their teachers” (Fang & Li, 2011, p. 304).

Moreover, similarly to the concept of Junzi, Xunzi argued that teachers were required to have distinguished virtues, broaden their knowledge and be erudite, and were encouraged to actively participate in society. He contended that individuals would be regarded as teachers if they had rich life experiences and high prestige, narrated doctrines coherently but did not violate regulations, and guided others with good intentions (Fang & Li, 2011). Rather than being against officials and being involved king’s politics, he advocated “Shi” (士) constantly improving themselves and benefitting the ruling of the territory by participating and taking charge of the benevolent government (Xunzi, 2015).

To summarize the evolution above, the cultural figure and identity of a teacher gradually became clearer and more distinguishable from other roles in society during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (770 B.C. to 221 B.C.). It is manifested as a “Shi” (士, “intellectuals” in English) – elegant and contented in poverty, devoted to things spiritual, and aspiring for integrity in his life’s goal. In general, the concept of a teacher in Confucianism refers to the concrete embodiment of propriety and the model of virtue. This image, which was formed on the basis of pre-Qin Confucianism

and shaped in the cultural discourses of successive ancient dynasties, is not only static and explicit, but also dynamic, endogenous, and self-cultivated. The role of a teacher in ancient China, in this sense, means to pay equal attention to inspiring others and self-cultivation with individual noble moralities. Teachers turn out to represent a group of individuals who were educated and knowledgeable exemplars of moral integrity and inheritors and disseminators of Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. This cultural connotation enables teacher identity to have lofty dignity and high sociocultural reputation as well as status, showing great personality charm and model effect.

In addition, it was also during this time period when the connotations of a teacher started to intertwine with other multiple social layers based on their cultural dimensions in a more complicated way. Before this chaotic wartime, limited knowledge and education were firmly in the grasp of kings, aristocrats, and the ruling groups. However, because of the continuous wars and disintegrations between seigneurs and feudal lords, the originally stable Patriarchal Clan System (Zhang & Nie, 2003) and the system of rites and music (Han, 2001) were strongly struck, and previous cultural officials were constrained to turn as floating literati who wandered from state to state to lobby kings and offer advice to make a living. In this way, knowledge and scholars began to flow geographically among states and private schools developed in folk groups, which further stimulated the rise of a hundred schools of thought (Zhao & Wei, 2006) and the increase of literati as private school teachers. Since private school teachers were not required to hold official positions, teaching in private schools gradually took shape as one means of making a living, and “teachers” came into the profession’s history (Zhang & Zhang, 2000).

From Qin to Qing Dynasty: Being Selected as Officials

This period is characterized by a social transition in the meaning of a teacher from a cultural emphasis to a political one, i.e., assuming the roles of officials in ancient governments with multidimensional social identities and functions. In this section, I will elaborate on two intellectual selection systems in ancient China, highlighting their implicit nexus between being a teacher or “Shi” (士) and becoming officials in imperial courts of dynasties. This transition or overlap of connotations of what it means to be a teacher implies more complex practical and social flavors being blended into the teacher identity compared to its previous cultural element, while also representing a specific group of individuals who were perceived to be knowledgeable, respected, bureaucratic, and working for the ruling circles.

When centralized feudalism was established in ancient China from Qin (221 B.C. to 207 B.C.) and Han Dynasty (202 B.C. to 220), teachers were recognized and selected as national officials and responsible for social education for the ruling class and emperors. In Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu (179 B.C. to 104 B.C.) proposed the idea for the emperor to “set up the imperial college and positions for teachers with profound knowledge to educate and train all the ‘Shi’ (士) in Han” (Zhang & Zhang, 2000, p. 62). Another courtier Gongsun Hong (200 B.C. to 121 B.C.) carried Dong’s proposition out and furthered “asking to prosper this project on account of the original officials” (Zhang & Zhang, 2000, p. 62). Eventually, Emperor Wu (156 B.C. to 87 B.C.) took the initiative to set up the authoritative court academician of Confucian classics in 136 B.C. to teach disciples the Five Classics (Li & Guo, 2006). It marked the emergence of independent

teacher officials in the state bureaucracy, and teaching began to become a regular and formal national position in ancient China (Zhang & Zhang, 2000). More than merely a cultural symbol, the concept of a teacher started to play a significant social as well as political function in composing the imperial court, solidifying the feudal ruling and local stability, and dominating cultures and thoughts (Wang, 2006b).

Neither similar to the concepts of teachers nor to officials in present days, teachers at official schools in ancient China were considered in multiple folds, and teaching was only one of their many functions (Yao, 2009a). On the one hand, they were officials in the imperial court and responsible for discussing politics, enacting rituals and ceremonies, collecting books and classics, testing and selecting officials for the court, and serving as envoys for specific missions required by emperors. On the other hand, they were regarded as noble individuals as “Shi” (士) who had the responsibility to guide the people with moral etiquette and to amplify their educational impacts of dignified personalities through teaching activities with their students (Sun, 1996). In other words, as the feudal system matured, although the title of a teacher was explicitly classified as an official, the boundaries between serving as teachers, officials, courtiers, and literati intellectuals or “Shi” with noble virtues had been blurred on the individual level. That is, as Jin (1982) argued, the social and family functions, characteristics, conducts, moralities, and the title were viewed as a whole and interwoven in each person - a teacher.

Hence, the selection and appointment of “Shi” (士) who were potential central or local teachers and officials became particularly crucial in ancient China because this selection determined who and what kind of individualities would be valued by the society. One system of selecting officials in the Han dynasty was based on

recommendations and interviews (Chen, 1992), which involved recommending individuals noted for their filial piety, moral records, and broad knowledge. However, the requirements for the recommendation process were extremely strict, and the standards for qualifying as the recommenders and the recommendation formats were also rigorous (Wang, 1991). Other than recommending talented individuals, emperors also selected authoritative court academicians by direct conscription, transfer from other official positions, and appointments after testing and interviews (Sun, 1996). Specifically, Emperor Wu (156 B.C. to 87 B.C.) required that the teachers in court academician roles should be capable of combining self-cultivation, erudite qualities, and versatility, as well as being able to stay informed and write systematically (Huang, 2005). Yao (2009b) also cited that Emperor Cheng (51 B.C. to 7 B.C.) declared to select “knowledgeable Confucianists on history, and they should be able to gain new insights from reviewing previous histories” (p. 8). Besides, most of the requirements for selecting teachers as central officials put great emphasis on examining moralities and the talents of administering national affairs (Huang, 1993).

Another selection system implemented throughout history is the imperial examination system (Keju, 科举), which started from Sui (581-618) and Tang Dynasty (618-907) and was abolished in 1905. Different from the system based on interviews and recommendations, and departing from previous selection systems, the national imperial examination system focused more on talent, knowledge, and ability than on virtue and etiquette discussed above. That means, without recommendations, intellectuals could register for the exam by themselves and take the regularly held exam. The subjects of multiple rounds of examination contained Confucian classics, literary talent, writing

poetry and prose, discussing national realistic problems facing society, observing and thinking through social problems, and putting forward solutions in paper (Wu, 1982).

In this sense, schools were the site of preparation for the imperial examination, and the examination played a direct role in central government regulating and guiding school education. Therefore, according to Wang and Guo (2009), teachers gradually shifted their guiding ideologies of being a teacher from a cultural perspective to a more practical dimension. That is, teachers transformed from being moral exemplars and knowledgeable intellectuals with noble virtues in front of people to persons “passing the basic knowledge as well as skills for making a living as officials, and answering students’ questions” (Wang, 1985, p. 3). Teachers devoted themselves to imparting knowledge and assisting students in preparing for exams and becoming officials. This transformation of the selection process and appointment criteria also implied that the governing class turned their emphasis more on the practical function of the imperial examination, education, and the roles of teachers and officials in terms of offering suggestions and advice to courts and national affairs (Che, 2007), rather than merely setting moral exemplars of noble virtues. It also enabled the imperial court to develop a controllable nucleus of elite bureaucrats constituted of officials, intellectuals, and teachers.

However, it is worth mentioning that during the whole period of feudal dynasties in ancient China, the social status of males and females remained systematically unequal. Males have become the owners of production tools, wealth, and knowledge while females’ rights have been extremely suppressed and they gradually became subordinated in the traditional Chinese family (Wang & Wang, 2020). Due to the oppression of male-dominated culture, women were deprived of the right to be educated and the paths of

obtaining social jobs as well as being accepted by public society were blocked. This means, there was almost zero possibility for females to become “Shi” (士), officials, and their attempts of becoming educators were thus interrupted. Therefore, for most of the time in ancient China, and when teachers’ responsibilities became to be defined in terms of social roles and cultural symbols, females were excluded from the category of teachers.

Late Qing Dynasty to The Republic of China (1912-1949)

After the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Western capitalism, the circulation of (Western) commodities and ideologies reached each corner of the world, infiltrating into semi-closed China culturally and ideologically to pursue their own interests and motivations. The defeat of China in the Opium War in 1840 changed the Chinese cultural imagination of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912) and the mature feudal regimes from “the advanced and civilized” to “the laggard” (Fang & Zhang, 2004). This section will explore four historical periods (i.e., The Opium War Period, the Westernization for Self-strengthening Movement Period, The Period of Constitutional Reform, and The Republic of China Period) and the changing conceptions of ‘teacher’ and selection standards in respective historical backgrounds. It aims at catching a glimpse of teacher’s connotations and their relation to cultural contexts in the last days of feudal dynasties in ancient China and in the newborn modern society.

The Opium War Period

In this period, two aspects related to the concept of teachers must be considered. First, domestic intellectuals in the historical context of Western invasions spontaneously

reflected on the image of teachers – from teaching content to pedagogy – and portrayed their expectations of the teachers. Furthermore, the macro background of Western learning spreading to the East urged the emergence of Western missionaries and church schools, while also stimulating the transformation of the concept of teachers in their role compositions and skills.

Given the state of flux in the Late Qing Dynasty, Chinese indigenous intellectuals started to criticize – teachers and education more generally in two aspects – the teaching content and pedagogy. As discussed in the above section, assisting students in passing examinations and becoming officials was the primary responsibility of teachers under the system of imperial examination. With the rigidification and constriction of the exam content and structure, teaching content was constrained in terms of becoming pedantic and unrealistically vague as well. Therefore, in teaching content, intellectuals appealed to teachers to abandon abstract and useless doctrines and instead cultivate practical scholars who digested sutras and applied them. For example, Gong Zizhen (1792-1841) believed that with times changing, Confucianism was no longer the only venerated academic doctrine, so it should not be regarded as the dominant content of education and teaching. Instead, teachers and intellectuals needed to free themselves from cumbersome piles of outdated papers, text research, and the fetters of moral reasonings, and turned to humanistic pragmatism, i.e., studies of practical problems and stressing the demands of real life and production (Gong, 1959, p. 5). Moreover, the traditional monotonous teaching methods (e.g., spoon-feeding and rote memorization pedagogies) for reciting Confucian classics and passing the exam and monodirectional communication between

teachers and students (e.g., preachy style of knowledge conveying) were challenged as well (Liu, 2000).

Those patriotic intellectuals also proposed their ideal expectations of teachers. Based on both the traditional teachers' roles and Western pedagogies, Wei Yuan (1794-1857) tentatively expected (Qu & Tong, 1997; Wei, 1976) that to remedy the "reality" of China falling behind in the competition with the Western powers, teachers were supposed to be equipped with different talents, scientific and practical knowledge for crafting weapons, the capability of individualizing pedagogies for students (Mao & Shen, 1985) and learning from foreigners (Wang & Zhou, 1986), and diligently practices those thoughts in teaching. The descriptions of ideal teachers by indigenous intellectuals in the late Qing Dynasty attempted to fuse the novel Western knowledge and ideologies focusing on technologies, science, individualism, and pragmatism, and also the requirements of the Confucian talents highlighting self-cultivation, leading by example, modestly learning from others, and the integral and connected view of individuals.

In addition to reflections from domestic intellectuals, the gradual but fundamental transformation of social contexts also prompted changes in the definitions of teachers. The spread of Western learning to the East and the active work of missionaries played an essential role in this period. The eastward transmission of Western sciences (Xi xue dong jian, 西学东渐), a process of cultural and educational exchanges between the East and the West, started as early as the Ming Dynasty. During the Ming Wanli period (1573-1620), Italian Jesuit priests Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), Jules Aleni (1582-1649), and other missionaries came to China with religion propagation and Western science. Later, by means of the unequal treaties signed during the war, Western countries obtained plenty of

privileges for missionary work with few constraints in China. Since then, Western missionaries poured into China with colonial aggression in various social activities (Mao & Shen, 1985), such as establishing modern schools and hospitals; translating and publishing newspapers, magazines, and books in other languages; introducing Gregorian calendars and scientific knowledge on water conservancy and astronomy; and importing Western social sciences, philosophies, and pedagogies. Meanwhile, some Chinese and Western missionaries in two institutions, the School of Combined Learning and the Translation Hall of Shanghai Jiangnan Manufacturing Bureau, collectively translated and published Western books, which also accelerated the process of spreading Western learning to China (Ministry of Education, 1934).

Among the most radical challenges to the monopolistic status of feudal education was the establishment of modern schools and the offering of additional disciplines and curricula. By the end of the 19th century, the established church schools in China had evolved into a roughly similar pattern as the modern educational system (Gu, 1994), i.e., settling preschool education in kindergartens, primary school education, middle-high school education, and vocational schools, and higher education in the universities. That means a set of relatively complete modern Western education systems had been transplanted to China, from early childhood education to higher education, performing a rival show with “old style education” inherited from ancient China. Additionally, educational content in church schools combined religious content (i.e., the Bible) and Confucian classics, added foreign language teaching (typically English), and included knowledge of natural sciences and humanities such as mathematics, physics, philosophy, Western histories, and geography (An & Du, 2009).

Teachers in society witnessed a series of radical changes, and therefore, the way of defining and contextualizing teachers shifted too. First, after the Confucian scholars and “Shi” (士) were viewed as desired exemplars for more than a thousand years, missionaries, industrialists, practitioners, and reformers from various perspectives became honorable individuals in the half-traditional-and-half-modern society as well. Furthermore, experts excelling in scientific knowledge, foreign languages, art, agriculture, and other subjects became increasingly necessary in schools and offices (Zhou, 1995). That is not to claim that individuals with those identities were teachers, but in defining the boundaries of talents, role models, and valuable knowledge as well as doctrines, the category had expanded from a single concept of teacher and intellectuals to multiple disciplines and dimensions. Besides, establishing the modern Western education system enabled individuals to work as teachers at various levels and grades and to teach different kinds of subjects. It diversified the teacher groups and gradually shook previous inherent cultural impressions of teachers as Confucian official-related intellectuals. The concept of a teacher began to transform from a cultural symbol to a skills-targeted notion.

This also led to shifts in teaching content and teaching methods used in schooling (Bai, 1989). For instance, Xu Guangqi (1562-1633) constructed his own curriculum system by reforming the teaching content based on his connections with missionaries (Bai, 1989). This course was conducted in mathematics, covering astronomy, meteorology, hydrology, music, military engineering, accounting, architecture, mechanical mechanics, geodesy, medicine, and horology. It guided several practical sciences with mathematics to explore the physical reasoning of nature. Furthermore,

teachers applied new teaching methods and pedagogies, such as scientific experiments, intuitional instructions, and object teaching, and developed interning and practical skills (Wu, 2012b).

Westernization for Self-strengthening Movement Period

In this historical period, the “Westernization faction” (Yang wu pai, 洋务派) strongly advocated for the imperial court to conduct the Westernization movement to seek wealth, as well to enhance the self-strength, resist foreign invasions, and maintain Qing Dynasty’s rule (Feng, 2004). In the process of carrying out the Westernization movement, the Westernization faction endeavored to persuade the rulers of the Qing Dynasty to admit the necessity of launching foreign language and science education and introduced radical reforms in military, industrial, and mining enterprises, transportation, culture, and education. Those reforms thus produced the sprout of modern education and the corresponding trend of educational Westernization in China. Therefore, the concept of a teacher in this movement will be elaborated in the following structure. First, the general educational policies and principles of the Qing government will be discussed as the historical background of teacher-related policies and the meanings of the teacher profession. Then, the methods of introducing Westernized teachers, standards of teacher employment, and the responsibilities of teachers (or trainers) will follow to further enrich the concept of a teacher in the era of the Westernization movement.

Along with the Westernizing trend, cultural and educational policies were formulated by the ruling class and reformers differently from previous ones. According to Dong (1990), educational policies were promulgated under the guidance of two

principles, innovatively applying Classics and “Chinese classics as the fundamental structure, Western learning for practical application” (Zhong ti xi yong, 中体西用, Ding, 1994, p. 107). Applying Classics innovatively encouraged intellectuals to face realities and unify theory and practice. That is, classic books and theories could be applied to social production, life, and the practice of moral and ethical relations (Zhang, 2004). The goal of introducing “Chinese classics as the fundamental structure, Western learning for practical application” meant to learn or imitate Western material civilization on the premise of maintaining Chinese ancient civilization and culture. Feng Guifen (1809-1874) first proposed this principle in his book (Feng, 1861), suggesting that managing states with Chinese ethics, frames, and doctrines as the original should be supplemented by the skills of growing prosperity. Li Hongzhang (Li, 1908) also advocated for imitating the West under the guidance of changing instruments but keeping the system: “Take advantage of the other's strengths to benefit our weaknesses” (Li, 1908, p. 3). In his opinion, measurement, physical science, and methods of making utensils, weapons, steamers, and firearms were Western strengths that could be taken advantage of to improve China. In fact, the Westernization faction’s movement was absorbing teaching content and methods of modern Western science, technology, and arts into traditional Confucian classics and mechanisms. In essence, they kept open and supportive of Western ideas and skills while firmly insisting on the indigenous doctrines and classical systems in education and ruling the nation.

Among the many reforms of the Westernization movement was the introduction of teachers who were regarded as Westernized instructors, which became a crucial but troublesome issue for the Westernization faction. To solve the problem of gathering

appropriate teacher resources for Western-style schools, the Westernization faction entrusted foreigners in China to recommend individuals who were equipped with relevant knowledge and whom they were familiar with, to serve as teachers and instructors in new schools, which resulted in a number of Western talents being introduced into China. Other than recommended acquaintances, teacher groups also consisted of foreigners recommended by the legations and consulates of foreign institutions as well as foreign enterprises in China (Zhu, 1983c). To solidify the control over the Qing government and to gain the maximum interest in China, those institutions and enterprises actively introduced foreign teachers to the Westernization officials of the Qing government. Later, as the Qing government gradually established embassies in foreign countries, teacher selection changed from passively accepting the recommendation of others to Chinese ambassadors selecting relevant talents abroad on their own initiative. The advantage of having Chinese ambassadors to select teachers was that they were well aware of both the kinds of teachers who were urgently needed and eligible and the strengths as well as talents of the country where ambassadors served (Xia, 1982).

With the increase of foreign teachers in China, the specific standards of employment were adjusted. There were strict quality standards for the recruitment of foreign as well as Chinese teachers in modern schools, which manifested expectations and requirements for new talents and teachers. The Westernization faction emphasized that what China urgently needed at this time was foreign talents with competent and well-trained skills and knowledge who were able to promote the process of modernization (Chen, 1981). Thus, the Westernization faction claimed to have careful investigation and selection of foreign personnel and teacher candidates' overall performances. The Qing

government also paid much attention to managing foreign teachers by signing contracts in case foreigners manipulated the sovereignty of schools and education. For instance, General Tso's consistent principle (Zuo, 1897) of hiring foreigners was employing foreigners but not being taken advantage of by foreigners. That is, learn the strengths of the West by hiring foreigners to teach, but the initiatives must be held by Chinese people.

In the context of introducing Western skills, the composition of teacher groups and the roles of teachers became more diverse. Teachers in modern schools during the late Qing Dynasty were named "Jiao Xi" (教习, "trainer" in English translation). Because of their different responsibilities and authorities, they were divided into the "Zong Jiao Xi" (总教习, "Head of Trainer" in English translation) and general teaching trainer. The head trainer took charge of managing other teachers, school teaching and learning activities, and undertook teaching tasks by himself. With today's professional position in modern schools, the head of trainers was equivalent to the dean or director of departments or colleges (Xi & Shen, 1982). Although the head of trainers was responsible for managing all the affairs related to teaching and learning in school, he did not hold the authority of decision-making but merely suggested and implemented the decisions; The Qing government possessed the power of making decisions.

The major duty of general trainers, on the other hand, was teaching students. This duty was embodied in four aspects (Wu & Tian, 2012). First, trainers undertook professional teaching work in modern educational institutions. The main content of their professional duty included teaching foreign languages and modern culture courses, which were mainly fulfilled by foreign teachers. Second, trainers needed to be responsible for the education of students and answer students' questions. Besides, trainers of new school

types in this period contributed to compiling teaching materials and textbooks. For the new schools, the main content of teaching was science, technologies, and Western cultural knowledge, which were brand new knowledge areas, and did not include teaching materials at that time. While compiling textbooks, teachers of respective subjects were responsible for “translating original Western books and combining the reality of Chinese students with the introduced knowledge” (Wu & Tian, 2012, p. 86). Last, trainers also guided students in experiments and practice in order to stimulate students’ interest in science and technology with the hands-on study.

The Period of Constitutional Reform and Modernization

The Westernization and modernization in China proceeded into a process of institutional and voluntary reform due to the increasingly serious exterior invasions and continuous loss in wars. Hence, this section will start with the historical background of how systematic reform was carried out in the educational field in terms of urging to abolish the imperial examination system and establish the modern schooling system. Afterward, I will discuss a series of specific criteria for work time, responsibilities, and Japanese teachers’ employment as qualifying teachers in both fundamental education and higher education, which implies the trend of modernization and Westernization happening in teacher groups as well as teacher education.

At the end of the 19th century, international capitalism evolved into imperialism, and China was confronted with the danger of being carved up and colonized (Ma, 1991). Russia and Japan became powerful after their modernization efforts. In particular, Japan, China’s neighboring country, embarked on the road of modernization through the Meiji

Restoration, rose rapidly, and actively expanded abroad. China's disastrous defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894) and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki convinced Chinese reformers of the inevitability for reform. Hence, at the point of national crisis, some officials and intellectuals with capitalist thoughts set off a socio-political reform that gradually formed a complete system of thought on fundamental issues. The reformists represented by Kang Youwei (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) argued that the nation needed to be saved through education. Especially in the movement of Scholars' Petition to the Throne (Gong che shang shu, 公车上书, Chen, 1981), Kang Youwei bravely raised the systematic problem of changing the preserved ancestral conventions and put forward specific suggestions on reforming routines in three aspects, including enriching the country, nourishing the public, and educating people.

Kang Youwei (Chen, 1996) suggested abolishing the eight-legged essays (Ba gu wen, 八股文) and introducing innovations into the imperial examination through the Scholars' Petition to the Throne. The eight-legged essay, a.k.a., stereotype writing, was one style of imperial examination in the Ming and Qing dynasties. It was oriented to the topics from Confucian Classics and required candidates to use the tone of the ancients with a specific length of the sentence, rhythm, as well as a standardized number of words (Gong & Gao, 2005). In other words, the focus of the eight-legged essay lay in scholars' interpretations of the Confucian classics and the parallel genre of writing, thus there was little space for the author to freely elucidate his or her own thoughts. Kang Youwei expressed that the eight-legged essays were not only "useless for learning" in terms of preventing people from reading books after the Qin and Han dynasties, but also closing their eyes on exploring various countries in the world (Zhu, 1983c). As a result, the

officials and talents were not capable of coping with practical situations and the nation was defeated in the Sino-Japanese War (Wang, 1994). He believed that it was urgent to reform the imperial examinations by decreasing the number of selecting scholars through exams, abolishing the eight-legged essays to select talent, and training talent for practical use (Chen, 2000). The reformists further anticipated that when the role of modern schools in teaching sciences was popularized in the whole country, the imperial examination system would be gradually abolished (Mao & Shen, 1988).

Except for the examination, reformists advocated for setting up modern schools widely and establishing the Ministry of Education. Emperor Guangxu (1871-1908) approved the Regulations of the Imperial University of Peking (Jing shi da xue tang zhang cheng, 京师大学堂章程, Zhou, 2013) in 1898, and the Imperial University of Peking (Jing shi da xue tang, 京师大学堂, Wang, 1998) was founded. The university adopted the principle of equally emphasizing Chinese and Western courses and divided the courses into general and specialized ones. It was not only the highest institution of higher education in China at that time but also the highest educational administrative authority in China. The imperial edict (Chen, 2000) about vitalizing education brought increasing attention to establishing primary and compulsory education by imitating the education system of European and American capitalist countries. Secondary schools were officially included in the school system as well. Unlike the modern school system in the Opium War Period, this complete modern school system was officially set by the emperor's authorization rather than the missionaries and churches. In addition, a variety of schools for science and technology, agriculture, current affairs, commerce, as well as railways and mines were established to meet the needs of developing national industries

during the reform. Female schools also started to appear, and the Qing government issued a series of rules to encourage various social forces to run modern schools in different forms (Chen, 1981).

Teachers at this time were required to obey more explicit and rigorous regulations according to official documents (Qu, 2006; Zhu, 1983c). However, the lower or higher classes in the modern school system needed different teachers, which depended on teachers' levels of educational degrees or educational backgrounds. In other words, university teachers were required to be Chinese, graduates of excellent Confucian colleges or overseas universities, or foreign teachers who would be preferred when candidates were comparable; while the threshold for primary school teachers was only requiring graduation from "lower level of normal colleges" (Qu, 2006, p. 434). In short, the regulations in modern schools accentuated the professionalism of teachers as one career in the modern educational system.

Because of the lack of university teachers, the government "planned to send dozens of students to Europe, the United States, and Japan to study the method of education, and then asked them to return to China after graduation to teach in various schools and universities" (Qu, 2006, p. 243). It also clarified the responsibilities and obligations of both Chinese and foreign teachers in universities: teachers must prescribe class hours to teach and abide by the curriculum rules; there should be "no slack in time or in teaching contents"; at the end of the year, the minister of school management would carry out the assessment on teachers, and teachers would be dismissed if "there were any violations or unqualified behaviors" (Huo, 1989; Qu, 2006, p. 258). Missionary work was also not allowed in schools.

For teachers in primary and middle schools, the emperor's edict required teachers to divide students to teach. Teachers were supervised and managed by the prime minister of the school who was a graduate of teacher-training colleges. Both teachers and administrators must be "excellent in virtue and learning and not bending the rules for personal benefits" (Qu, 2006, p. 276). Teachers in primary schools should give priority to teaching patiently and adopt pedagogies of inspiration and induction. Teachers could not punish children physically, but they were allowed to "take advantage of children's sense of shame to discipline them" (Qu, 2006, p. 323). The regulations (Qu, 2006, p. 347) also made a clear distinction between school administrative staff and teachers. Administrators were in charge of "school administrative affairs," while teachers "concentrated on teaching." Both had to perform their respective duties, which were beneficial for improving the quality and efficiency of schooling.

With the development of the Constitutional Reform, educational reform did not aim at improving a specialized education system with a limited scale to cultivate elites, but at establishing a general popularized education for the whole population throughout the nation. Therefore, setting up normal education had become an inevitable trend of educational reform (Ma, 2003), and the neighboring country, Japan, became the most accessible and appropriate template for policy borrowing. To have unified rules to follow and manage normal education, the Qing government introduced the Japanese teacher education system by dispatching officials and students learning overseas to extensively study Japanese normal education and bring it back into China (Han, 2011). To borrow the Japanese normal education system as soon as possible, the Qing government, regardless of funds, sent officials to Japan multiple times and anticipated a customized Chinese

normal school system based on Japan's example (Wei, Zhang, & Wang, 1998). The Qing government also employed Japanese teachers to work in Chinese normal schools to train new teachers for China (Shu, 1979). Because of the shortage of teachers and training teachers, directly hiring Japanese teachers in primary and middle schools became the last resort for the government. From around 1902, the trend of employing Japanese teachers began to take shape in Chinese schools, and "almost all schools in all provinces of China employed Japanese teachers and trainers" (Shu, 1979, p. 345).

From the late Qing Dynasty to the early 20th century, with the gradual establishment and development of standardized modern schools, as well as the spread of Western feminist thought, the number of females started to increase in schools, which broke the male monopoly in the role of teachers. However, the male-centered social system still limited women to a subordinate social status. This was reflected in the field of education, where women were incapable of getting the same educational opportunities as men. It led to relatively constrained developments of females' knowledge, vision, and the breadth and depth of women's participation in society. During this historical period, the majority of teachers were male, and there were few opportunities for women to participate in teaching (Wang & Wang, 2020). Particularly, in the initial establishment of normal education standards, the determination of teachers' job responsibilities and the formulation of teachers' code of conduct in modern schools, standards, and norms were male-based and women were not included in the consideration (Zhu, 1983c). The structure of the teaching profession also reflects this feature. The administrative core positions were mostly male-occupied while most women who became teachers were engaged in specific teaching work or supporting roles.

The Republic of China (1912-1949) Period: Turbulent Days

The last imperial dynasty Qing collapsed in 1911. According to the descriptions of the national and educational background above, Western countries continued their occupation of more territory in China. More importantly, besides occupation and invasion of geographic territory in this transitional period in China, they also brought the Western educational system, thought, and science converging into cultural impacts on the country, which overturned its previous national and cultural imagination of self-satisfaction and self-superiority. However, the traditional and cultural impacts on education did not disappear with the collapse of the feudal system, and the forces of the restoration emerged one after another. The role of teachers in the context of social system change, cultural conflicts, and exploration of national reconstruction in the critical 37 years became complex and differentiated in terms of the values and functions of development of the nation-state and individual life.

Thus, this section will first introduce the binary but interlaced roles of teachers and intellectuals in two distinctive social forces, the influences of feudal restoration and the forces from burgeoning intellectuals who advocated for Western ideologies. I will explain in depth the complexities and confusions of the concept of teacher in terms of individual teachers' struggles among old and new, traditional and Western ideologies and institutions. This also leads to teachers' feelings of being unsure of the teacher career and indifferent about the fate of the nation, which furtherly narrows down the concept of 'teacher' to merely a job.

On the one hand, to uphold the monarchy and oppose republicanism, Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) as the first president of the Republic of China, issued commands that the *Analects of Confucius* were considered the standard textbook for primary and secondary schools, and textbook compilation should also take the *Analects* or other theories of the same origin with Confucianism as the standard (Xiong, 1990). For example, the *Educational Outline* (Li, 1997) required that teachers should respect Confucianism and other sages, and learn Confucian theories of idealist philosophy in the Song and Ming dynasties. Besides, he also required teachers both to accept his educational concept on adhering to Confucianism and to spread Confucian ethics to students through teaching practices. In doing so, he aimed at cultivating students' faithfulness to the nation to maintain its feudal autocratic rule. In his opinion, teachers were supposed to serve as cultivators for the ruling class and defenders of traditional ethics.

On the other hand, because of the significant disparity of military and technological strength between Western countries and China, some intellectuals still advocated for learning from Western philosophy and thought to make the whole nation stronger in both ideology and practice, culminating in the May Fourth Movement. In 1919, students and intellectuals cultivated by the modern style of education argued for the spirit of democracy, science, independence, and freedom through demonstrations, petitions, strikes, and violence against the government (Wang, 2019). Multiple Western theories, such as Dewey's pragmatic theories of social science and education, had been profoundly affirmed by Chinese intellectuals. Many famous Chinese educators, philosophers, and social reformers such as Hu Shi (1891-1962), Jiang Menglin (1886-1964), Feng Youlan (1895-1990), Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946), were all influenced by

Dewey and other Western educational theories (Sun, 1999). In the appeal of Western theories and ideologies, female students were accepted in modern schools and the Chinese educational system had been further reformed based on the educational system of Japan and the United States (Li, 1997). Another educator in this period, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) who served as the first minister of education in the Republic of China, was firmly opposed to the feudal education system and actively advocated for modern education. He strongly attacked the purpose of feudal education by saying, “feudal education is incompatible with democratic politics, and respect for Confucianism contradicts freedom of religious belief” (Gao, 2011, p.7). He expected teachers to undertake the historical task of cleaning up feudalism and cultivating modern bourgeoisie citizens, which was “educating new people” (Yu xin ren, 育新人, Gao, 1984, p. 291) in general.

During the alteration of the old and new social systems, the concept of a teacher also faced inevitable uncertainty and complexity at both collective and individual levels. Many teachers expressed their inner conflicts, worries, confusions, and hesitations in this situation (Luo, 2004a; Ren, 1989; Shu, 1945). One primary complexity situated the conflicts between individuals’ noble pursuits and the ideologies or channels of achieving their goals. That is to say, from their perspectives, their pursuits of strengthening the nation had to be achieved through borrowing and learning from Western countries, systematically and technically; while it was the traditional Confucianism, precisely what they attempted to criticize and abandon, enabling them to generate the patriotic idea about the salvation of nation and people.

Specifically, although teachers who were educated in both traditional and modern schools or universities abroad learned scientific knowledge and Western ideologies in adulthood, they were fundamentally influenced by Confucianism and claimed to aspire to be “Shi” (士) and “scholars” who took the nation and people as their duty and intended to be the glory of their family and ancestors. Those teachers regarded themselves as “enlighteners,” and teaching was one of their means of enlightening the people (Ye, 2017). They often held multiple roles besides teaching, such as participating in political activities. Nonetheless, because of the political instability, the conflicts between old and new forces, and the influx of various Western thought and influence, their ambition of being “Shi” and enlighteners were threatened and constantly questioned. In other words, in their journey of teaching, teachers also struggled in exploring their goals and aspirations in the fast-changing ideologies, knowledge, and demands of society. They doubted and hesitated whether Western science and knowledge could change the ‘backward’ situation of China, and whether the role of a teacher could be helpful in this process. This ambiguity and instability in relation to the roles of teachers brought more difficulties to individuals serving in the profession of teachers (Liu & Qin, 2005), and thus, they “left teaching positions when they realized there were other professions and activities to achieve their purpose of enlightening others” (Ye, 2017, p. 129).

Hence, some intellectuals wandered between the new and the old systems and knowledge, seeking to balance their teacher roles. For instance, different from intellectuals who pursued Westernization and modernization and believed that Western knowledge could change the so-called ‘backwardness’ of China, Shu Xincheng (1893-1960) enjoyed the harmonious relationship between humans as well as humans and

nature and was instinctively resistant to modern schools using the rigid system as a way of connecting people (Shu, 1945). He also depicted the huge unstoppable Westernization forces after the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement. Shu Xincheng (1930) wrote,

During those sixteen years, I almost always lived a life in which my thoughts and actions contradicted each other. However, due to the oppression of social training, although I doubted the methods in the new style of schools and often recalled the feelings of teaching in classical colleges, I never dared to advocate breaking the current modern educational system, and even still less advocating a return to the classical teaching methods. I just wished to seek the paradise of imagination in the new Western methods. (Shu, 1930, p. 5)

He approached the critique of Westernization with satire, pointing out that the school system sometimes imitated Japanese, sometimes German, and sometimes American, depending on the dominant external Western forces and influences, while arguing that educational theories were more confused and abnormal and lacked practical research on domestic education (Shu, 1928).

Confusion and wandering of teachers in this period also reflected the transformation of teachers' attitudes about their role – from caring for the fate of the nation to indifference. Due to the aforementioned multiple turbulences, teachers chose to merely focus on their own teaching jobs in schools and stay hands-off from other national and international affairs. This meant that when teachers in China were categorized as a specialized profession in the modern school system, then the concerns embedded in the

traditional Confucian concept of teachers regarding taking responsibility for the universe as well as people and potential critical consciousness faded as well. Teachers were more satisfied with finishing their own work or tasks assigned by their superiors, but seldom reflected on the questions about what responsibilities teachers should take in this era at the macro level and what kind of knowledge and abilities they should pass along to students (Ye, 2017).

In general, since the middle of the 19th century in China, the concept of a ‘teacher’ has gone through more fundamental transformations in respective backgrounds, with one of them clearly defining teaching as a social profession. That is to say, the term ‘teacher,’ which has historically represented a cultural identity as well as a relational role in the social community, has transformed to include another dominant layer of meaning: a social job. This transformation followed the introduction of the Western educational system, especially the influence of American education and the Japanese teacher education system in China, and the establishment of new forms of schools as a part of the modern educational system at the end of the 19th century. In the late Qing dynasty, the Western science and knowledge systems were popularly diffused in this ancient country, importing the career of a teacher in modern schools. Missionaries in churches, experts on specific Western and scientific disciplines, and “trainers” working in modern schools constituted the image of a teacher. In the era of the Republic of China (1912-1949), many famous Chinese educators, philosophers, and social reformers were all influenced by Dewey’s pragmatism and other Western educational theories (Sun, 1999). Therefore since then, the concept of a ‘teacher’ has been used by the majority of students and society to conventionally refer to a group of people who are teaching in modern schools.

1949-1976: People's Teacher

In the beginning years of the People's Republic of China, both ideologies and practices in politics, education, economics, and multiple aspects of social life had an excessive left-leaning tendency. This trend was also directly mirrored by the general principle and goals of education. This section, therefore, examines the concept of a teacher in this historical context with two representative and featured terms: the people's teacher and "being both Red and Professional." Before that, I will briefly introduce another flow of impact from the Soviet Union on the modernization process in China as the general national and international background of this left-leaning tendency. I will then explain the two meanings of "the people" to fully understand the political implications of using "the people" to embellish the identity of a teacher. Afterward, I will describe how the intensification of the left-leaning tendency and the events of the Great Cultural Revolution have contributed further transformation of the concept of a teacher by infusing it with political and ideological flavor to play the leading role in the tide of "Red" education.

In this period, other than the impacts of Western educational systems, especially in a form of modern schooling, another type of coloniality significantly influenced the modernization process of the teacher concept in China at the beginning years of the current regime. As Tlostanova and Mignolo (2009) argued, "modernity in the 20th century was realized in two forms – the liberal/capitalist modernity and the socialist/statist one" (p. 136), and Soviet modernity represented the transformed colonial matrix. In other words, although Soviet socialism seemingly took the opposite position

from Western capitalism, it basically created another modernity project that “reproduced the logic of coloniality in the control and management of its colonies” (p. 137). The Soviet own modernity project was embodied by the firm belief in socialism and communism, as well as its measures of propagating and materializing those beliefs.

Particularly, in the early days of the People’s Republic of China, socialist construction was hampered by a lack of experience. In order to explore the socialist construction of “new” China, the government put forward the policy of “learning from the Soviet Union” and took almost every aspect of the Soviet Union’s socialist construction as an example for China (Fei & Farquhar, 1998). Mao Zedong pointed out that “the Soviet Communist Party is our best teacher, and we must learn from it” (Mao, 1987, p. 600). He even proposed to “follow the path of the Soviet Union” in the first amendment of the Constitution (Fei & Farquhar, 1998). Since then, the principle of learning from the Soviet Union has been officially incorporated into the fundamental legislation in China and became the guideline for the socialist construction of China.

In the educational field, this blind borrowing also continued. The educational department began to hire Soviet educational experts to work in China and play guiding roles. Stalin once said that the aim of dispatched Soviet experts was to “convey all the knowledge and skills to the Chinese until they learn them” (Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 1998, p. 73). In addition, China also requested to send students to the Soviet Union, and in 1951, Chinese students officially went to study in the Soviet Union for the first time. What they borrowed from the Soviet Union could be broadly described in terms of ideologies and practices. As the Soviet educator Иван Андреевич Каиров (Ivan Andrejevich Kairov) claimed, the whole educational system,

pedagogical contents, and methods in the Soviet Union aimed to fulfill the ‘lofty’ task of training people into well-rounded socialist and active constructors of communist society (Chen, 2014). Hence, with regard to the role of teachers, the Soviet Union’s expectation was that teachers should regard themselves not only as executors of general education, but also promoters and builders of socialism and socialist education (Hu, 1957; Wang, 1958). It was reported that there were enough normal schools in the Soviet Union; teachers who graduated from normal schools were determined to serve communist education career for life with high professional attainments (Chen, 1956; She lun, 1956). Besides, teachers in the Soviet Union were required to meet specific professional standards and have a high scientific knowledge level, and practiced teaching skills. The Chinese visiting delegation described, “they strived to be professional in every lesson to achieve the purpose of national industrial development” (Visiting Delegation of Primary and Secondary School Teachers to the Soviet Union, 1956, p. 10).

In this broad context of Soviet impacts, after the People’s Republic of China was established in 1949, Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the first president of China, issued the Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (Bai, 1950) as the policy of new China from the central government. This policy stipulated that cultural education in China should be national, scientific, and available to the general public. The main goal of the educational activity was supposed to focus on raising people’s educational level, cultivating talents for nation-building, and eliminating feudal and fascist ideologies to further the ideology of serving the people (Bai, 1950). The Ministry of Education in China was established in the same year to reinforce the purpose

of education-related work to serve the people—the workers and peasants—as well as the revolutionary struggles (Ma, 1951).

In this centralized political and economic context, teachers were prescribed and situated as “the people’s teacher” (Ren min jiao shi, 人民教师, Ma, 1951) who served the people and the nation. “The people” here were the broad working class, the proletariat, and the soldiers rather than the landlords and rich peasants. Those categories of individuals, from Mao’s perspective (Mao, 1966), were the largest portion of the Chinese nation and the overwhelming majority of the population. According to Liu (2006), the word “people” (Ren min, 人民) in front of “the people’s teacher” had two meanings. First, the people were the object or the group to be served, which meant that teachers were supposed to serve the people rather than other social classes. Secondly, teachers also belonged to the category of the people which was an “attribute concept” (Liu, 2006, p. 136). For the first populist connotation of people, it implied that “people’s teacher” should not be restricted in the narcissistic study or the school teaching work but was required to step out of the study and into action. More importantly, the actions should be people-involved. That is, teachers must take the initiative to merge with the people, follow the people’s line, understand and help the people, and learn from the people. Hence, teachers at this time were asked to take responsibility for social education by being close to the people in addition to teaching in schools. In the second meaning of the “people’s teacher,” the identity of teachers was not that of aloof and proud intellectuals any longer. Teachers had to make continuous efforts with the attitude of revolutionaries in becoming a member of the people’s camp. In other words, teachers were not categorized as the class of “the people” originally, but they needed to bow down, reflect,

and disrupt themselves to truly “bear the responsibility of social enlightenment and liberation” (Liu, 2006, p. 136).

In this sense, the identity of a teacher referred to not only a profession, but also one of the political forces within the power structure, and it represented a relatively inferior and hostile status within the communist ideological hierarchy in this period. Teachers were categorized into the camp who “hover on the edge of ‘the people’, and there is always the danger that they will slip into the camp of ‘the non-people’ and be hostile to the revolution” (Fei & Farquhar, 1998, p. 5). The reason for grouping them is because, in the discourse of the people’s democratic dictatorship, intellectuals were always connected with the bourgeoisie. “From their class origin, ways of living, to their ideologies, everything reflects the imprint of the bourgeoisie” (Liu, 2006, p. 138). Mao (1939) further explained,

The majority of intellectuals and young students in modern China can be classified as bourgeois in terms of their family background, living conditions, and political stance. Some of them, when the revolution is in an emergency, will leave the revolutionary groups and adopt a passive attitude. A few of them will become enemies of the revolution. Such shortcomings of intellectuals can only be overcome over a long period of mass struggles. (p. 769)

In other words, being classified as a part of the intelligentsia, teachers were potentially disciplined due to their teacher identity. By calling them the “people’s teacher,” the Communist Party not only expected and required teachers to serve the people, but also used the name as a political warning for Chinese teachers to constantly

reform as well as “popularize” themselves (Mao, 1964; Ye, 2017) while blending into the people.

Another requirement for the group of teachers also embodied the dominant control of the party and the political aim of serving the national government. In October 1957, Mao Zedong directly stated in his book that “intellectuals should be both ‘Hong and Zhuan’” (又红又专, Mao, 1977, p. 485). He (Mao, 1999) explained that Hong (红, Red in English) alludes to holding a proletarian worldview which is political reliability as well as loyalty to the party, while Zhuan (专, Expertise or Professional in English) means having professional knowledge and ability, and none of them can be omitted in the ideological remolding of dangerous individuals and groups. From his perspective, the two concepts were interconnected and interdependent. “Red” guaranteed the pure motivation and enthusiasm of work in terms of dedication to and love for the ideological belief, but in the specific practices, professional skills and capabilities were necessary. Besides, serving the socialist regime with individuals’ own professional knowledge and skills and actively strengthening their professionalism and specialization were also seen as the embodiment of keeping the proletarian worldview in mind.

However, in the “left-leaning” era of class struggles and the Great Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976), the “Red” reference to loyalty to the Party became the overriding and fundamental requirement for teachers, indicating the standard of professionalism. Worse than the scenario that knowledge level and professional teaching ability were no longer the criteria for evaluating teachers, intellectuals and teachers as representatives of the bourgeois category were tortured, insulted, and humiliated by being criticized and denounced publicly. The traditional Confucian respect for dignified

teachers and intellectuals was considered to be a “fabricated educational tool for slave-owner class enslaving the working people and for the revolutionaries against the thought autocracy” (Bai, 2017, p. 31). The moral image of teachers was socially marginalized and damaged, and their political status kept declining as well.

In this circumstance, teachers lost the space – even though it still existed in the previous turbulent days – for exploring and individually determining which doctrine they would be willing to follow. In fact, teachers were no longer able to express their respective opinions on what was the purpose of education, as the traditional Confucian scholars or the modern intellectuals who regarded themselves as “enlighteners” in the Period of the Republic of China did. Instead, teachers became more similar to a marionette in the top-down calls of being dedicated and in the top-down gazing. On the one hand, because the Communist Party claimed that it represented the interests of the people, “the people’s teacher” was supposed to be ideologically armed with Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism and to hold a “Red” heart to serve the people. They were expected to take the people’s recognition as a supreme honor. On the other hand, in practice, teachers were also positioned as propagandists of the Communist Party’s policies. Teachers were expected to return to the people, meet the needs of the people, and serve only the people wholeheartedly. Teachers’ task then was waking up students’ revolutionary spirit and shaping their souls (i.e., planting Marxism-Leninism and Maoism into students’ minds to mold students into the perfect candidates for proletarian revolution and socialist construction). As teachers, “we were born with the responsibility of watering the flowers of the motherland carefully, and training students to become useful talents contributing to the construction of the motherland” (Si, 1996, p. 22). That

means, when we called teachers “the people’s teacher,” “individual autonomy and ideological independence of teachers that emerged during the Republic of China were unacceptable in this progressive left-leaning context and they needed to be eliminated” (Ye, 2017, p. 141-142), and the range of education offered by teachers had been narrowed down to “Red” education.

After 1978

After the end of the Great Cultural Revolution, the macro policies in China generally experienced several fundamental changes. The most significant one was that the political focus started to shift from political and social class struggles to “taking economic development as the central task” (Deng, 1994) in every social aspect and implementing the system of “opening up to the outside world” (Gai ge kai fang, 改革开放, Deng, 1978; 1993). Hence, the aim of education changed from serving as a space for class struggle to serving the goals of economic construction. In the context of this rapid social transition, the concept of a teacher also changed, including strict administration of teachers in policies, two emphases in the national top-down policies of teachers (i.e., teachers’ professionalization in terms of the global trends and the related legislation in China and the requirements on teachers’ ethics and morality). The transition also involves some emerging “issues” related to teachers as a social job, the capitalization of the teacher concept as another representation of educational globalization, and the unbalanced gender ratio. Last, I also reviewed recent literature to offer a broad overview of the themes and topics related to the concept of a teacher in both English and Chinese literature.

The shifts in political as well as economic focus and “opening up” policy resulted in two seemingly contradictory directions of education policy-making and implementation. On the one hand, Western educational systems flooded into China again and the global educational reform tide (Huang, 1992) swept China after the 1980s. That is, Western ideologies brought more thorough and all-round impacts on China’s society (Ma & Peng, 2009). On the other hand, to cope with the multiple values introduced from the west and re-establish the system of mainstream socialist core values aiming at solidifying the governance of the communist party, the government further tightened its controls and constraints on both ideology and administration. In other words, China attempted to join the global educational hierarchy with its absolute political control on ideology and to obtain relatively high rankings in international student achievement tests.

In this sense, education was still endowed with strong instrumental and pragmatic functions and was firmly controlled by the government. For the goal of improving the quality of education and cultivating talents for national construction and participation in the global educational competition, China reinstated the system of the National College Entrance Examination (Zhang, 2007) to select talents in 1977, and teachers as one crucial professional role, was also automatically included into the system. The government grasped the power of administering teachers by regulating that “in regard to the recruitment of teachers with explicit allocation, merit and award appraisal, principals’ selection, general hiring of teacher cadres, teachers title appraisal, cadres, and salary promotion, and advanced studying and training abroad, our political standards must be strictly executed; and schools should contribute to maintaining stability and unity of the

domestic political situation” (Department of Policy and Regulation in National Education Commission, 1992, p. 48).

Two Emphases of Teacher as A Social Job

Both to further strengthen ideological control and successfully assimilate into the global educational reform meanwhile, nationwide regulations and expectations for the teaching profession as a social job were gradually set. In particular, the national top-down policies have generally focused on two areas: teacher professionalization and the ethics and morality of a teacher, requiring teachers to “Jiao shu yu ren, Wei ren shi biao” (教书育人, 为人师表, “impart knowledge and cultivate people, and be a model of virtue for others” in English, Jiang, 2000, p. 2). Parallel to the related global standards, the concept of a teacher in today’s China is simply and explicitly defined as a social career held by professional workers at all types and levels of schools, whose duty is to educate and cultivate students in all aspects of disciplinary and scientific knowledge and in the aspects of personhood and behavior (The Editorial Committee, 1987).

Hence, the first and crucial area, teacher professionalization, was the result of being impacted by the global trend of educational and curriculum reform. With the global educational reform implemented in the field of curriculum, there was a growing call for “teacher professionalization” (Hoyle, 1982; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Glatthorn, 1995) in Western countries. UNESCO (1996) recommended the worldwide understanding that teaching is supposed to be regarded as a profession. It clearly stated that an educational career should be considered as a specialized occupation (i.e., profession) which required the faculty to acquire and maintain expertise and skills through rigorous and continuous

efforts. It also required both an individual and shared sense of responsibility for the education and welfare of the students in its charge (Fan, 2003). After World War II, teacher professional development has become an influential trend, which has promoted the establishment of new theories and systems for teacher education globally (Tang, 2002). Governments in various countries have fully realized that the improvement of education or schooling quality to a considerable extent depends on the quality of teachers in the 21st century (Harman & ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching Teacher Education, 2001; Sun, 2010; Wang et al., 2003; Ye, 2012; Zhong, 2009).

China first stepped into the global trend of this curriculum reform in the 1980s, driven partially by domestic and foreign pressures that introduced the discourse of “teacher professionalization” in China with a domestic emphasis on teacher specialization (Jiang, 2004). That is, policies and practices related to teachers and teacher education were dedicated to vigorously promoting the professional knowledge and skills of teachers. First and foremost, this includes recognizing the professional nature of teaching and teachers in national legislation. For example, China implemented the Law of Teachers in the People’s Republic of China (referred to as *Teachers’ Law*) in 1994, explicitly stipulating that “teachers are professionals who perform the duties of education and teaching” (Yuan, 2016, p. 104). This document legally affirmed the professionalism and irreplaceability of the teacher as a career.

Second, in the aspect of improving teacher professionalization, a series of national projects were carried out. For example, in order to deepen the reform of quality-oriented education, the state proposed the implementation of the “Cross-Century Gardener Project” (Ministry of Education, 1999). In 2010, the Ministry of Education and the

Ministry of Finance jointly implemented the “National Training Plan for Primary and Secondary School Teachers” (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In addition to the national legislation and some concrete national projects, the last but most important aspect of boosting teacher professionalization in China was to set up and reform the examination system of teacher qualification, and the flavor of borrowing and learning from the Western educational system has been typically epitomized by this professionalization process. In order to adapt to the worldwide tide of teacher professionalization reforms, the Chinese government has determined to set up and adjust the teacher examination system to follow the pace of teacher education reforms in other countries. In 1995, China laid out the Teacher Qualification System (Fan, 2003), which aimed at providing an institutional guarantee for promoting the professional development of teachers. The promulgations of these laws and policies formally defined ‘teacher’ as a specialized profession and a professional career that undertakes teaching and educating affairs in the present regime, thus establishing the standards of teachers as professionals. Meanwhile, as the concept of a ‘teacher’ began to expand to include the attributes of a social occupation, targeted professional training and teacher education was set up and flourished at the national level, and the teacher qualification examination system in modern China was initiated and reformed since then as well.

Here, it is important to elaborate further on the National Teacher Qualification Examination System, because it is the most prominent epitomization of both educational globalization and teacher professionalization emerging in China. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, teacher education was introduced along with the rise and development of the Western educational system and modern schools in China since the late Qing dynasty and

the Republic of China period. In the current regime, the history of teacher education chronologically starts from 1952 when the government issued the Regulations on Higher Normal Schools (Gu, 2003) to make a general rule on establishing regional normal colleges and universities and institutions of personnel training for this new-born country (Liu, 2019). However, because the field of education as well as other fields of social studies in China started to flourish, initiate, and attempt to approach the modernization of Western developed countries after 1978, the influential policies and actions of teacher education refer to those after then.

Specifically, the teacher qualification examination system in China is a statutory occupation admittance examination system, which is conducted by the government for individuals preparing to enter the teaching profession. Passing the teacher qualification examination is a prerequisite for a citizen interested to apply for a teacher qualification certificate. Throughout history, the reform of the teacher qualification system in China has gone through three stages (Ruan, 2007; Zhang & Wang, 2013). It was initially established from scratch in 1983-1995. The system transitioned from a pilot to full implementation among normal university students, then non-normal university students from 1995 to 2011. In September 2011, the phase of the pilot national unified examination began. As one of the most important policies to promote the development of teacher education and ensure the quality of teachers, the national uniform examination policy for teacher qualification is particularly remarkable.

Hence, the most direct and effective reform in the field of teacher qualification would be the reform of policies of the National Teacher Qualification Examination system. The reform of the system was also filled with traces of borrowing and references

to Western countries. Specifically, the Chinese government initiated a reform of the examination system of teacher qualification from 2011 in the whole nation, and the proposed policies in this reform were borrowed from Western countries and educational systems (Fan, 2003; Li, 2004; Liu, 2002; Wang, 2016). Wen (2004) summarizes that the teacher qualification systems in the United States, Japan, and France have established strict laws and regulations and a powerful structure for guaranteeing implementation since World War II. In addition, the three countries have implemented a monitoring mechanism for teacher training institutions and educational programs, which are directly linked to the teacher qualification system. Because these policies and practices are believed to ensure the quality of teacher resources from the source in teacher education, many Chinese scholars contend that the Western systems are worth to be learned from in establishing a modern and standardized teacher qualification system in China (Wen, 2004; Wang, 2012; Wang, 2016; Xiong, 2008). To echo the idea of learning from the Western teacher qualification system, at the present stage of educational reform in China, the demand for teachers has begun to transition from quantitative expansion to quality assurance which was defined according to the Western teacher qualification system. In the Outline of the National Program for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) (2018), the government clearly calls for improving the management system of teachers and strictly implementing the teacher qualification system. The national government will formulate standards for the examination and qualifications of teachers, which will further clarify the standards for teachers' academic degree requirements and teachers' codes of conduct.

In 1987, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) of the United States was established, marking a shift in the teacher qualification system in America from local to national authentication of teachers' professionalism (Qin, 2010). Similarly, after the reform of the examination system of teacher qualification was initiated by the Chinese government in 2011, China also changed from a provincial-level examination to a national-level examination (Ruan, 2007) and set up the national teacher qualification standards (The Outline of the national program for medium and long-term education reform and development [2010-2020], 2018). Since then, the new policies of the examinations for teachers would be effective in every province simultaneously. For instance, the examination pays more attention to the assessment of teachers' practical capability in classroom teaching, so as to meet the needs of teachers' professional development. The new policy breaks the lifelong tenure of teacher qualification and requires teachers to re-register every 5 years. And the teacher qualification system has turned from a "double-track" (designed for both normal university students and prospective teachers to receive the teaching qualification by passing the exam) to a "single-track" (designed as the only way of receiving teacher qualification for anyone). And some of the above policies have been first put into practice in – and then borrowed from – other countries such as the United States, Germany, France, and Japan in earlier years (Gong, 2004; He, 2004; Li & Chen, 2014; Shen, Lu, & Liu, 2008; Zhao & Wu, 2006).

The ethics and morality of a teacher

In addition to teacher professionalization, another emphasis of the national top-down policies is the ethics and morality of a teacher. The state government promulgated the criteria for regulating the ethics and morality of a teacher in present China. In these rules, the term ‘teacher’ is presented as a social profession with extra moral requirements. That means, being a teacher does not only require fulfilling the basic duties similar to other social work but also expects individual moral integrity which is covert and difficult to measure or observe. The focus on the ethics and morality of a teacher is roughly rooted in two aspects of historical, cultural, and political impact which have been mentioned before – Confucianism and Soviet coloniality and modernity (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2009). In the early days of the People’s Republic of China, the Soviet firm belief in socialism and communism, as well as their measures of propagating and materializing those beliefs, were radically introduced and implemented in China. Similar to the Soviet Union, the whole educational system, pedagogical content, and methods in China aimed to fulfill the ‘lofty’ task of training people into well-rounded constructors of communist society (Mao, 1987). Hence, the role of teachers, whom the Communist party called “the people’s teachers” (Ma, 1951), was to serve as “both Red and Professional” (Mao, 1977, p. 485), and regard themselves not only as executors of general education but also promoters and defenders of communist and socialist education.

Although socialist modernity/coloniality does not appear to play an explicit and dominant role in the name and requirements for the teaching profession any longer, there are subtle clues of ideological impacts from it - as well as from Confucianism - in today’s China. In fact, these clues have been hybridly blended and entangled in some current

requirements and expectations for the teaching profession. Specifically, in 2008, the Ministry of Education (2008) revised the Rule of Professional Ethics for Primary and Secondary School Teachers. It has six core content areas, and each core area emphasizes one moral expectation for teachers: (1) being patriotic and law-abiding; (2) cherishing the job and devoting wholeheartedly to work; (3) caring for students; (4) teaching and educating people; (5) being a model of virtue for others; and (6) lifelong learning. For example, the second foci implies some shadows of socialist ideology,

Being loyal to the career of people's education, having high ambitions, being diligent and dedicated, and being willing to contribute as a ladder for others.

Teachers are supposed to be highly responsible for their work and to prepare lessons as well as correct students' homework carefully, be helpful to students, and no perfunctory duties.

To make this requirement understandable, it explains that this is the nature of the teaching profession because it regards the teaching profession as a sacred duty and endows teachers with glorious responsibilities connected with profound social changes as well as the prosperity and strength of the nation (Ministry of Education, 2008). Here, education is still regarded as "people's education" and the sacred glory of being a teacher essentially comes from the political, national, and socialist goal that it serves.

In addition, it advocates that teachers should serve as a model of virtue for others, which is the inherent requirement of the teaching profession. Teachers are expected to lead as exemplars in all aspects of life, not only for students but for all citizens. Teachers

need to face their students with their own personality charm and academic influence to educate students. The specific code expresses,

Sticking to noble sentiments, knowing the glory and shame, being strict with self, and becoming an example to others. Dressing and speaking appropriately and behaving in a civilized manner. Caring for the collective, being cooperative, and respecting colleagues and parents. Being honest and consciously resisting paid tutoring. Not taking advantage of the teacher position for personal gain.

The concepts of a model of virtue and an exemplar for others clearly stem from the cultural symbol in Confucianism and expectations of “Shi” (士) in ancient China, which has been mentioned above. And today, these moral and behavior codes become formal rules for teachers as professional workers in modern schooling. Besides, the last rule is clearly built on the assumption that teachers are supposed to be lifelong learners. It refers to developing the spirit of science, broadening the horizon of knowledge, and updating the structure of knowledge. It also requires teachers to concentrate on their focus with the courage and innovation of exploring, and constantly improving the professional quality of pedagogy. This conforms to the national aspirations of globalization and modernization in every social aspect. For the group of teachers, the professionalism of this identity would be the most representative index of globalization. Thus, introducing this rule for teachers aims to “meet the requirement of following the development of times” and to “strengthen the inexhaustible driving force for teachers’ professional development” (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Based on the specific content of the existing policies and regulations, some fragments of Confucianism, socialist modernity, and Westernized universality can be identified either implicitly or explicitly. They have been fused into the requirements for teacher professional ethics and become embodied in expectations for teacher identity. Since teaching has become a social profession, it stresses that individuals should devote themselves to the job of being a teacher. More than their own duty, the spirit of utter devotion—being others’ ladders—is also necessary for becoming teachers. By narrating teaching as “a sacred duty” that has been “endowed with glorious responsibilities connected with profound social changes as well as the prosperity and strength of the nation,” it puts individuals in relation to their communities and the nation, which also represents the Confucian ideology of situating persons in society. Other than that, noble moralities such as being others’ exemplars and relating to students with love and care are requirements for “Junzi” in ancient China under the Confucian cultural contexts as well. In short, the criteria for regulating the ethics and morality of a teacher in present China is an intertwined mixture of multiple forces and contexts, and it is impossible to consider each connotation and its impact on the concept of a teacher separately.

“Issues” Related to Teachers

Although this two-fold national and systematic requirement on the teacher profession—teacher professionalization and the ethics and morality of a teacher—is seemingly comprehensive and inclusive of both aspects of the profession, it does not prevent various and endless “issues” to arise in relation to teachers’ work. According to the website of the Ministry of Education in China and news on social media (Ministry of

Education, 2019b, 2021a, 2021b), typical cases of teachers violating rules, failing to meet professional standards, and even engaging in illegal conduct have been reported and met with public criticism. For example, on the issue of classroom behavior, some middle or high school teachers discriminate, insult, and give corporal punishments to students in the classroom; on the issue of earning extra money, some teachers “accept gifts and money from students’ parents, offer long term paid make-up lessons, and induce students to take specific teachers’ paid lessons”; on the issue of sexual harassment, some in-service teachers are accused of molesting, sexually harassing, and sexually assaulting students (Ministry of Education, 2021a). Besides, most issues in regard to kindergarten teachers involve corporal punishments, hurting and torturing children (Ministry of Education, 2021b).

However, some problems are not about teachers’ professionalism; rather, they concern more the individual teacher’s conduct, opinions, and personal or private lifestyles. Those issues include “leading students to support entertainment stars, academic misconduct, using vulgar and indecent teaching methods or speaking styles, having improper relationships outside marriage, making wrong remarks in class, having inappropriate behavior which does not match the exemplary image of the teacher, offering off-school training courses outside schools, and posting or forwarding wrong viewpoints on the Internet” (Ministry of Education, 2021c).

Based on the different severity of breaking the rules, the treatment and punishment of teachers may be different (Ministry of Education, 2019a). Some concerned teachers are downgraded in their positions and given serious warnings, while others have their teacher qualifications and certifications revoked because of their mistakes. Some of

them may also be blacklisted for teacher qualifications and not allowed to take the teacher qualification exam again within five years or for life. Teachers who have economic issues and make extra money may be punished by deducting their yearly merit payments and may not be eligible for excellence and awards within three years. For teachers who are Party members, they may be expelled from the Party and given the punishment with the inner-Party warning. In addition, the principal or the direct superior of the involved teachers may be investigated for their accountability, and the acquired honor or ranks of the educational institutions (schools) where the teacher worked may be revoked.

Capitalization of The Profession and The Gender of Teachers

Other than the professionalization of the profession, teaching has also evolved into an economic sector in relation to the impacts of capital as another consequence of globalization. Since the establishment of the socialist market economy system in 1997, the general image of teachers has gradually changed in both teachers' own perceptions and public opinion (Huang, Zhao, & Zhu, 2021). Teachers started to exhibit economic behaviors in their professional roles, which was not common in the traditional Confucian culture. Specifically, from the perspective of the general public (Che, 2011), teachers, as noble intellectuals and scholars, became increasingly commodified along with teaching or education-related activities. For example, some teachers removed selected learning content from school classes to tutoring after school to collect tutoring fees; teachers suggested that students should buy more expensive learning materials for rebate; students and their parents gave teachers huge amounts of money as gifts for better attention from

teachers (Wang, 2014). Secondly, the perception of teachers not emphasizing economic income began to change. Previously, the job position of primary and secondary school teachers was relatively stable in geographic aspects, whether in ancient China or earlier years of modern China, with few teachers flowing among provinces and cities. But with the operation of the market mechanisms in society and the education system, teachers began transferring their positions in schools from economically disadvantaged areas to make more income in economically developed areas (Yao & Peng, 2007; Rong, 2017).

With respect to the gender of teachers, women have constituted the dominant part of the teachers' profession in modern China. The gender structure of teachers in the modern schooling system in China shows the increasing trend of "feminization" in the recent 30 years (Ao & Lin, 2020; Fu, 1997; Wang & Wang, 2020). Statistics from China's Ministry of Education show that the total number of teachers in China has approached 18 million people (Xinhua Net, 2021), while the gender ratio of teachers is seriously unbalanced. According to statistics (see Table 1, numbers retrieved from Guangming Daily, 2018; Sohu, 2018; Zhongguo Jiaoyu Zaixian, 2019, summarized and tabulated by the author), it reports in 2019 that over the past eight years, the proportion of female teachers in preschool education has remained at 97-98%, with little change. The percentage of female primary school teachers increased from 57.95% in 2010 to 67.19% in 2017, and in junior middle schools, the proportion of female teachers also increased from 49.48% in 2010 to 55.64% in 2017. For regular high schools, the situation was similar: Female teachers increased from 47.66% to 53.07% in the same period. Accordingly, the proportion of male teachers in public primary and secondary schools has been decreasing year by year in the past 20 years (Xu & Zhang, 2021; also see Gan et

al., 2014; Hui & Han, 2011; Jing et al., 1997; Ministry of Education, 2019a; Zhang, 2016).

Related studies explain that the reasons for the increase of females in the teaching profession might be related to the impact of the social system, traditional views, and the characteristics of the teachers' profession (Hui & Han, 2011; Zhang, 2019; Wang & Wang, 2020). Specifically, the maternal qualities of caring, patience, and tolerance satisfy the expectations of the characteristics of the teaching profession, and it is widely believed that women are more patient in guiding students' growth and development. Meanwhile, the traditional perception that women need to take on more responsibilities indoors and at home also plays a role here (Fu, 1997). Influenced by the traditional social division of labor, women were required to become qualified as "good mothers" and "good wives", so more family labor was undertaken by females. This has resulted in difficulties for women to fully devote themselves to challenging social tasks that require high concentration in modern China. To fulfill social expectations of gender roles and take good care of their families, women are more inclined to choose teaching jobs that appear to be more stable, to have clear-cutted office hours and vacations, and to work with less physical labor.

Table 1. The Percentages of Female Teachers in Different Levels of Schools (in percentage)

	Preschool Education	Primary School	Junior Middle School	Regular High School
2010	97	57.95	49.48	47.66
2017	98	67.19	55.64	53.07

Related Literature

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to briefly review recent literature about the concept of teacher in both English and Chinese languages, in order to recognize some common themes around this research topic. Mainstream English language literature about the ‘teacher’ in Western academia pays much attention to topics of teacher education (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Grossman et al., 2009), teacher professional development (Avalos, 2011; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; Villegas-Reimers, 2003; Yoon et al., 2007), and teachers’ roles in multiple educational contexts (Crawford, 2000; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Shimizu, 1999; Valli, & Buese, 2007). In other words, the concept of a teacher in research has been comprehensively discussed and perceived as an occupation that can be systematically and routinely cultivated in well-designed programs. Besides, the effectiveness of learning and cultivating always appears as the aim of discussions about the term ‘teacher’. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2000; 2010) emphasizes the significance of teacher education in training effective and long-term in-service teachers in the United States and proposes key components of constructing more high-efficient and high-quality teacher education programs in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In addition, literature about connections between teachers’ professional development and student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017) identifies the characteristics of effective professional development for teachers to facilitate teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Lastly, Ben-Peretz et al. (2003) argue that the educational contexts are intimately connected with teachers’ professional roles. Epstein & Van Voorhis (2001)

explore teachers' roles in homework design and homework effectiveness in mastering skills and communications, while another study (Valli & Buese, 2007) also illustrates the complexity of teachers' roles in teacher-student relationships and offers suggestions for future policies, but still in school classroom contexts.

In general, Chinese literature about teachers involves discussions of the meanings of the 'teacher,' professionalization of the teaching profession, and the teacher qualification system. Several main aspects are frequently mentioned in the research, such as the origins of the teacher profession, core concepts in cultural contexts, and evolution (Xiao, 2009; Yu, 2014), which examine how the notion has transformed and developed in history (Zhou & Reed, 2005). Besides, the current policies of the teacher qualification system in China (Long & Yang, 2008; Peng, 2011) with their reforms over time are also common (Zhu, 2009). From the perspective of comparative education, research concentrates on comparing cases and policies regarding teacher qualification systems in the so-called 'developed' countries globally (Gong, 2004; Liu, 2001; Qin, 2008; Wang, 2020), drawing the lessons and experiences that the teacher qualification system and teacher education in China could learn from (Fang, 2019; Xia & Tian, 2018; Yi, 2002).

Specifically, existing research on the concept of 'teacher' in China mainly regards it as a social job in a modern social context, and the themes of the literature are also profession related. That means, in the research discourse, the concept of a teacher is habitually examined in modern schooling environments and always emerges with the discussion of the profession. For example, Lin et al. (1996) believe that the quality of a teacher includes the following components in structure: "Professional goals, knowledge level, the viewpoints of education, teaching monitoring ability, and teaching methods and

strategies” (p. 16). Ye (1998) explores teacher’s professional qualities along with the new curriculum reform in the 21st century, with the premise of “acknowledging teacher as one professional career” (p. 41).

In the new century, Chen (2003) argues that teachers’ professionalism comes from “practical knowledge” (p. 108). Some scholars (Lu & Zhong, 2006) place teacher professional development on the international horizon to introduce the latest progress in the field of teacher professional development in Western countries to the Chinese context. Such an approach then expounds the definition, purpose, function, influencing factors, and evaluation of teacher professional development to discuss how teachers improve their professionalism in learning. Wei (2008) examines teacher professional identity from a psychological perspective, summarizing the status quo and developing characteristics of teacher professional identity as “one synthesis of positive cognition, experiences and the behavioral tendency of teachers towards their profession and their internalized professional roles” (p. 15). Xu and Dong (2011) attempt to critically discuss the term “expert teacher” (p. 62) from three angles, including the psychologic, sociologic, and pedagogic ones. More recent studies focus on the theoretical model construction of teacher professional development (Zhu, 2014), and explore the professional roles of teachers in the times of artificial intelligence (AI) (Fan, 2018; Liu & Liu, 2020; Yu, 2018; Zhang & Shang, 2019). With the rapid growth of AI technology and industry, the literature discusses the roles of traditional teachers and how teachers and AI technologies could cooperate to overcome challenges in teacher professional development (Fan, 2018; Feng, Guo, & Huang, 2021).

What's Next?

Given the brief evolution history of the concept of a teacher in both ancient and modern China, the historical and cultural contexts of the conceptual transitions, and the narrowed-down, Westernized, human-centric, colonialized, as well as vocationalized and secularized connotations of the notion of a teacher, some of the interesting and intriguing questions include: What happens when we bring into focus some indigenous Chinese philosophies to (re)consider today's concept of a teacher? What would emerge when starting to include more-than-human species and beings as well as entanglements into the discussion of who is the teacher and who is the learner? What or who might become the teacher, if 'teacher' does not merely mean a social career? What might be changed in learning and teaching when shifting the ways of experiencing, becoming, and defining teachers? In the next few chapters and the rest of this whole dissertation, I will explore and discuss these questions in more detail.

CHAPTER 3

FRAMING ‘TEACHER’ IN CONCEPTUAL DIALOGUES: MULTIPLE THEORETICAL LENSES

This chapter will describe the main theoretical frameworks that offer possibilities of reexamining the evolution of the teacher concept and redefining the concept of teacher in future research from a decolonial perspective. It aims at delinking from the dominant, westernized, and universal patterns of considering and defining teachers, and exploring alternative conceptual constructs to engage with in my research. I will specifically focus on decolonial perspectives (e.g., Mignolo’s five trajectories in comparative education), indigenous lenses (e.g., Taoism and Confucianism), and posthumanism, alongside the discussion of several commonalities and distinctions among these theories. For each framework, I will discuss the following points: (a) What are the theoretical concepts and approaches (their features and strengths) that might be helpful; (b) How are those constructs applied in educational studies; (c) What are the similarities, intersections, and differences among them; and (d) Why and how are the lenses related to my dissertation research?

(Western) Comparative Education: A General and Plural Analytic Frame

One analytic framework, which may be useful for exploring the different connotations of a teacher and alternative articulations of this concept, is a decolonial lens presented by Mignolo (2011) and extended into comparative education analysis by Silova, Rappleye, and Auld (2020). Mignolo (2011) argues that the 20th century could be best characterized by “the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 9), which means

that modernity and coloniality are interdependent with each other, and countries that take the path of ‘development’ and ‘modernization’ are unable to escape from this matrix and the world order in the context of globalization. Chatterjee (2013) further describes the anfractuous intersections of political, cultural, economic, and knowledge coloniality and national independent development of nations as being “intellectually imprisoned in the matrix” (p. 571). He summarizes, “What we are left with today is a world that is polycentric but capitalist, deeply enmeshed in colonial relations of power” (Chatterjee, 2013, p. 571). Hence, decolonial scholars aim to advocate for challenging the Western universal and colonial order and frameworks, while thinking and living independently but harmoniously with the foundation of decolonial as well as pluriversal options. To put the emphasis on the pluriversal futures in a more concrete way, Mignolo (2011) raises five specific contrasting options (or trajectories) as tentative descriptions that challenge the global status quo and offer alternatives for the future: rewesternization, reorientation to the Left, dewesternization, decolonization, and spirituality. It is worth mentioning that the relation among these five projects or trajectories is not “either/or” in shaping the future possibilities, but entails a series of concurrences, coexistences, and negotiations.

Rewesternization

Mignolo (2011) describes Rewesternization as a series of measures including rebuilding the confidence towards the United States in terms of “saving capitalism” in the economy, “maintaining its leadership in international relations” in authority, and ambitiously claiming the best “science and technology,” enabling the revamp and development of economy in knowledge (p. 36). Those measures aim at maintaining

Western hegemony in aspects of economy, politics, ideology, race, and knowledge in the past few decades (Mignolo, 2011). Mignolo also reminds us to pay attention to the rewritten subjectivity from “communal and pluriversal futures” to “subjectivities of consumerism and individualism” (Silova, Rappleeye, & Auld, 2020, p. 4). He cites President Obama seeking a partnership with China as an example of rewesternization initiated by the United States government (Mignolo, 2011).

For example, in recent modern China, (re)westernization happened more than once, and this trajectory has never stopped or even slowed down in the present days. This is because being a traditional “non-western” country, China always has a long way to go in exploring, understanding, and practicing “new” systems in politics, economics, cultures, philosophies, and ideologies when the shock comes from the western world (Ma & Peng, 2009). The process of westernization in modern China might be traced back to the time of the late Qing dynasty when the church and modern schools, modern curriculum, and foreign teachers were introduced and flourished in this ancient land (Gu, 1994). The newly introduced knowledge and technologies of natural sciences and humanities as well as social systems of politics, governance, and education, were learned and implemented in China as the most advanced knowledge at that time (An & Du, 2009). It was also in that period when the concept of a teacher began to be interpreted as a profession in modern schools to establish the primary system of teacher education in China (Ma, 2003).

Following the shifts in political and economic focus and after announcing the “opening up” policy in 1978, China has eagerly followed the global trend of educational reforms, curriculum reforms, and teacher professionalization (Chapter 2), which is

another example of rewesternization. In this process, policies and practices from western countries (e.g., U.S., Japan, and European countries) were usually used as the model for setting up and reforming education in China. In other words, when the educational system in China was or is in the state of (re)westernization, Western hegemony is visible and pervasive in multiple aspects and at multiple levels, from how to interpret the concept of a teacher to what type of teacher education and teacher qualification is needed. In this process, capital also plays a significant role in planting westernized subjectivities into conceptualizing the notion of a teacher in modern schooling contexts (Chapter 2; Huang, Zhao, & Zhu, 2021).

Reorientation to the Left

The second choice or trajectory, reorientation to the Left, strongly criticizes the trend of rewesternization. Its ideological orientation —Marxism—conflicts with the goals of capitalism, but continues the logic of universality in terms of re-conquering the wealth back to achieve absolute material equality (Silova, Rappleye, & Auld, 2020). This trajectory explains the phenomenon of inequitable wealth distribution and differences in the global economic and political structure, competing with the westernization and rewesternization trends within the hegemonic framework of universality.

The most representative period of this trajectory in China is the early years of the People's Republic of China. Impacted by the ideological coloniality of the Soviet Union, social life and order appeared to be excessively left-leaning, and the educational system as well as national policies were also borrowed from socialist countries' (Chapter 2). They ambitiously claimed that teachers and schools should serve all people in the country

(Bai, 1950). By adding dominant political flavor and explicit ideological orientation, policies, practices, and individual circumstances related to the identity or the concept of a teacher were firmly antagonistic to Western ideologies and capitalism. The “absolute material equality” was embodied in education in terms of teachers being viewed as belonging to the people and the whole nation (Chapter 2).

Dewesternization

Dewesternization is a trajectory opposing Western modernity. Given the domination of Western knowledge, many Asian countries, including China, experienced cases of ideologies conflicting with and challenging Western structures directly. However, Mignolo (2011) states that, in fact, it does not radically oppose Westernization because in confronting the Western structures and epistemologies, dewesternization in China has aimed to reclaim the control of the global order rather than to challenge the global power structures. In other words, dewesternization does not seek a thorough rupture with the epistemological and systematic domination embedded in westernization and rewesternization, but rather aims to replace capitalism with another controlling and colonial power as the supreme and universal position in the hierarchy. Silova, Rapple, and Auld (2020) further explain,

China increasingly rejects Washington’s dictates as it grows more confident with its global leadership role, yet its resuscitation of Confucianism is largely a means of accelerating the move toward China taking control of the locus of global authority. That is, China seeks not to change the structure and hierarchy of a

global order created by Western powers and epistemologies, but simply assert control of it. (p. 5)

Mignolo (2011) concludes that the dewesternization is “not a movement of anti- but self-affirmation” (p. 47). That means it does not endeavor to break away from hierarchical epistemology but to take advantage of the mechanism of power hierarchy and covertly seize the hegemony in the global order.

As mentioned above and in Chapter 2, a typical example to epitomize this dewesternization choice in modern China would be the resuscitation of Confucianism and the self-affirmation of other Chinese traditional cultures, philosophies, as well as ideologies. For instance, in the second focus of the national top-down policies related to teachers after 1978 (Chapter 2, The Ethics and Morality of a Teacher), requirements highlighted teachers’ ethics and morality. Specifically, the core idea advocating that teachers should be a model of virtue for others – also embedded in officials’ rules and regulations (Ministry of Education, 2008) – originated from the expectations of “Shi” (士) in Confucianism. Besides, supervision and punishment of professional teachers’ individual lifestyles and speech also revealed the peculiar cultural and political expectations in China (Chapter 2, “Issues” Related to Teachers). Here, labeling Chinese traditional culture (or socially related phenomena in modern societies) as “dewesternization” is not to stigmatize the specific culture or ideology per se, but to identify the covert aim of doing so. In other words, Confucianism and the idea of regarding teachers as exemplars for others do not possess the attribute of opposing Western modernity. However, it reflects its opposition to the dominant Western

knowledge and the ambition to replace the (western) hegemony by the authority's conflicting attitudes at multiple levels – anteriorly criticizing Confucius and “Breaking the Four Olds Movement” (Bai, 2017) in the Great Cultural Revolution period (Chinese Communist Party History Society, 2019), and then in recent years, purposefully promoting Confucianism and other traditional Chinese cultures, including emphatically and continuously bringing it up in rules and policies, and foregrounding it in the time of modern China's rapid development and globalization.

Decolonization

In regard to decolonization, Mignolo (2011) contends that its central point is recognizing the multiplicities and “delinking” from the colonial power and its impacts. It is necessarily a “long-term processes involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power” (Tuhiwai, 1999, p. 98). Mignolo (2011) explains the decolonization trajectory by the essence in the concepts of objectivity and truth, expressing as “objectivity is in paratheses” (p. 52), signifying two levels of connotations. First, parentheses imply conditional, contextual, and limited truth and objectivity, which argues for the termination of universality in epistemology and ontology (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004). That is to say, the option of decolonization acknowledges that first, relative objectivity, rather than the absolute truth, is necessary to be explained and contextualized as acceptable and negotiable knowledge. And second, the incommensurable diversities of truth within a variety of epistemologies deny the ruling logic of sole truth in Western frameworks. Moreover, in this case, it leads to a

world in which multiple worlds coexist, which refutes the illusion created by the West that there is the “ultimate blueprint for the future” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 52).

The delinking process not only stresses the importance of the “content of the conversation” but also the terms of the conversation (Mignolo, 2007, p. 459) because the contents of replacing the previous -isms could be infinite in variety, but the hegemony of “modernity” in each attempt is not challenged and the hierarchical structure of knowledge, being, and understanding has not been opened up to plural alternatives. Here, he also mentions Chen’s argument (2010a) in the meaning of Asia divesting from Western coloniality,

By decolonization, I do not simply mean modes of anticolonialism that are expressed mainly through the building of a sovereign nation-state. Instead, decolonization is the attempt of the previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically and economically. (p. 3-4)

In other words, establishing a new foundation of an independent sovereign nation does not necessarily refer to the satisfactory end of decolonial struggles, or a distinct rupture from coloniality. It is more about reflectively envisaging the coherent connections between the present structures and the historical colonial mechanisms in terms of subtle embodiments in different social aspects, which offers the chance of “delinking.”

Spirituality

As one of the most vaguely described trajectories, the spiritual option seems to be more subjective and personalized. The spirituality in this option involves “the combination of religion, subjectivity, and knowledge” (Silova, Rappleye, & Auld, 2020, p. 5). Providing novel ways of being and knowing outside of Western modernity, the spiritual option “advocates decolonizing religion to liberate spirituality” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 62). Mignolo (2011) further points out that the constructive role of the spiritual option is “opening up horizons of life that have been kept hostage (that is, colonized) by modernity, capitalism, and the belief in the superiority of Western civilization” (p. 62). That means that the existence of various spiritual pursuits and desires themselves offers alternative possibilities and strength of stepping beyond Western domination. Other researchers (Silova, Rappleye, & Auld, 2020) attempted to clarify this term as an ontological option (p. 14) based on the consideration that objectivity and materiality were viewed as the ontological foundation in Western frameworks. They creatively assumed that “the spiritual option moves to open up new ontological possibilities, or if some prefer, metaphysical universes, ones they refuse a secular, materialist worldview as a starting and end point of research” (p. 14). Wu and Wenning (2016) further articulate the spiritual option into two culturally different educational movements in a “post-secular turn” (p. 565). In analyzing the Confucian education in China and the mindfulness movement in the West, the authors argue that the spiritual trajectory offers an entangled space for reexamining pedagogies creatively and “an impossible possibility” in this hybrid modernity of the educational field.

Coexistence and Intersections

Disagreeing with Schmitt's forecast that any of these options alone can hold this world (2003), Mignolo (2011) argued that multiple worlds could coexist. He asserts, "in the forthcoming decades, the world order will be decided in the struggles, negotiations, competitions, and collaborations between five different and coexisting trajectories—without a winner" (p. 33). In other words, the goal of outlining the five trajectories is not advocating that any one option is the best, correct, or excelling over the others (i.e., dewesternization is strictly superior to rewesternization, etc.) and assuming future superior positions in the global order. Instead, it emphasizes the existence of multiple coexisting systems in the contemporary world and reminds scholars to step out of the confines of mono-logic within one option. Some scholars (Gong, Jiang, & Silova, 2023; Neusiedl, 2021; Pashby, da Costa, & Sund, 2020; Reiter, 2018; Silova, Rappleye, & Auld, 2020) have echoed the idea of coexistence and applied this key argument to their efforts of re-envisioning education. For instance, Silova, Rappleye, and Auld (2020) analyzed and repositioned educational policy borrowing studies in the global map to introduce more distinctive voices and expand and enrich the debates. With the five research trajectories which are co-existing alongside each other while interacting with each other, they consider the nature of international policy borrowing and depict policy examples. They state, "Our primary goal in this chapter is not to advocate for one specific position or perspective, but instead to call attention to the plurality of projects unfolding in our contemporary world" (p. 4).

Other than pointing to the fact of coexisting multiplicities, Mignolo (2011) also contends that the process of unfolding each trajectory has the possibility of incorporating

typical scenarios in other trajectories into it. In Mignolo's (2011) words, "the trajectories and options are not closed systems" (p. 34), and the cultural contexts are comprised of the political and economic core of each option. For example, in earlier modern times, China temporarily discarded traditional Confucianism and adopted western technology, knowledge, and systems to strengthen the nation and to ascend into the global hierarchy dominated by the West. However, today's China seems to be revisiting Confucianism as a distinguishing cultural characteristic and rejecting the Western doctrine, which produces a hybrid and "fascinatingly complex cultural-pedagogical terrain" (Wu, 2019, p. 474). Those two distinctive moves appeared as if they were in contradictory trajectories (i.e., westernization and dewesternization), but in fact, the core of dewesternization, i.e., recapturing the dominance, has not changed. The core of the trajectory metamorphosizes into various articulations along with different contexts and demands of the time. By explicating the five trajectories as open systems, Mignolo (2011) blurs the binary boundaries between Westernization and other alternatives and highlights the importance of the historical, contextual, and geographical complexities during this process.

Connecting to Teachers

In this dissertation, this lens is applied in articulating and examining the complex contexts and presenting the multiplicity of options available to engage with the 'teacher' concept in order to set the premise of positioning the teacher at the crossroads of multiple forces and cultures. The complexity of the background and the multiplicity of connotations will be embodied in the following three ways. First, these five trajectories provide both a frame and analytic approach to identify each of the threads in the

entanglements of being a teacher. It enables and encourages this project to consider thoroughly and think critically and experimentally about each potential meaning of the notion of a teacher.

Specifically, the three trajectories, rewesternization, dewesternization, and reorientation to the Left are the three helpful lenses to reexamine the historical and modern traces of the changes in ideologies of selecting and training a teacher. As described in Chapter 2, the transformations of the teacher concept have experienced the processes of (re)westernization and dewesternization - sometimes contradictory but overlapping trajectories in modern China. Besides, when elaborating on the above three trajectories, I gave separate examples about the changed notion of a teacher in respective contexts. Meanwhile, the decolonial and spiritual/ontological options present open possibilities for the future in terms of reconfiguring the concept of a teacher in a more inclusive and diverse way, which is also the aim of this study. Therefore, instead of giving instances for those two choices here, the following three theoretical frames (Taoism, Confucianism, and posthumanism) will be elaborated as options within the decolonial and spiritual trajectories to provide alternative indigenous and posthumanist lenses for this goal. That means, I intend to position the conceptual frames, methodologies, and collected data of this study in the decolonial and ontological trajectories rather than propagating any one of them solely and dominantly.

More importantly, echoing the continuously interactive and overlapping effects and realities mentioned in the previous chapter, this frame also highlights the reality and the future where the coexistence of diverse forms of educational ideologies, education systems, and trajectories is an inevitable trend and phenomenon. In other words, the

discussion of five trajectories is not aimed at comparing in a hierarchical and hegemonic way (i.e., to pick one of the five choices), but to render more alternatives for defining teachers visible and feasible. Lastly, those trajectories essentially contextualize the changing meanings of the notion because the coexistence of diversity – both in connotations, forms, and beings at a micro level and in ontologies as well as epistemologies at a macro level – faithfully considers and reveals the reality. They shape the connotations of the notion of a teacher, and those connotations also constitute characteristic and dynamic trajectories.

Taoism: Dialectic View in A Correlative Cosmology

Taoism, as one of the indigenous Chinese philosophical perspectives in my research, will be portrayed in several fundamental philosophical concepts, consisting of the Tao, nature, and how the relationships between humans and nature are formulated in Taoist doctrines. For the sake of clarity of writing, those concepts will be separately described in the following pages, but they are interconnected and synonymic in essence when collectively constituting the wisdom in Taoism. Then, I review some of the literature which applies Taoist philosophy and its implied correlative cosmology into introspections of educational concepts and learning process and attempts to inspire the connections between my research on the concept of teacher and the Taoist perspective. In general, Taoism expresses a dialectic and dynamic view in a correlative and holistic cosmology.

The Tao

Tao Te Ching (道德经, Laozi, 2011) begins with the words, “The Tao can be known, but it may be not the well-known truth. Things may be named, but names are not the things. In the beginning, heaven and earth are nameless; When named, all things become known” (ibid., Chapter 1). The term “Tao” (Dao, 道) can be regarded as the core concept of Taoism. Although the connotations of “Tao” as a concept were rich and extensive beforehand, it did not touch the level of ontology. However, since Laozi, “Tao” in his ideological system was not only an extended meaning of “Tao” used before but also a salient breakthrough in philosophical systems and worldviews. Rather than involving conceptual attributes such as will, fate, and personality in explaining Tao, “Tao” in Laozi’s opinion is the origin of the world and the unique concept used to express the world noumenon (Wu et al., 2018), which belongs to the category of metaphysical ontology (Liu, 2005). Laozi argues, “Tao produces one (the universe); One produces two (of Yin and Yang, 阴阳); Two produces three (Heaven, Earth, and human, 天地人); Then varied and born the universe of all things” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 42). In short, “Tao” is a mixed origin ahead of the birth of the universe and the fundamental and ultimate basis for the existence of all things. It is silent and empty, but independent and inexhaustible in circularly running. Heaven and earth were shaped due to “Tao”; all beings and nonbeings came from “Tao,” and human beings were born as a result of “Tao.” It is infinite – with no beginning or end.

In addition to the ontological root of all phenomena, in Laozi’s philosophical system, “Tao” is also the ultimate destination of all things. It refers to a general process

of the natural growth and development of all kinds of everything instead of elucidating one certain kind or special phenomena of many kinds. In this sense, he argues that “Tao,” which all things depend on to live, is the law of things developing, changing, and perishing. All things in the world obtain their forms, performances, and functions from “Tao” and their behavior is also guided by the law of “Tao.” Laozi (2011) says,

Tao gives birth to all things and virtue nurtures them. Although all things take various forms, the environment shapes all those forms. All things respect Tao. The reason why Tao is respected is that Tao grows all things without interfering, and virtue breeds all things without dominating them. They all occur naturally.
(Chapter 51)

“Tao” seems mysterious and powerful in Laozi’s description. It can be transmitted but not received and can be obtained but not seen. It cannot be observed or distinguished, but only be felt, experienced, and understood in an uncertain way (Chen, 2008). In short, “Tao” furthers Laozi’s explanation and understanding of the nature of the universe by being expressed as the law of the change of things. That is, in his ideological and philosophical system, Tao is the essential nature of the universe, both existing and transforming.

Laozi also regards “Tao” as one of the “four great forces” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 4) in the universe, including heaven, the earth, and human beings. Thus, the relationship between them should be “humans following the laws and characteristics of the earth; the earth imitates the heaven; the heaven operates on the basis of the Tao, and the Tao is natural, and Tao imitates nature” (ibid., Chapter 25). Specifically, it states that Tao in

human society, including governance, education, enlightenment, and personal cultivation, should follow the Tao of heaven in the universe, otherwise it equates to self-destruction (Wu, 2018). Scholar Hou (Hou, 1979) also commented that despite the concepts of heaven, earth, human, and nature being ambiguously explained here, the relationship of human social order following the natural order of things is explicit. The relationship between the four forces will be elaborated on in more detail later.

As the rule of guiding everything, Laozi explains the operation of Tao within the principles of dialectical views. He uses several simple examples to express the dialectical principles, “Being and not-being grow out of one another; The difficulty and the easiness complement each other; And the longness and the shortness manifest themselves in comparison” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 2). Laozi illustrates the laws of Tao as “the cyclic and reiterative movements and transformations. The role of Tao is subtle and weak. All things under heaven arise from You (有, visible matters) which in turn springs from Wu (无, invisible matters)” (ibid., Chapter 40). These complex (and perhaps confusing) sentences contain two complex folds of meanings. First, everything within the framework of Tao moves and always develops in the opposite direction. That is, things exist in the state of mutual conversions of opposites rather than being static and invariable, which implies another sophisticated application of the dialectical view (Che, 1962). Laozi (2011) recognizes the contradictions in society and in nature, and he contends that the opposite sides of these contradictions depend on each other and transform from/to each other. He proposes a series of opposing categories, such as there is and there is not, ugly and beautiful, high and low, hard and soft, and here and there. The transformations within the opposites are driven by the internal forces, a.k.a., the internal contradiction of opposites

rather than external forces. He gives an example of “Misfortune lying where happiness lies, and happiness lying where misfortune lies” (ibid., Chapter 58).

Secondly, it emphasizes the cyclical changing processes of Tao and of everything following Tao. Everything in its complexity would eventually return to its original state which is a state of inactivity and quietness. Laozi depicts, “The return of all things to their source of life is called quietness, which is also a returning to one’s true self” (ibid., Chapter 16). The above descriptions of the laws of Tao refer to the characteristics of Tao acting on all things, in terms of weak and quiet but prosperous functions. The role of Tao is weak, but the weak Tao enables all things in the world to live and flourish in their own time and space without pressure. The state of all things following Tao in prosperous being, is therefore summarized as “Tao is natural, and Tao imitates nature” (ibid., Chapter 25). In other words, Tao advocates for returning to the simplest state and abandoning the “artificial wisdom,” complicated skills, and strict moral standards to live simply and naturally (ibid., Chapter 19). It emphasizes the teaching from nature, which is to respect and conform to the natural disposition and order of things, and to promote things in an unaffected developing state (Chen, 2008).

Therefore, Laozi further proposes one practical and political methodology according to Tao imitating nature, “taking actions through inaction” (Wu Wei, 无为, Laozi, 2011, Chapter 37). Based on the idea of mutual conversions of opposites (Wu et al, 2018), taking action can be as ineffective as without actions, while taking no action can also be recognized as one effective reaction. To explain this idea, Laozi gives a political example of rulers frequently setting up various laws and governances, but the complicated and extensive political actions often lead to bringing disasters, concerns, and

even deaths to the people. Such promising action-takings might cause the loss of people's support and the whole nation, which refers to the "emptiness" (Wu, 无) for the governor. However, inaction does not mean not doing anything at all. Instead, it highlights the role of Tao in this process. That is, it is inappropriate to take action recklessly or wildly regardless of the natural laws. Following the Tao, humans should realize what they ought to do and what they ought not to do and refuse forced interventions. The reasoning behind this is that the harder it is to endeavor, pursue, and hold the concerned thing, the easier it is to lose it because people care and control it too much and intervene in its natural changes in an unnatural and anti-Tao way. In general, returning to the essence of life, the true state of nature such as the "infant" state, is the ideal state of Tao which imitates nature.

Nature

Another crucial question is, what is "nature" in Laozi's philosophy? According to the Western traditional epistemological philosophy, "nature" in modern times refers to the natural world that exists outside human beings, in contrast to the human world (Ducarme & Couvet, 2020). Related to but not identical to the Western understanding of "nature," in Taoism the category of nature is not only an entity concept but also an abstract philosophical thought. On the one hand, similar to the Western orientation, connotations of "nature" in Taoism involve exploring everything existing in the universe and the earth, including the natural world from the concrete perspective. But on the other hand, another implication of "nature" in Taoism is to consider nature as one type of ultimate goal of conforming to "Tao." Zhan (2006) explained that anything along with its

own unique characteristics can be named “nature,” and Liu (1996) also interpreted “nature” as “[beings] they originally are this; they ought to be like this; they usually are these performances; the forms are taken for granted” (p. 34).

In this sense, the “law of nature” is the fundamental guidance for all things to follow, including human beings, so that their most perfect state of existence and selves are naturally achieved and performed. Nonetheless, Laozi points out that driven by interests, human beings are inclined to lose their natural essence (Zhou & Li, 1998). To re-include human beings into the natural categories, humans ought to approach nature and follow the Tao implemented in heaven and on earth, without interfering with it in a compulsory and arbitrary way. Back to “Tao is natural, and Tao imitates nature” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 25), Laozi implies two-fold meanings of this “nature” related to beings: (a) the heaven, the earth, humans, and everything in space between the heaven and earth constitute a unified and inseparable whole; (b) the development of any beings or non-beings in this space cannot escape from the constraints of the Tao of nature, and especially, humans ought not to act against the law of nature (Zhou & Li, 1998). For instance, Laozi describes, “How leisurely the best rulers are governing. He rarely gives orders, and when things get successfully achieved, his people would say, ‘That's just the natural way we are’” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 17). The “natural way” here is Laozi’s appreciation and affirmation of the kind of governance which exists without interfering with and conforming to nature.

Relationship Between Humans and Nature

From the two folds of connotations on explaining “nature” above, Laozi’s relational view on the connections between human beings, other beings, and existing everything (living and nonliving) is manifested. Specifically, the relational framework can be generalized as “harmony between human and nature” (Hu, 2016, p. 24) and “Tianrenheyi” (天人合一, Zhao, 2019b, p. 1107), stating that humans and nature are integral one. Laozi regards humans from the perspective of unifying natural substances in terms of classifying humans into natural entities as well as explaining the human world by comparison with other natural substances of the universe. In other words, similar to heaven, earth, and Tao, humans are independent natural substances as well (Shu, 1980).

Zhuangzi (Zhuangzi & Sun, 2007) further elaborates on the relationality between humans and nature. He contends that the harmonious relationship between nature and humans is inseparable and both are invincible to each other. That is to say, nature and humans are not mutually opposed and surpass each other, because humans, the same as other creatures, are differently equal in this world. He says, “Heaven and earth are coexisting with me, and all things and I are in one” (Zhuangzi, 1983, Chapter on The Unity of Things). In his doctrines, he emphasizes the unity and inseparability of the universe and humans, but meanwhile, also reminds neither heaven nor the human is transcendental to the other. Tianrenheyi, the intimate-related but anti-transcendental relation between heaven and humans, potentially exists in scenarios where human actions conform appropriately with nature and Tao. However, this does not mean it is required for human beings to be slaves of nature. Instead, humans ought to be “taking advantages of objects but not to be enslaved by them” in terms of “conforming to the nature of all

things in the world in light of six climates' transformations and roaming in the infinite space" (Chen & Zhuangzi, 2016, p. 25). He yearns to "be independent to heaven, the earth, and spirits, but not despising or condemning other things" (ibid, p. 59). This reflection eliminates the abstruse mysteriousness of superhuman power's interventions in human affairs and enables humans to become the independent creator of their own destinies. Meanwhile, this positive and detached view on the unity of humans and nature constitutes the natural basis and intrinsic characteristics of the "immortal individuals" (Long, 2014, p. 15) in Taoism, and thus defines the specific criteria of immortal individuals' behaviors (Chen & Zhuangzi, 2016, p. 168).

More than illustrating the different equality of relationships between humans and heaven, as well as among creatures, this interconnectedness also reflects the multiplicity and diversity of various creatures. Although Taoism asserts that Tao should be the law for everything to follow, Tao is intangibly disparate for respective creatures. There is no one specific and fixed universal model of Tao for people to imitate and practice. For example, Zhuangzi (Zhang, 1986; Zhuangzi, 1983) tells an enlightening story on universal standards,

Nie asked Wang, 'Do you know the common standard of things?'

Wang answered, 'Let me ask you first. Human beings will feel pain and even become hemiplegic if they sleep in the wet mire, but what about loaches? Humans always get scared when they climb up and live in trees, but what about apes and monkeys? Whose dwelling should be considered as the common standard one?' (Zhuangzi, 1983, p. 34)

Zhuangzi intends to reject the ontological and epistemological universality through the story, and also contends that all things in the universe are richly different and ever-changing. There is no Tao that can be applied and implemented as the only and ultimate one (Zhou, 2017).

As mentioned above, the idea of “harmony between human and nature” and “Tianrenheyi” affirm an ideal unified state combining “others, nature and I in compatible one,” which requires human agency and practice. However, Zhuangzi expands this idea by illustrating how the harmonious convergence between nature and humans is shaped in a dynamic process asking for mutual respect, diversity, and coordination. In general, Zhuangzi recognized the essential differences between nature, humans, and other multiplicities from the original unity of the universe at that time but attempted to pursue the potential harmony and compatibility between nature and man in this division.

To sum up, the essence of nature within Taoism is not depicting a savage condition that is anti-culture and anti-civilization. It involves the highest value inscribed in humans’ ultimate concern for the relationship between human beings and the natural universe (Yang, 1996). Hence, the Taoist concepts of nature and Tao also express hopes and expectations for group relations, namely relationships between living conditions of various kinds of human groups. Finally, it cares about the future existence and development of human beings (Liu, 2009; Liu & Zheng, 2013). Again, Taoism presupposes that all things operate according to interrelated rules, and human actions are not independent of nature but interconnected with it. In contrast to the Western subject-object dualism and anthropocentrism, Taoist holistic and “correlative cosmology” (Zhao,

2019b, p. 1113) resonates with some modern ecological ethics (Escobar, 2011; Haraway, 2016b; Stengers, 2012) in viewing the world, not as fragmentally divided into independent subjects and objects, but interdependent where the boundaries between the human world, non-human beings' world, and non-beings' world are not apparently clear (Lei, 2001). In particular, everything in the world exists in an interwoven way, and substances within this space are in the relationship of interactions and interdependence. As one subsystem of the whole, human society depends on its dynamic balance, and maintaining the harmonious relationship between nature and human beings is necessary.

Literature on Education and Teachers

This correlative cosmology of Taoism has been applied in the educational field to bring fresh air into the discourses filled with modern western ontology and epistemology in terms of re-envisioning concepts and ways of being and educating in the Anthropocene. For instance, Zhao (2019b) applies the concept of Tianrenheyi as one traditional Chinese person-making education and a correlative cosmology to convincingly challenge and criticize now foundational anthropocentric logic (Gong, Jiang, & Silova, 2023). Rather than using westernized frameworks, Zhao (2019b) furthers the explanation of correlative cosmology with Roger Ames's own interpretations of ancient Chinese concepts in terms of conceptualizing humans as being relational. By introducing the ancient Chinese cosmology of "qi" (ibid., p. 1113), she argues that the correlative cosmology and Tianrenheyi transform individual persons into relational roles within their situations, and posits individuals in their communities temporally as well as spatially so that to achieve the ecological consonant state of co-creating and co-existing

among beings, natural and social worlds. Another article by Zhao (2019a) inserts the dialectic view of Tao in the discussion on learning. She argues that “onto-un-learning” can be regarded as one “non-individualistic and non-anthropocentric form of study” (Zhao, 2019a, p. 262) in Taoism to break the western binary discourse of strictly dividing and opposing “learning,” “study,” and “unlearning,” with her own doctoral spiraling learning experience.

The concepts of Tao, nature, and the correlative cosmology in Taoism are related to my research on reconceptualizing the notion of a teacher in the following two ways. First, as described, the notions of Tao and nature inspire a natural, intertwined, and dynamic way of being and knowing, which then triggers a series of transformations in examining the learning process, the definition of education, and the concept of a teacher. In particular, given that everything has its own Tao and natural laws of existence, the modern definition of education and schooling appears to be extremely narrow in space, time, as well as species at the macro level. Besides, the significance of modern schooling seems not as impressive as what modern educational systems claim. Education and learning are no longer constrained in classrooms through textbooks and technologies in the “compulsory education period,” and knowledge is not confined to scientific subjects, theories, and methods anymore. That means, education happens all the time. The concept of teachers, in this case, will also be broadly enlarged to other categories, such as the Tao of the seasons, the life experiences, the dialectic law of nature, and even the learner themselves, rather than merely referring to a social profession and personnel with national certifications.

Furthermore, the Taoist framework, offering the perspective of correlative cosmology, reminds us of the interconnected relationship between humans and nature. This cosmology attempts to heal the binary conceptual fracture between humans and non-humans, and so includes non-human beings in other worlds into the concept of teachers, which might trigger teachers to reflect on their identities and profession. The argument that “Tao imitates nature” and “Tianrenheyi” elucidates humans, other beings, and non-beings sharing similar laws of living challenges the common view of human exceptionalism and supremacy or irreplaceability of human teachers in modern schooling and even in the whole education experience. It also alerts the teachers from the pedagogical perspective to (re)define themselves and teaching activities. For example, what and how should teachers offer students in terms of learning to respect and keep open the possibilities of other worlds’ existence? Beyond humans, who or what else could act as teachers? Other than the so-called “science” and “truth,” what other neglected knowledges and ways of being are worth being taught as knowledge? How to show the correlative connections in teaching? What would the seemingly “binary” relationship between teacher and student look like in the framework of Taoism?

This ontological transformation, thus, leads to innovations in methodologies of redefining the teacher notion. The interconnected relationship between humans and nature asks us to experience the concept of a teacher in other worlds, learn from more-than-human beings, and blur the boundaries between human and non-human teachers, rather than merely facing the human teacher in the classroom. It also suggests that the way of approaching the teacher concept in research is not only limited to studying the

teaching profession and its related literature and data, but extends to every site where being, knowing, and learning is naturally happening.

Confucianism: An Integral, Relational, and Harmonious View

Confucianism is another Chinese ancient philosophy that imposes profound influence on Chinese ontology, epistemology, and worldview. As I described in the historical literature review, Confucianism also shapes the concept of ‘teacher’ and individuals’ perception of the figure of intellectuals in Chinese culture to a great extent and continues to impact today’s morality requirements on professional teachers together with other forces. Having recognized this, however, I need to clarify that applying Confucianism in this study does not aim at revitalizing Confucianism as one dominant ideology for the dewesternization purpose (Mignolo, 2011). It will not be employed and appear as one perfect, preferred, and superior choice over the others in reimagining the concept of a teacher. Instead, it is considered in this study as one subchoice on the premise of decolonization and spiritual enlightenment. Bringing Confucianism into the conversation aims to provide another indigenous and alternative lens, equally with others, and also to explore diverse ways of interpreting and applying Confucianism. In other words, the emphasis here is not on reinforcing and justifying the existing cultural and philosophical dominance in Confucianism, but on re-assembling multiple philosophies and engaging with the entanglements among them.

Here, some Confucian concepts will be brought up to illuminate the integrity and harmony of the teacher concept at both individual levels as well as in relationship with “others.” Similar to Taoism, the concepts of relationality, harmony, self-cultivation, and

the practical “Ge wu zhi zhi” (格物致知) are inseparable from one another, and they constitute the system of Confucianism together. Last, some educational literature will be reviewed as examples of using the above Confucian concepts and logic in innovative studies. The section will end up with its strengths in assisting my research on reexamining the notion of ‘teacher.’ In general, Confucianism in this research offers an integral, relational, and harmonious view to re-consider the concept of a teacher in multiple worlds.

Relationality

Relationality is a basic but significant concept in Confucianism in interpreting individuals, relationships, and social systems. Confucianism holds that grouping and relating are the essential attributes of human beings in explaining individuals. For instance, benevolence (Ren) is the core of Confucius’ thought, and the most representative argument on benevolence was “Benevolence, is loving others” (Ren zhe ai ren, 仁者爱人, Mengzi & Fang, 2010, Chapter 28). This statement shows its emphasis on the relationship between people and community, or in other words, the relationality among human beings. Another example would be of Confucius (2016) seldomly discussing individuals and the “self” singularly, but always positing individuals and self in certain community relations. Referring to the exemplary individuals (i.e., Junzi) mentioned before and villains, Confucius described them in a relational and comparative way (Confucius, 2016) in terms of individuals with higher or lower social status, or with noble or despicable moralities.

Another ancient Confucian philosopher, Mencius, argues that the greatest pleasure of human life is to have one's family members alive and healthy, with the pleasure coming from the maintenance of the interpersonal relations within the family (Mengzi & Fang, 2010). He further extended the pleasure of relational retention to a macro level where the country is governed in a proper way and the society develops in harmony (Jiang, 2007). Xunzi (2015), as a later developer of Confucianism, expanded the discussion of relationality to other species. He believed that although human beings are negligible in confronting the powerful natural forces, they would survive as a group by being interdependent with human beings as a group and on other groups of species. Conversely, if a group does not exist, human beings will not exist. In those explanations of the Confucian concepts and ideas, certain social relationships are the necessary contexts of positioning and analyzing individuals, and Confucian philosophies were also constructed through the maintaining of harmonious relationships of communities.

Hall and Ames (1997) have similar observations on relationality in analyzing "self" as well, and they accordingly generalize the methodology of contextualization in comparing cultures. They start with the "self" to illustrate the relational characteristics of both individuals and others,

In the Confucian model where the self is contextual, it is a shared consciousness of one's roles and relationships. One's 'inner' and 'outer' (neiwai) selves are inseparable. Here, one is self-conscious, not in the sense of being able to isolate and objectify one's essential self, but in the sense of being aware of oneself as a locus of observation by others. ... This involves an image of self-determined by

the esteem with which one is regarded in the community, an image of self that is captured in the language of face and shame. (p. 26)

In other words, through the lens of relationality and interconnection, the image of the self and individuals is shaped by his or her social relations and social roles which, in reverse, also consist of individuals who self-cultivate and self-evaluate with those relational expectations in the society. In differentiating the seemingly binary concepts of “self” and “others,” Confucianism proposed that it is important to view them not as two controversial opposites, but as “mutually entailing and interdependent correlatives” (Hall and Ames, 1997, p. 27). Confucius implies that the “self” is constituted by the others and the relation between those two is intrinsic, which suggests that the “self” and “others” are becoming with/to each other (Hall and Ames, 1997; Wu, 2013). Distinctive from modern Western thought on the isolation and dualism of “self” and “others,” this relational consideration connects individuals and society in a rhizomatic and intimate net, and both shape each other.

Harmony in Relations and Self-cultivation

Harmony is another core concept of Confucian philosophy in viewing social interpersonal relationships. The unique details of everything in the world are composed of different elements, which require cooperating, merging, and coordinating with each other in this process. Mengzi (Mengzi & Fang, 2010, Chapter 1) says, “the right time is not as good as the right place, and the right place is not as good as harmony and unity with people,” arguing that the harmony in the group is the most perfect principle. In the view of pre-Qin Confucianism, harmony in family interpersonal relationships mainly

includes the father-son relationship, brothers' relationship, and husband-wife relationship (ibid., 2010). Harmony in society refers to the interpersonal relations in a certain social structure (Jiang, 2007). The most important aspects would be the harmonious relationship between the emperor and his courtiers within the political and official system, and the harmonious coexistence between the masses. Jiang (2007) also summarizes that the "Five Constants" (Wuchang, 五常, Liu, 2010, p. 188) in Confucianism are the basic principles for individuals building harmonious interpersonal relationships in the society, including benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and honesty (Ren, Yi, Li, Zhi, Xin, 仁义礼智信, Dai, 2012).

However, one kind of harmony was fundamentally highlighted as the basis of the above kinds of harmonies, which is the inner harmony within human individuals. It consists of two levels: (1) harmony between humans and nature; and (2) harmony between the body and mind (Wang, 2007). The first level is analogous to the previously mentioned concept of Tianrenheyi in Taoism, arguing that humans are a part of nature and they are in symbiosis with and reciprocal with each other. To avoid repetition, I will only mention the idea briefly here. Tang (2006) pointed out that because heaven (nature) in ancient times had great influences on human beings in terms of its link with agricultural production, it was necessary for people to observe, listen to, and keep consistent with the laws of heaven and nature to gain a prosperous harvest. Hence, humans should treat nature, which was represented by Tian, the four seasons, local conditions, and every other being, with benevolence, love, and respect. Moreover, Confucianism also stresses that human activities should follow the natural laws of life,

such as “obtaining things according to appropriate time” and “respecting other natural beings” (Confucius, 2016, Chapter Shuer). For example, Confucius (2016) emphasized the importance of avoiding catching all the fish in one net and not shooting the nest while hunting birds in order to preserve sustainability for humans themselves.

The second level, harmony between the body and mind by self-cultivation, presupposes that a harmonious society and relationship can only be realized when the social ethical norms are internalized and transformed into people’s subjective moral consciousness. That is, the self-directed inner and outer cultivation (Xiushen, 修身) contributes to the harmony of the body and mind within individuals, and then the harmony in relationships. Self-cultivation, interpreted as one type of self-reflection, is one crucial effort for each individual, especially for Confucian intellectuals. The core of the self-cultivation theory is benevolence inside and propriety outside (Chen, 2011). Benevolence represents the inner cultivation of virtue, and propriety refers to outer behaviors in line with norms. Hence, harmony between the body and mind embodies the self-cultivated whole combining the inner benevolent mind and external mannered manifestations (Wang, 2007).

In the concept of self-cultivation, Confucianism stresses the “self” in introspection instead of external learning from others or forcing requirements from the outside. In other words, the natural efforts from the inner self vitally facilitate the harmony of individuals. For instance, Confucius (2016, Chapter Xueer) summarizes that he self-examines himself several times a day on “devotion in planning, honesty with friends, and reviewing on knowledge.” He also describes his own self-reflection requirement whether he meets people with or without noble virtues, “When you see a

wise individual, you could reflect on keeping abreast with him and learning from him; If you meet a villain, you should reflect on yourself to examine whether I have similar shortcomings” (Confucius, 2016, Chapter Liren). In his view, self-reflection and moral introspection are spiritual cultivations and activities to achieve self-harmony in individuals’ bodies and minds.

Other than spiritual cultivation, another outer aspect of the harmonious unity of body and mind is the ability to practice and experience it personally, which is also the ultimate purpose of self-reflection. Different from Taoism which asserts non-secular worldviews in terms of “inaction,” emphasizing the unity of knowledge learning, and action as an important feature of Confucian moral cultivation. Confucius instructs, “Be swift in deeds and cautious in words” (ibid., Chapter Liren), arguing that learning happens in interactions, and it is merely the method, while the ultimate goal of learning through actions is practicing, to improve individual moralities and decency. Later Confucianist Wang Yangming (1472-1529) in the Ming Dynasty criticized the sequential division of knowing and practicing and instead proposed the theory of combining knowledge and practices in one (Zhi xing he yi, 知行合一, Wang, 1992). What he underlines is the harmonious consistency in each individual between learning and acting, as well as knowing and being in morality (Dong, 2013). That means, his propositions attach great importance to the harmonious shaping process of the individual body and mind and pursue the interdependent unity of spiritual and material developments (Shao & Liu, 2005). Besides, in regard to concrete practices, harmony also reflects on the unity between individual self-cultivation and achievement in terms of being officials and demonstrating social success. This echoes the previous point that individual harmony is

viewed as the basis of social harmony because the process of self-cultivation and reflection both create and contribute to the harmonizing of individual success and society (Chen & Mou, 2001). To put it simply, self-cultivation, self-achievement realizing, and the harmonious relationship in society are considered as a whole while concentrating on individual persons.

Study Things and Know the Reasoning (Ge wu zhi zhi, 格物致知)

“Studying or observing the phenomena to learn the nature of things” (Ge wu zhi zhi, 格物致知, Wang, 2006a, Daxue Chapter 1) as both theoretical and methodological framework pushes the idea on harmonizing humans’ self-cultivation, the nature, and the society to an additional significant layer. Zhu Xi (1130-1200) develops the doctrine of studying things’ phenomena, asserting that reasoning, or logic, exists in everything in spite of their size and quality. This theory consists of two inseparable and interwoven elements, studying things (Ge wu, 格物) and knowing the nature of things (Zhi zhi, 致知). It is worth mentioning that he regards those two as coexisting reiterative elements. That is, knowing is in learning, and learning is in knowing, without priority in time (Zhu, 1983a).

His category of “things” to be learned is extremely broad, including all things accessible by humans’ senses (Zhu & Li, 1993, p. 283). It contains (1) everything vivid, tangible, and perceptible to humans in the universe, from grass, trees, and insects to the heaven, the earth, and “Taiji” (太极, *ibid.*, p. 284); (2) every matter consisting of all natural and social phenomena, such as moral psychological activities, moral cultivations, and practices; (3) the places where the reasoning appears, because things are the external

embodiments of implicit reasoning and laws and reasoning is the foundation of phenomena (Zhu & Li, 1993). Thus, from Zhu Xi's perspective, studying "things" contains not only obtaining knowledge from books or teachers, but also learning from natural material entities such as plants and trees, the sun and moon, mountains and rivers in the world, and social interactions such as moral cultivation and practices, the human ethics and social norms, as well as some subjective thoughts rising from individuals' own mind. He emphasizes that when people examine their thoughts in their own minds, their thoughts are also viewed as the object of people reflecting and learning from. However, when it comes to the action of "self-reflection," it turns to the later process of "getting to know," i.e., learning and mastering, rather than merely observing and inquiring about the phenomena.

Zhu Xi further proposes that the result of starting to study and observe phenomena is knowing. Knowing refers to mastering the knowledge, covering the capability to know, understand, and learn knowledge, and also the obtained knowledge which includes sensible knowledge and the knowledge of virtue (Zhu & Li, 1993). The scope of experiential and comprehensive knowledge is wide, including not only the perceptions from humans' sensing in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, but also the rational knowledge of thinking and reasoning. The knowledge of virtue is the inherent moral knowledge in mind, cultivated by the society, culture, and family contexts. The ideal state of knowing, he argues, is named "sudden and thorough connections" (Huo ran guan tong, 豁然贯通, Zhu, 1983b, p. 320) which would be a non-linear accumulation of continuous intuitive thinking in multiple spaces and time. Chen (2010b) commented

that the “sudden and thorough connection” is not only a creation of meaning and knowledge but also creative thinking for the integral grasp of logic.

In addition, for the methods of knowing and mastering knowledge, Zhu Xi (Zhu & Li, 1993) puts the method of analogy forward for interpreting integral recognitions. He believed that although each entity has its own principle and logic, it is not necessary to exhaust learning from all things and phenomena in the world. Instead, countless logics come from one source of reasoning which can be revealed by exhausting one logic within the entity and analogizing it to the others (Yang, 2015). Here, similar to the concept of Tao in Taoism, the one source analogous reasoning implies the shared and interconnected features and logics embedded in diverse species. This also mirrors the reason why the perfect state of knowing happens out of a sudden: One nature of things is learned and known; the general reasoning of others might appear.

In short, Zhu Xi’s theory of “studying or observing the phenomena to learn the nature of things” concerns the attempts to recognize general reasoning and logic through studying and speculating outside or inside objects. It reflects the integrity of the universe in terms of nature, human beings, other beings, and non-beings coexisting in symbiosis with each other, because the logic embedded in the entity studied is interlinked and inter-transformable with the reasoning of humans and the essence of everything. The deep bond of the diverse reasoning of things is quite similar to the Tao in Taoism. It is apparent that the goal of studying one entity is not to acquire real scientific knowledge or to perceive the world as objective knowledge, but to have a thorough insight into materials that simultaneously mirror the inner logic of humans.

The intellectualist tradition of technical and practical rationality in the West tempts us to view the world as an external object in relation to the researcher epistemologically. That means the researcher is a priori, certain, and rational subjective existence whose main task is to analyze the objective world outside, targeting the researched object. Such cultural practice of knowing inevitably implies the dualistic opposition between the researcher and researched, subject and object. However, Confucianism insists on the world view of “the unity of humans and nature,” insisting that individuals are endowed with sacred status equal to others as a whole. According to this, through self-cultivation (self-reflection and examination of the cognitive subject), the individuals and their self-cultivation unite themselves with everything in the universe and ignite the hope of growth and vitality of everything in the world. Confucianism advocates the unity of humans and nature and begins to understand the world from the understanding of self or one entity, thus challenging the dualism in Western epistemology in terms of technology and practical rationalism.

Literature in Educational Studies

The concepts of relationality, harmony, and self-cultivation or self-learning have been discussed by scholars in the education field to sketch perspectives beyond the western horizon and articulate “interdependent futures” between worlds (Silova, Rapple, & You, 2020, p. 4). For example, You’s recent research (2020) illustrates the process of self-cultivation and the harmony between humans and nature in this process as another ontological interpretation of the learning experience relative to the dominant constructivist epistemology. By giving concrete pedagogical and curricular examples, she

argues that learning experiences should not be divided into binary categories which have been critiqued by some Confucianists mentioned above, such as practice and knowledge, theory and experience, rational/organized objective knowledge, and perceptual/emotional experience. Instead, in Confucianism, the process of learning is experiential self-cultivation. It is woven based on and within individuals' dynamic surroundings and senses to experience the essence of harmony "via knowing the world and transforming students' ways of living in the world consequently" (You, 2020, p. 79). She explains the experience of learning in the following way:

Learning should be circumstanced in terms of lived ethical roles and characterized by the sense and meaning of morality. It moves beyond developing cognitive and rational capabilities as a priority but values the cultivation of sensitivity to and appreciation of living-in-this-world with all nature in harmony. (p. 79)

Rather than following the dominant western philosophy, this reinterpretation of learning experience and pedagogical practices through Confucius emphasizes the participatory and coordinative characteristics of learning experience in pedagogy, and advocates another religious as well as aesthetic way of conceiving and imagining the world, to urge deeper decolonization in the educational field.

Moreover, Sim & Chow (2019) use the terms harmony, criticality, and relationality in the Confucian framework to break the stereotype of teachers' passive roles and reexamine citizenship education in Singapore. They aim to challenge the western shallow interpretation of the seeming passivity of citizenship educators for

collectivist goals and instead, offer alternative attention to the Asian distinct features of citizenship education by analyzing teachers' discourses and thematic values in their unique cultural contexts. Another scholar, Kim (2009), also applies the concept of self-cultivation as a Confucius version of "lifelong learning" (p. 1) to provide a different perspective other than a neoliberal and western framework. He contends that capitalism emphasizes economic individualism in lifelong learning in terms of regarding life as capital success and gains, while the view of value in Confucianism involves noble moralities and virtues on individuals, thus enabling an alternative chance for re-envisioning "self," success, and relations in "mutually flourishing and co-existing" worlds (p. 2). Besides, in order to offer another alternative conceptualization of standardized international assessment of capacity (i.e., PISA), Tan (2019) proposes that self-cultivated virtues in daily life could be perceived as "a Confucian notion of competence" to point out the "interpersonal, cultural, and ethical dimensions of competence" in Confucianism which are neglected in global assessments.

Connecting to Teachers

The above-mentioned Confucian notions such as relationality, harmony, self-cultivation, Ge wu zhi zhi, and related Confucian ideas in this general framework assist in reconceptualizing teachers in multiple aspects, especially in both theoretical and practical levels in this research. First, the frame of relationality places ideas, concepts, as well as social roles and beings, such as teachers, in its local and cultural contexts, offering an interactive and dynamic lens. In Hall and Ames's (1997) words, it refers to the "art of

contextualization” (p. 40) represented by Confucian intellectuals. They explain “contextualization” in the cultural and comparative analysis as follows,

The variety of specific contexts defined by particular family relations, or sociopolitical orders, constitute the fields focused by individuals who are in turn shaped by the field of influences they focus. *Ars contextualis*, as a practical endeavor, names that peculiar art of contextualization that allows the focal individual to ally herself with those contexts that she will constitute and that in turn will constitute her. . . . The art of contextualization involves the production of harmonious correlations of the myriad unique details (*wan wu*) that make up the world. (ibid., p. 40)

In other words, relationality implies that the “art of contextualization” is necessary for re-considering the concept of a ‘teacher’ when the teacher is regarded as a cultural identity, career, role, as well as ways of being in modern Chinese society. That also means that the notion of a teacher can be explored in more diverse ways in this research because for each individual and being within its unique contexts, the perception of ‘teacher’ is shaped by and emerges in various experiences differently, which again, constitutes disparate individuals as different teachers vice versa.

In addition, the notion of harmony declares the blended unity of multiple elements, beings, and worlds. According to the above illustrations, the state of harmony requires mutual mingling at individual, social, and other-than-human levels. The teacher-related focus here is, what does the identity of a ‘teacher’ mean at the three levels respectively? For instance, harmony in the relations with other worlds and beings

suggests the need to seek common ground while shelving differences (i.e., harmony without uniformity and difference without conflict). In other words, the state of harmony cannot be realized by being blind and isolated from differences. It instead asks to include elements, beings, and ideas that have been usually insulated from the category of a teacher into the mainstream, while reconfiguring the relations among diverse categories of teachers. In such a state, various “teachers” are in harmonic symposium, while their differences complement each other. At the methodological level, Ge wu zhi zhi (Studying the phenomena to learn the nature of things, 格物致知) which argues to equally treat non-human beings, therefore, uncovers not only a humble attitude towards other beings but also a practical reconnection with worlds beyond human. That means, the boundary both between this concept of teacher and other concept categories, as well as between humans and non-humans, is tactfully blurred. In such a state, various “teachers” are in harmonic symposium, while their differences complement each other.

Rather than holding the national qualification of being a teacher, for example, Confucianists believe that it is more necessary and significant to achieve individual harmony through self-cultivation for intellectuals and teachers. In other words, harmony in individuals is a process of generating and providing resilience, reconciliation, and mediation for one’s own. This is also another practical approach in this study. The wisdom embedded in this way of being implies staying in the golden mean (Zhong yong, 中庸) in the harmoniously balanced relation between humans and nature, individuals and society, and individual and self (Wang, 2007). Occupying an honorable social role, teachers with self-cultivation are supposed to keep an inherent state of life existence where natural life and social existence are in their respective places and living in

harmony with each other. In this sense, the three balanced relations above would lie in a harmonious state within the teacher's ways of being. It opens the possibility of learning from other species' - as teachers - in multiple worlds and treating the individual self as an integral and natural "teacher" to reach an inner peace and harmonious state.

Posthumanism: Anticipating Pluriverse, Sympoiesis, and Common Worlds in the Anthropocene

In the last exposition of the theoretical lens, I will begin with two basic but crucial terms, Anthropocene and posthumanism, to offer a general landscape of post-humanist perspective. Then, the notions of pluriverse, sympoiesis, and Common Worlds will be elaborated to emphasize diverse ontological and epistemological efforts of challenging existing hegemonies of knowing and being and to provide alternative space for rethinking taken-for-granted concepts and ideas. Related literature in the educational field will also be discussed at the end of each subsection. I will conclude this part with how the three theoretical posthumanist concepts connect to the notion of a teacher and this research.

Anthropocene and Posthumanism

Recognizing active and wide-ranging impacts of human beings on the global environment and nature, the notion of "Anthropocene" has been brought up and acknowledged as one historical time on earth in recent scholarship (Crutzen, 2006; Steffen et al., 2011; Lewis & Maslin, 2015) focusing on global climate and environmental changes. The huge effects that human activities have devastating impacts on non-human beings - natural resources are exhausted in search for unlimited economic development; arrogance makes humans destroy and ignore rich cultural and biological

diversities; capitalism, colonization, and westernization – accelerate and intensify the tensions as well as conflicts among regions, races, and species (Haraway, 2015). Other than merely referring to the vast human influence, the concept of the Anthropocene points to a human-centric and human-dominant ontology and epistemology, criticizing the assumption that the human world is the only world and modern society is the only way of being while overlooking other more-than-human possibilities.

The term posthumanism, on the other hand, expresses this criticism and reflection against the prevailing emphasis on human-related and human-centric ontology in modernity (Hassan, 1977; Badmington, 2000; Wolfe, 2010). In the education field, it starts with blurring the ontological edges between human and non-human (Stengers, 2012; Snaza & Weaver, 2014; Silova, Rappleye, & You, 2020), and then develops into a philosophical lens that attempts to explore possible other-than-human perspectives of reexamining the concept of human beings. It aims at challenging and broadening the traditional narrow boundaries of humans in the current cultural and historical contexts. Besides, it concerns aspects and elements in more-than-human worlds and opposes binary terms such as subjectivity and objectivity, human and non-human, as well as nature and culture. In this sense, it involves the interconnected fresh view, rethinking and reassembling the relationships with human beings, nature, other beings and non-beings, and across worlds encounters.

Pluriverse

The concept of the “pluriverse” challenges the universality rooted in modern Eurocentric binary epistemology and questions its ontology that insists on one world

existence. Escobar (2011) and other scholars (Kothari et. al., 2019; Mignolo, 2009; Querejazu, 2016; Reiter, 2018) contend that according to the relationalities manifested in diverse worldviews, there are multiple worlds coexisting and blurring the boundaries between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, self and other. In presenting the landscape of pluriverse, the authors take an environmental lens to assert that multiple worlds and voices can peacefully coexist together, rather than only picking one hegemonic way to replace the other developing possibility. Escobar (Kothari et. al., 2019) explains that a pluriverse is “a world where many worlds fit” (p. xxviii). The pluriverse refers to “a different way of imagining life, to another mode of existence” (Escobar, 2011, p. 138). In the assumed pluriverse,

All people's worlds should co-exist with dignity and peace without being subjected to diminishment, exploitation and misery. A pluriversal world overcomes patriarchal attitudes, racism, casteism, and other forms of discrimination. Here, people re-learn what it means to be a humble part of ‘nature’, leaving behind narrow anthropocentric notions of progress based on economic growth. (Kothari et. al., 2019, p. xxviii)

Such environmental projects advocate for a series of actions in “thinking-feeling with the earth” (Escobar, 2018, p. 204) and reveal “the profound conviction of our indissoluble connection with the Earth and with everything that exists in the universe, the unity of all beings” (p. 204). The proposition of this pluriverse concept urges ontological re-orientations in various social fields, more than ecology. It aims at shifting from “entrenched ways of being” to “doing toward philosophies of well-being that finally

equip humans to live in mutually enhancing ways with each other and with the Earth” (p. xi). In other words, the concept of the pluriverse, as a conceptualizing framework, offers future potentialities in terms of describing a decolonial matrix of spiritual and ethical alternatives that fundamentally and practically question single notions inscribed in western modernity.

Silova (2020) applied this conceptual framework to her speculative thought experiments to invite reimagining education in co-existing multiple worlds. She powerfully expresses that what she is afraid of is not the uncertainty and impracticability in envisioning multiple worlds, but the loss of capability to imagine the very existence of pluriverse in the context of the dominant “modernist Western paradigm” (Sterling et al., 2018, p. 325). She tentatively furthers pluriverse into two thought experiments, including epistemologically recognizing both scientific and rational knowledge and marginalized and fragmented knowledge, and ontologically acknowledging the realness of the pluriverse (Silova, 2020). She encourages us to situate education at the intersectional zones of different worlds as a “connective tissue” (p. 145) for de-linking with Western dualism and domination, while speculating “and if” to imagine alternatives (p. 144). She consistently invites scholars to consider education as an intersectional space in which people can learn to anticipate and entangle with other worlds, arguing that learning is a process as well as a chance of connecting with and becoming with other worlds. In general, she asserts that education should be placed into a pluriversal horizon which holds open the doors to multiple other “ways of knowing and being” (p. 138).

Sympoiesis

Similarly, Donna Haraway proposed another concept, sympoiesis, in describing multi-species relationships between humans and more-than-human species, which are coexisting, entangling, and inter-belonging in the world. Offering rich experiences and practices of interdependence with more-than-human beings in her books, Haraway (2008, 2016a) critiques the split logic that separates humans and nature, or nature and culture, embedded in longtime interiorized anthropocentrism in the present, and advocates for staying with the unfinished trouble in terms of continuously entangling with countless “others” who have been expelled and isolated from human-centric categories and epistemologies. Sympoiesis is brought up relative to autopoietic logics widely applied in the human world, which refers to autonomous “self-producing” entities “with self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 61). This idea posits that humans and other beings are in an independent, transcendent, and instrumental state, stressing the illusion that existences on earth can be alive in a self-sufficient and stable system. On the other hand, sympoiesis is a “collectively-producing system that does not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 33). It focuses on understanding that we all thrive in terms of the existence of “poly-temporal, poly-spatial knotting” (Haraway 2016a, p. 60) in contextual, complicated, and responsive systems.

In the practice of staying with the trouble and actively coping with the future, Haraway (2016c) argues that “there is no becoming, there is only becoming-with” (p.

221), which implies the ontological relationality in the interactions among humans and more-than-human existences. In other words, sympoiesis refers to beings and non-beings shaping, living, and transforming with and within each other in a reiterative, generative, and reciprocal structure. For humans, sympoiesis requires making relational and recursive kinships with companion species. That means, to confront the troublesome world we created, other than recognizing the multiple coexistences of other species in this world and describing the complex systems across boundaries and between beings, we need to also recognize the deep as well as long-lasting interdependencies and intimate associations in the dynamic process of “becoming” and transforming. Haraway (2016a) explains,

Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means ‘making-with.’ Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing... Earthlings are never alone...
Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with... (p. 58)

The concepts of sympoiesis and “becoming/making with” imply the profound sympathetic resonances and mutual connections among all existences as well as their forming processes. “Sympoiesis” does not merely illustrate a simple shared relation of living and breathing together with all, but also contends that entities become what or who they are because of each other. They exist in their relationships with each other, and they co-constitute relations themselves. She explains that there is no pre-existence before they connect and have relations because in relating, entities responsively co-evolve and co-become with each other (Haraway, 2003). In Haraway’s (2008, p. 67) words, “actual

encounters are what make beings.” Except for resonances, this type of relationality also includes multiple diversities and possibilities as they all thrive in their becoming.

The frame of sympoiesis has been introduced into diverse fields in educational research to reimagine pedagogies, policies, and even educational systems within as well as beyond the Anthropocene. For example, Goebel (2020) borrows and further develops the idea of a sympoiesis, extending it to “sympoietic story worlding” to reconceptualize education and the learning process. Based on data emerging from and being collected in children’s indigenous life in Brazil, the research illustrates multiple coexisting and interconnected worlds with sympoietic and reassembled stories which consist of “the relationships between and among all biotic and abiotic forces on Earth” (p. i). Besides, Murriss and Haynes (2020) bring this term into professional education and early childhood practices as a pedagogical approach. Specifically, they diffractively collected and analyzed daily working data in classrooms to discuss the practices and notions of “authority and boundary-making” (p. 24). They also intended to invite more scholars to re-examine how authority is situated in educational relations and spaces, and more specifically, how it is shaped in teachers’ professionalism, children’s subjectivity, and relations in between. Through the examples of sympoietic pedagogies in educational practices, authors assert that pedagogical sympoiesis enables more democratic education contexts in terms of “establishing diverse approaches to negotiation” of relationships (p. 39). Another related research (Murriss & Reynolds, 2018) discusses “sympoiesis” in the context of ontological transitions of teacher education in South Africa. In doing so, the authors focus on environmental education in troublesome and uncertain spaces and

trigger the interactions and intimacies with “each other, other animals, and the more-than-human” outside the classroom (p. 15).

Common Worlds

Latour (2004a) first proposed the idea of “common worlds” in describing ethical worlds concerned with the “common good” (p. 98) and insisted that the radical openness and inclusiveness of their compositions are necessary for common worlds. That means, our curiosity of finding “more about where we are, and who and what is there with us” (ibid., p. 110) is crucial to finding unknown dimensions of common worlds. However, Latour (2004b) reminds us that “no common world may be achieved if what is common has already been decided, by the scientists, out of sight of those whose ‘commonalities’ are thus made up” (p. 222). Hence, the concern behind this concept is to generate inclusive ways of thinking about and recognizing the existing worlds, as well as to break the determined categories and hegemonic forces that separate worlds.

According to Taylor and Giugni (2012), the term “common worlds” could be defined in terms of “things we share or hold in common” (p. 110), enlarging the landscapes of interpretations both practically and fundamentally. They used common worlds as a conceptual framework to reimagine inclusions and relationships with multiple other worlds in childhood education and learning activities. Specifically, the concept of common worlds enables them to decentralize understandings of human worlds and to productively extend the possible connections with more-than-human worlds. Besides, in the Anthropocene, the term “common worlds” invites them to examine the “heterogeneity of communities” and the shared essence of humans’ responsibilities in the relationships

between human beings and others in multiple worlds (Plumwood, 2000; 2008). That is, humans “are not alone in common worlds” and “these worlds are not only about us” (Taylor & Giugni, 2012, p. 112).

Pacini-Ketchabaw (2013) applies this term to childhood education, asserting that what is critical and innovative about this concept is that it challenges the stereotyped impressions such as purity, innocence, and protection which are regarded as the reasons for separating children from other more-than-human worlds (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). Hence, from this theoretical perspective, this concept radically enquires about human centrism and human exceptionalism in terms of delinking with reinforced Western binaries and coloniality (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017). In practical research (Nxumalo & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; 2018), scholars focus on methodologies emphasizing connections with more-than-human beings, responsive interactions in daily life, and multispecies ethnography (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, and Blaise, 2016), and shift from children-centric stories (i.e., human-centric) to then interactive entanglements across multiple worlds (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010).

In the times of technology, scholars also noticed digital places and contact spaces of education (Land et al., 2020a) within the frame of common worlds. They applied this concept to examine and reassemble the relations between digital technologies, educational places, and childhood pedagogies, and so as to tentatively depict the messy and uncertain entanglements as well as the shared accountabilities during dealing with multiple worlds (Land et al., 2020b). They argue through pedagogical experiments that “Facetime on iPhone” could be taken as a “contact zone” (Land et al., 2020a, p. 40) of

knowing and communicating with other worlds, and those encounters with the multiple worlds will inspire future childhood pedagogies related to more-than-human beings.

Connecting to Teachers

Posthumanist theoretical approaches discussed above relate to my research about the notion of teachers in the following two aspects. First and foremost, the conceptualizations and perceptions of a teacher in modern Chinese history are essentially centered on humans rather than other species or non-beings. Although some philosophical ideas in Confucianism and Taoism euphemistically and culturally reflect alternative wisdom other than portraying teaching as an exclusively human domain, the dominant accepted and discussed connotations of teachers are human-centered, westernized, and professionalized. Posthumanist lenses, on the other hand, are applied in this research to powerfully weaken this enduring human figure of teachers, which has displaced other beings and worlds and elevated human teachers to a highly respected social status and identity. It instead attempts to introduce other possible voices and ways of being teachers, considering teachers in terms of describing the teaching and learning relationships among entities, the entanglements and encounters with other species, and the coexistence of multiple worlds. In short, in doing so, it aims to break the human-centric and hegemonic conceptualizations and perceptions of the ‘teacher’ notion in Chinese history.

Additionally, the three theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter facilitate reimagining the concept of teachers in different ways. Specifically, pluriverse reminds us of the feasibility of multiple options (or trajectories) coexisting simultaneously, while

problematizing the common sense of the teacher concept. That means, rather than getting accustomed to specific professional teacher impressions inscribed within modern social, cultural, and schooling contexts, we should ask - what have we ignored? How do the existing impressions reinforce their hegemony in connotations, and block from view other horizons and possibilities which coexist in harmony both ontologically and epistemologically? Besides, the term sympoiesis reminds us to examine the intertwined elements and entities in the context of forming teacher concepts. Teachers have been regarded in isolation from each other - and other species and (non)beings – all the time, but their ways of being and knowing are shaped within countless dynamic and relational interactions with visible and invisible forces. That is, what can we learn about “teachers” and “learning” from other beings? How are some groups determined as non-teachers and some knowledge regarded as non-knowledge? Lastly, the idea of the “common worlds” encourages us to always keep the curiosity and courage to question the rigid and dominant “definitions” and even systems, while exploring the unknown, because the shared worlds imply radical inclusiveness to anticipated diversity.

Similarities and Differences Among Frameworks

At the end of my theoretical section, I chose to summarize the similarities and differences across the above four theoretical lenses I have dived into. By identifying the similarities, my aim is not to generalize the different theories of distinctive cultural contexts and neglect diversity. Instead, I intend to further clarify the resonances among those perspectives and to explore the possible insights in the intersections, so as to create multiple easy entry points and trajectories for a diverse audience. The most prominent

resonance among them is that they explicitly or suggestively contend the unity between human beings and nature, the interconnectedness between entities, and the coexistence of multiplicity.

In contrast, although the similarities of those four frames are the fundamental base of this research, their differences are also significant to be briefly mentioned. Again, my elaboration on their differences does not imply that there are clear boundaries across them in this research, but rather underlines their respective efforts for the common goal of reimagining the teacher concept.

Unity

The first similarity among the concepts in Confucianism, Taoism, and posthumanism is the unity between human beings and nature. In Taoism, Zhuangzi and Laozis' explanation of the term Tianrenheyi contends that humans and Tian are one, which implies a highly integrated fusion between humans and nature in ontology, spirituality, and epistemology. The repeated argument that "Tao is natural, and Tao imitates nature" (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 25) also asserts that Tao is the essence that humans and all other beings need to follow because it mirrors the natural logic of nature. In regards to the inner harmony within human individuals in Confucianism, one aspect of it is the harmony between humans and nature, which stresses how humans follow the guide of nature to produce and use natural resources for better living. In achieving harmony, Confucianism encourages intellectuals to gain inspiration from nature during self-cultivation, because, from this process, individuals could have a taste of the unity not only between the human and nature but also the resonances among all others. The notion

of common worlds and sympoiesis also reflects the inseparability between humans and non-humans. They shift the emphasis from humans to every entity in nature in order to resituate humans within the broad ecological categories. Posthumanism, in fact, furthers this idea in terms of problematizing human exceptionalism and human-centeredness in modern western ideologies, advocating for indigenous and decolonial frameworks to reconnect with nature and other beings.

Interconnectedness

The interconnectedness between every entity, especially between humans and others, is the second commonality across the three frameworks. This idea is embodied in the concept of relationality in Confucianism when knowing and interpreting individuals in their contexts, which involves contextualizing individuals in social relations, concepts, and identities in historical and cultural backgrounds, and humans as one group within other kin groups. The interconnectedness also implies the process of mutual shaping, which ontologically destroys the binary intention of separating “us” and “others.” That is, relationality in Confucianism contends that individuals are constituted by others and their surroundings. On the other hand, Taoism does not propose the idea of interdependence directly as one principle. However, in the connotations of “Tao,” the relationality of “wan wu” (万物, “everything” in English) is clearly expressed because Tao is the invisible “connective tissue” (Silova, 2020, p. 145) for everything blending into one. Tao, as the origin of the world, does not assume the nonexistent universality in all things. Instead, it points out the inter-relevance in the essence of existence for humans and non-humans. From a posthumanist perspective, sympoiesis also illustrates the entanglements among

species. It opposes the modern impression that humans are self-producing and independent entities who address certainty, stability, and controllability of this world. It further describes interconnectedness as the practice of “becoming-with” (Haraway, 2016c, p. 221), which also points out the interactive encounters, transformations, and mutual shapings of everything as co-existing assemblages.

Coexistence of Multiplicity

The last similarity between the theoretical frames discussed above is the coexistence of multiple horizons, entities, and ways of knowing and being at different levels. That means that other than recognizing the essential differences of diverse species (i.e., distinguishing different categories), we should also consider them equally and interactively. The most significant contribution of the five trajectories brought up by Mingolo (2011) and applied in educational literature is not only in articulating the multiplicity of frameworks in analyzing western modernity but also in bringing into focus - and into dialogue – coexisting choices and trajectories. In other words, the fact of coexistence refuses any transcendence, but intends to question the priorities and universal hierarchical logics, while coequally widening as well as diversifying the worlds. In Taoism, although Tao exists as the fundamental guidance for all things, Zhuangzi also disagrees with the universal standard of everything living and instead argues that diverse categories are not mutually exclusive and transcendent. That means that any group, culture, or species do not possess the right or superiority to eliminate and exploit others, and any standards involving this universal logic used to narrow down diversity should be cautiously examined. They are just equally different. Besides, Confucian intellectuals

believe in harmonious relationships, but they also accept the coexistence of differences. The harmonious unity implies the peaceful coexistence of differences, which advocates symposium, mutual development, and complementary relations between alternatives, rather than competing rankings and antagonistic divisions. In addition, the concept of pluriverse in posthumanism intuitively implies the coexistence of multiple worlds in terms of breaking the boundaries among species and artificial categories, while challenging the hegemony controlled by one powerful voice. This mutual-beneficial coexistence does not only emerge in the relationship between humans and the earth, but also signifies other ways of being, knowing, and imagining future lives.

Differences

In regard to the differences, Mignolo's five trajectories (2011) are considered as one decolonial perspective because in arguing for the coexistence of multiple trajectories, this theoretical lens aims at delinking from the Western universality, coloniality, and modernity. That means that the multiplicity and coexistence of trajectories, per se, is Mignolo's way of decolonizing and deviating from the modernization and colonization process. Thus, this perspective highlights the decolonial feature of my research.

As two indigenous frames, Confucianism and Taoism are not analogical in some aspects. It is necessary to acknowledge that Confucianism has been considered the dominant and governing ideology in most dynasties in ancient China, while Taoism appears in the Chinese history of knowledge and governance in a more implicit way. This brings the divergence of their cultural status, doctrine development and transformation, and different ways as well as contexts of applying them. Specifically, compared to

Taoism, Confucianism's human-centeredness focuses more on the sociality of human beings, relationships between individuals and society, and thoughtful ideas about pragmatic affairs in the human world. In feudal society, it emphasized patriarchal ethics and advocated for realizing the nature of individuals through human social relations. It was regarded as the most representative and primary philosophy in ancient Chinese society because its doctrines were effective and helpful in handling intimate relationships in family and bureaucratic relationships in imperial courts and officials. Eventually, its ultimate purpose was to consolidate the ruling circle's authority, governance, and the stabilization of regimes. Hence, Confucianism has the flavor of utilitarianism and pragmatism in its main applications (Hong, 2003).

However, Taoism attaches importance to the naturalness of human beings. It advocates a more detached and modest worldview that attempts to integrate human beings into nature and other beings. It also believes in spiritually going beyond all the natural and social constraints, eliminating the opposition between "self" and "other objects/entities," while being in a harmonious relation. In this sense, applying Confucianism in this study will focus emphasize more on its human-related inspirations in reconceptualizing teachers, especially in terms of integrity, inner harmony, and relationality among individuals. Meanwhile, the correlative cosmology and connections to nature will be more stressed in the application of Taoism.

In contrast, posthumanism contends to decenter human beings in studies and to explore possible other-than-human perspectives. Therefore, in my research, it is used as one "magic door" to other worlds in terms of bringing the ignored "others" in more-than-human worlds into the category of teachers and rethinking and reassembling the

relationships and entanglements between human beings, nature, other beings, and non-beings.

Conclusion

In explaining the four decolonial frameworks and helpful concepts within and across them, this chapter attempted to explore new theoretical possibilities for delinking from the modern connotations in order to re-examine the concept of a teacher as well as ways of being and defining a teacher. However, it is not enough to merely discuss a more inclusive and diverse conceptualization at the abstract and theoretical level. In the next chapter, specific methodologies and methods which are applied in decolonial studies and indigenous philosophies will be elaborated on to practically guide future research of collecting and analyzing data in regard to how we could approach the concept of a teacher in a narrative, sympoietic, speculative, and experiential way.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGIES AND RESEARCH DESIGN: EXPLORING ‘TEACHER’ IN INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

In this chapter, I will explore several qualitative data collection and data analysis methodologies, which I employed in my dissertation research design about reimagining the concept of a teacher. The goal is to review and synthesize some of the literature on relevant qualitative methodologies in multiple contexts in order to learn from the existing experience, as well as to further explore alternative methodological possibilities for my dissertation. In addition, I will focus on three innovative methodologies in (post)qualitative studies to rethink some of the core concepts and challenge existing epistemologies, including memory work, re-animating senses, and speculative fabulations. Then, I will describe the methodological design and ways of analyzing the data used in my dissertation research in detail to show how it has been informed by the existing literature and practically rearticulated in my study. At the end of this chapter, I will illustrate how I implemented diffractive analysis as my methodology of analyzing the data throughout this study and prepare the readers for entering the worlds of teachers in the next finding chapter.

Literature on Teachers in Different Contexts

I will start this chapter with a literature review, focusing on the research methods in educational studies that explore the concept of a teacher. Specifically, the literature is presented in the following four sections for the clarity of writing: (a) studies conducted in

Western contexts; (b) studies conducted in Eastern contexts; (c) studies in comparative education; and d) studies in posthumanism.

Studies Conducted in Western Contexts

In Western education contexts, most academic research concerning the concept of a teacher and teacher-related themes relies on qualitative methodologies to collect and analyze data (See Chong, 2011; Dotger & Smith, 2009; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Penuel, et. al., 2009; Sexton, 2008; Smit, Fritz, & Mabalane, 2010; Woolhouse & Cochrane, 2010), with only a fraction of studies exploring the concept quantitatively to evaluate and report on teachers' qualifications, leadership, and to statistically inquire the correlations between teachers' effectiveness and students' outcomes (Angelle & DeHart, 2011; Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011; Phillips, 2009; Parlar, Cansoy, & Kiliñç, 2017). In qualitative studies, western researchers address teacher-related topics through diverse data-collecting methods, such as ethnography, surveys, case studies, interviews, and focus groups to investigate multiple aspects of the teaching profession as a social profession.

For example, Dotger and Smith (2009) scrutinized "the formation of the 'professional self' as teachers" (p. 161) by observing and interpreting participants' interactions with parents during a simulated conference as an intervention. In these simulation scenarios, teachers were asked "to articulate professional beliefs, negotiate compromise, and feel the tension of professional boundaries" (p. 162). Another study (Marsh, 2012) attempts to depict teachers' professional image in their relationship with students. By answering the questionnaire and meeting in follow-up focus groups as well

as interviews, pupils expressed their voices and experiences about “the features of effective teacher-pupil relationships” (p. 162) and teachers’ positive impacts on their engagements in school. Besides, one crucial method scholars applied in collecting teachers’ own voices is self-narrative and autobiography. Kennedy-Lewis (2012) explores the transformation of her role from a teacher to a researcher and observer by self-narrating, while the book *Studying Teachers’ Lives* (Goodson, 2013) centers their professional identity as the main thread of participants’ narratives, employing personal biography and autobiography to examine teachers’ own life stories in different historical contexts.

Moreover, teacher education is also a core theme of teacher-related scholarship. In studying the experience of student teachers, Sexton (2008) uses critical ethnography to posit student-teachers’ roles and identities in coherent power relations and life histories. In relation to teacher preparation, papers, and books (Creasy, 2015; Cochran-Smith, et. al., 2008; Eraut, 1977; Levine, 2006; Snoek & Žogla, 2009) pay more attention to teachers’ and candidates’ professionalism, characteristics, and strategies of teacher development, and general principles and visions in cultivating teachers for successfully implementing suggested policies in various Western educational systems and countries.

Interestingly, other than placing the concept of a teacher in the context of modern schooling and educational institutions, there are some scholars attempting to reflect on the concept itself from a general macro level (Ornstein, 1976) and to review past literature from other perspectives (Demirkasimoğlu, 2010; Tateo, 2012). However, the discussions still revolve around the feasibility of measuring teachers’ quality with the established criteria and different psychological considerations of teacher professionalism.

In other words, the concept of a teacher emerges as one social career in Western academic contexts, and it is inspected more through qualitative methodologies for the purposes of improving teacher professionalism and the future development of educational systems.

Studies Conducted in Eastern Contexts

The emphasis on teacher professionalism also emerges in Eastern and especially Chinese literature about the concept of a teacher. For instance, researchers attach much importance to the professional development of teachers in the modern educational system by conducting documentary analysis and interviews (Chen, 2009a; Guo, 2006; Hao, 2007; Huang, 2016; Li, 2010; Sun, 2009). Jing (2008) borrowed the qualitative methodology of ethnography from Wolcott (2003) and applied it in his study about teachers' professional qualities, advocating for the modern turn of educational research in China. The author analyzes teachers' job responsibilities, job norms, key events, and work diaries in their historical and cultural context, and reports the findings in the form of a case study. Guo (2006) focuses on teachers in rural areas, applying documentary analysis, questionnaires, as well as interviews to investigate the professionalism of preschool teachers in curriculum reform, while Chen (2009a) implements similar data collection methods to examine teachers in big cities. Another study (Elizabeth, May, & Chee, 2008) extends the idea of professional development to the notion of the "success" of teachers by collecting data from interviews with teachers and analyzing it with "direct interpretation and categorical aggregation" (p. 624) and eventually concluding by building a model of understanding the qualities in terms of teachers' success.

Another frequently emerging theme is policies in teacher education (Deng, 2019; Shi, 2005; Yang, 2006). Because those studies target documented and current policies, they rely much on documentary analysis, historical research, and case studies. In reviewing past national and international policies on teacher preparation, Yang (2006) compares domestic and western teacher education processes, systems, and prospects for the future role of national policy in teacher educational development.

Differently, domestic studies prefer quantitative methodologies in discussing teacher evaluations of their professionalism, classroom behaviors, teaching performances, and psychological developments (Wang, 2009; Wei, 2008; Zeng, 2011; Zhou, 2003). For example, Wei (2008) uses mixed methods leaning more toward quantitative methodologies to examine the professional identity of teachers. The author undertakes documentary analysis, individual interviews, and theoretical analysis to construct the theoretical structure for the study. In contrast, he applies statistics including psychological measurement as well as experiments, variance/correlation/regression analysis, and structural equation model to test and compare the structure of teachers' professional identity with standards. He concludes that the status of professionalism, the differences between individual background variables, and the social cognitive process of teachers with different levels of professional identity. To evaluate a physical education teacher's professionalism, Zeng (2011) conducts validity and reliability tests for the distributed questionnaire and develops a dynamic evaluation index system based on structural questionnaires for designing the questions. To sum up, Chinese literature approaches teacher professionalism and educational policy thematically by applying

traditional qualitative methodologies and documentary analysis, while using quantitative methods in teacher evaluation.

Studies in Comparative Education

In the context of cultural and national border crossing, comparative research involving the concept of a teacher mainly focuses on teacher qualifications (Marom, 2018; Wang, 2012; Wen, 2004; Xiong, 2008; Yan, 2008; Zhao, 2010; Zheng, 2013) and teacher education (Bo, 2009; Chen, 2009b; Hu, 2007; Jin, 2006; Li, 2006; Smith & Hu, 2013; Sun, 2015). Among the studies on teacher qualification in comparative education, Chinese literature primarily adopts documentary analysis, historical descriptions, and content comparisons as methodologies at a theoretical level rather than practical fieldwork. For example, Xiong (2008) summarizes his research process of comparing teachers' professional qualifications and standards into four parts: describing, explaining, predicting, and normalizing or evaluating (p. 12-14). He illustrates that the comparison of teachers' standards in various countries should start with describing what the representative national professional standards for teachers look like, including history, current situation, and influential elements. Then, comparisons are used to explain and interpret why the standards are implemented in this way and predict how they will develop in the future, with the results of the evaluation (p. 13). In contrast, Marom (2018) considers the recertification process of international teachers in Canada with different methods because the project Marom examined is not regarded only as a qualifying process for teachers, but also "a full-time training process following an assessment of foreign credentials" (p. 1). To inquire about teachers' own experiences in the trajectory of

constructing their professional identity, the author conducted semi-structured interviews, observed classes of a variety of courses and sessions, and examined policies and documents in British Columbia. The author contends that data from multiple resources “convey[s] the many layers of the case, and also as a means of triangulation” (p. 3). Besides, some studies (Caspersen, 2013; Eckert, 2013; Qin & Bowen, 2019) also apply quantitative and mix-methods for comparing the teacher qualification systems in different districts and regions in terms of system effectiveness, teacher distributions, and teacher classifications.

Similarly, Chinese scholarship on comparing teacher education concentrates on applying qualitative methodologies such as documentary analysis, visiting educational institutions, and comparative analysis in terms of paralleling teacher education curriculum, preservice education, and professional practices in different countries. For instance, Hu (2007) argues that the primary methodology used in the study is a comparative method that makes “moderate contacts with teachers and experts on teacher education” in both China and the United States (p. 7). It is worth mentioning that the last section in most Chinese literature about comparing teacher education among countries (Bo, 2009; Chen, 2009b; Hu, 2007; Jin, 2006; Li, 2006) is routinely “proposing recommendations in improving teacher education in China” (Hu, 2007, p. 42). Based on the comparative methods used in those studies, the goal of domestic comparative studies in teacher education is thus to learn from advanced Western countries including America, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand through introducing their teacher education curricula, policies, and educational mechanisms.

Nonetheless, some researchers (Howe & Xu, 2013; Luke, 2014; Massoudi, 2002; Smith & Hu, 2013) regard the process of comparison as dynamic and communicative learning, which itself is an educational and interconnective process for teachers across national or cultural borders and disciplines. In other words, those studies aim to explore and reassemble the personal experiences of teachers as individuals who have crossed the border and created an academic and inclusive space for teachers and teacher education. Smith and Hu (2013) apply the “self-study approach” (p. 94) to view teachers as individuals who are capable of reflecting internationally and systematically on their own practices to incorporate philosophies that are obtained from “Chinese and American cultures” and “affected teaching and learning” (p. 95). For the above goal, methods such as writing self-reflective journals, holding self-study meetings, and gathering other teachers’ feedback are used in the study. A study by Howe & Xu (2013) critically reflects on global teacher education and challenges the hegemony of Western knowledge and educational agenda through a transcultural, collective, and dialectic perspective. It investigates individuals’ teaching practices and “professional knowledge through narratives of West-to-East and East-to-West transcultural journeys” (ibid., p. 33). They powerfully illustrate their narrative methodology as “a way of thinking about phenomena” (p. 34). They describe,

With the narrative thinking of our cross-cultural lived experience as the phenomena in our inquiry, the themes for our paper emerged (or in some cases became submerged) over time through our reflexive reiterative conversations and telling and retelling of our stories... In this way, we are able to make meaning of

our cross-cultural educational experience not only personally and locally, but also socially and globally. (p. 34)

Studies in Posthumanism

Research involving the concept of teacher in posthumanism is dedicated to challenging and shifting some taken-for-granted connotations, relations, and ontologies in the teaching and learning process, such as pedagogies, the categories of teachers, and teacher preparation (Cooke & Colucci-Gray, 2019; Howlett, 2018; Murriss, 2017 & 2020; Murriss & Borchers, 2019; Taylor & Bayley, 2019). Those studies aim to break the binaries between human and non-human, culture and nature, and beings and non-beings. Focusing on the theme of teacher education (Arndt & Tesar, 2019; Howlett, 2018; Lambert, 2021; Sidebottom, 2019), these studies use creatively diverse and powerful methodologies, offering possible alternative pedagogies and opening up connections with other worlds. For example, Colucci-Gray & Cooke (2019) draws on music and science teaching in elucidating relational and specific ways of teaching that “enhance and multiply personal awareness of entangled relationships by enhancing sensorial, perceptual and perspectival experiences” (p. 169). On account of “more-than-human-inquiries” (p. 170) and diffractive ways of knowing, they discuss their experimental activities as the methodology in terms of experiencing the multi-sensorial aspects in the learning environment with teachers and students. With their diffractive but physical methods of knowing, they argue that the approach “is profoundly onto-ethical-epistemological for it is aimed at moving student teachers from ‘human exceptionalism and bounded individualism’, which are tied up with technical rationality in education, to

a view of the teacher/young person relationship as being one of ‘making with / becoming with’” (p. 175). Similarly, Maapalo and Østern (2018) also conducted multisensory interviews with teachers in Norway in woodworking spaces as an innovative methodology in their research to discuss the roles and agency of teachers in practicing and to criticize traditional interviews.

To understand teacher identity from a posthuman perspective, Hostetler (2021) proposes a posthumanist project to introduce the concept of a teacher into dynamic teaching and to see the beauty of messiness in “allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise, and wonder” (Barad, 2012, p. 207). She applies a diffractive auto/ethnographic and artistic method, including reading tarot, interviews, and hosting the discussion between teachers and the researcher, to understand the existing images of teacher identities in different ways and reimagine teacher identities. The author hopefully described that the unconventional methodology “allows me to give generous attention to these teachers’ identities by acknowledging their connections to other selves, other humans, and more-than-humans. I am particularly hoping to find an expanded sense of teachers’ self-perception and an increased recognition of a teacher’s multiple, connected, changing, and changeable identities” (p. 8).

Additionally, in practical aspects of teacher identity (i.e., becoming a teacher), Wallace, Rust, and Jolly (2021) argue against the divided and linear view of separating teachers’ preparation and induction, and instead contend that “becoming a teacher is fraught with multidimensional relations of obligation” (p. 406) in the simultaneous entanglements of both phases. They recognize that in traditional humanism, the separability of the two phases of becoming a teacher in the United States has drawn a

deep boundary that closes the complex possibilities of being a teacher. To blur the two conceptions and work at the speculative middle (Springgay & Truman, 2018), the study uses poetic methodology and minor inquiry in posthumanism to generate data from “direct quotations from resident interviews” (ibid., p. 411). With the methodology of staying in the middle, “knowing, being, feeling, and imagining work in concert with each other to produce knowledge in the ‘margins,’ where a ‘minor language’ of qualitative inquiry escapes the dogma of prescribed methods” (ibid., p. 411).

(Collective) Memory as Methodology

According to Keightley (2010), memory refers to “the metaphorical store or flashback and the activities of remembering associated with these are intentional recollection directed by an individual, or involuntary responses to sensory perceptions in the present” (p. 57). Because memories shape and connect both our past, present, and future temporally and spatially in terms of bringing “our changing sense of who we are and who we were, coherently into view of one another” (ibid. p. 57), memory is also defined as a methodology in academic research. Keightley (2010) argues that remembering in academia is a process rooted in dynamic contexts, and it is a relational activity endowing meanings and senses to experiences in the past, the present, and also the future by re-assembling and redirecting intertwined structures and stories. As a methodology, the diversities, nuances, and sensuality of remembering determine its irreplaceability compared to macro history and its crucial potentiality in research investigating human-related and more-than-human worlds.

Given the importance of memory and remembering as a research methodology, memory should not be simply interpreted as repeating past experiences. It “recreates the past each time it is invoked” (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 67). The complexity of memory lies in the messy and inextricable mingling of multiple times, identities, realities, imaginations, selves, and others. As one form of “art of contextualization” (Hall & Ames, 1997, p. 40) in Confucianism, it posits individuals into community and broad social contexts, as well as embodies the marks of times and society in personal stories. In the temporal dimension, while recalling memories, the memories have been rewritten and revised with the emotions, experiences, and senses from the past and present, from interviewees’ selves and others. Memory studies, in fact, invite participants to engage with re-membering and re-interpreting, which is “the excavation of relationships between individual and collective identities; an exploration of the relationship between public discourses and representations of the past and our personal memories; the role of the past and its recall in social relationships and the relationship of remembering to social, cultural and political power” (Fentress & Wickham, 1992; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998, as quoted in Keightley, 2010, p. 58). That means each memory study or re-membering activity facilitates reflexive (re)constructions of personal and collective life and future possibilities. Keightley & Pickering (2012) explain this imaginative blending in memory activities,

Through imagination we develop a sense of the temporal relations between different experiences, different episodes and different stages in our lives. Without this sense of temporal interconnectedness, ranging across the recollected past and

the contingent present of the remembering subject, lived lives are unliveable. (p. 51)

In contrast, focusing on the relationality built in the memory methodology, Barad (2007) expresses parallel descriptions of remembering from a macro level, discussing its complexity in the process of extensional, collective, and inevitable reassemblies during re-remembering. To some extent, she also addresses the significance of memory in social studies related to humans and more-than-humans,

Memory does not reside in the folds of individual brains; rather, memory is the enfoldings of space-time-matter written into the universe, or better, the enfolded articulations of the universe in its mattering. Memory is not a record of a fixed past that can ever be fully or simply erased, written over, or recovered (that is, taken away or taken back into one's possession, as if it were a thing that can be owned). And memory is not a replay of a string of moments, but an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual. Re-remembering and re-cognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any other way reduce one's responsibilities; rather, like all intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is part. The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook...we never leave it and it never leaves us behind. (p. ix)

However, memory is not well-rounded. Keightley (2010) also reminds us to pay attention to the "choices and exclusions made in mnemonic accounts" (p. 57) and

recognizes that it does not mean telling the objective, comprehensive, and dominant mono truth in doing research. It is not a weakness to some extent. Instead, just because of the remembering selections and omissions made by individuals, picking up memories implies exploring multiple possible versions of history and experiences in complicated contexts. More importantly, it reveals the silences in existing contexts and frameworks, and reexamines the reason behind the hidden and marginal voices: “it is here, in the process of selection, omission, and synthesis that we find the value of memory for social scientific concerns with unpicking the complex ways in which the social and cultural frameworks that shape not only our most mundane and seemingly idiosyncratic remembering activities, but also the confusions, silences, and absences in memory” (p. 58). In other words, the “missing fragments” in memory methodology should not become the justification for refusing its presence in academia, but it is necessary to regard its uniqueness and logics in identifying “the particular kind of truth to which memory makes a claim” (p. 60), because both the absences and presences in memory might imply “how we actualize alternative trajectories of living” (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 80).

In practical terms, memory work as a multidisciplinary field “is characterized by heterogeneous approaches to what it studies” (Keightley & Pickering, 2013, p. 2), and involves but not limited to oral history, visual ethnography, testimony, autobiography, and collective biography. Oral history always adopts qualitative interviews in one-to-one or small groups because it offers “striking detail and depth” (Keightley, 2010, p. 61). During the interviews, the research theme is introduced but the participants, other than the researcher, are also allowed to lead the memory activities. Collective interviews and conversations are also appropriate for rich and diverse data collection and analysis.

Visual ethnography, on the other hand, resorts to particular spaces and objects to elicit particular forms of memories (Keightley, 2010). The elicited memories include not only the stories and recollections in the mind, but also the feelings, senses, and emotions in the body. The stimulated memories can be dialogues, interviews, narratives, and writings. Those electing methods prioritize “the relative autonomy of the interviewee to direct research encounters” (p. 62) and their personal experiences.

Different from historical analysis, memory methodology involves analyzing narratives, diaries, and testimony from “both contents and forms” (p. 64) rather than making meaning based on commonsense or traditional patterns. That means, compared to grand narratives and prominent historical discourses, it turns its concern to forgotten scenarios, marginalized feelings, and individual ruptures. It usually proceeds in recognizing thematic threads from the raw data, including pictures, quotations, and other forms, analyzing narratives relationally and broadly with their generated contexts to keep the completeness of their connections, and inductively interpreting, organizing, and assembling.

Furthering the memory methodology, one significant methodological extension which will be applied in this study is collective re-membering and biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012; Gonick & Gannon, 2014; Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei, 2018; Pretti et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2023). Similarly, this data generation and analysis strategy emphasizes the collectiveness of re-membering and “the embodied sense of being” as well as details of what happened in our memories (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3). Rather than claiming and pursuing the “reliability” and the “unquestionable facticity” of the memories or the written texts (ibid., p. 3), collective biography stems from post-

structuralism (Davies & Gannon, 2012) and decolonial studies (Millei, Silova, & Piattoeva, 2018; ZIN & Gannon, 2022), focusing on the specific feelings, senses, and relations which are entangled and constituted through those remembered moments. For example, Davies & Gannon (2012) explain,

In collective biography a group of researchers works together on a particular topic, drawing on their own memories relevant to that topic, and through the shared work of telling, listening and writing, they move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories come as close as they can make them to ‘an embodied sense of what happened’. ... We take the talk around our memories, the listening to the detail of each other's memories, as a technology for enabling us to produce, through attention to the embodied sense of being in the remembered moment, a truth in relation to what cannot actually be recovered – the moment as it was lived. ... We do not seek totalizing truths but particular, local and situated truths. (p. 3-4)

The collective biography and re-membering also articulate the importance of the dynamic and interactive process when narrators and the contexts of memories shape and develop each other to present those remembered moments. Instead of regarding it as a method to produce stories and knowledge about specific themes, categories, or storytellers, Davies and Gannon (2006) explained the collective memory as a strategy to “provide knowledge about the ways in which individuals are made social, are discursively constituted in particular fleshy moments” (p. 4). Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei (2018) also describe the collective biography with similar expressions while applying it

to generating their childhood memories: “in collective biography, memory stories, and their interpretations are produced in the intersubjective spaces of participants and in the interrelations between participants’ presents and pasts” (p. 148). In other words, collective memories and biography enable us to engage and “know differently, through ... [our] own remembered past and the past of others” (Davies, 2000, p. 187, cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 33).” Hence, in this collective co-creation of the past memories, new and different ways of thinking and conceptualizing may emerge, which “surprisingly disrupts the usual way of thinking and poses questions to reexamine the taken-for-granted views about everyday life” (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei, 2018, p. 149).

Research in education usually adopts memory work as a methodology to explore past personal experiences and stories (Gardner, 2003; Middleton & Brown, 2010). For example, Janssen, Chessa, and Murre (2005) intend to reconfigure the trend of reflection in teacher education. Focusing on five student-teachers’ lived memories of learning how to teach, they identify three discursive contexts which play a role in student-teachers’ ways of reflecting. The collectiveness among this five-member group of memory work emerged in this cyclical data-collecting process triggered by specific vocabulary in their experience. In another article, Goodson & Choi (2008) also use life history methods, including memories, to examine the features of teacher professionalism. The authors aim to collect individual memories and experiences in understanding the elements which impact teachers’ professional development and the gaps between professional expectations and daily activities. They argue that the reason for using life history methods is because their mobility and subjectivity are helpful and powerful in “the analysis of

individual beginners' subjective career experiences and the situational responses of the self to daily interactional contingencies" (ibid., p. 6). In addition to the theme of teachers, Millei et al. (2018) also adopt collective biography to explore the childhood political lives and memories outside of the mainstream and "official" impressions in different national and cultural contexts. Likewise, Pretti et al. (2022) and Jiang et al. (2023) use collective memory work to explore common worlds and learning experiences with multiple species in interwoven childhood memories.

The methodology of memory work and collective re-membering may serve as a significant entry of both recalling memories about teaching as a profession and about teachers who are non-human beings, and also reconstructing them in responding to those forgotten stories. That means that the concept of a teacher does not only exist in the social profession and taken-for-granted connotations and contextualization as the only perceived truth, but also has been re-contextualized in those ignored and marginalized beings, non-beings, feelings, and multiple worlds. More than recalling, the re-assembling and reorganizing of teacher-related memories in this collective creation have the potential to induce and encourage more new stories and reflections on the mainstream perceptions of the teacher concept. That means the collective memory work per se has the potential to bring into focus the complexity, diversity, and relationality of redefining as well as broadening the teacher notion.

Re-animating Senses (Sounds) as Methodology

As I expressed in the theory chapter, the category of a teacher should be positioned in the relations with other more-than-human beings, and thus, its connotations

are also expanded to more-than-human worlds. However, how to be methodologically and ontologically aware of the existence of other potential forms of ‘teacher’ except for seeing and intellectually thinking about them? How would it be if we changed the way of sensing and receiving information? In order to move the emphasis from human-centered professionals to more-than-human beings in interpreting the concept of teacher, the methodology of re-animating senses will be applied in this research. It is regarded as an invitation of research practices to pay more attention to alternative ways of knowing and being in human senses as well as beyond human worlds. Focusing on elements in and beyond the human world and concerning nonhuman beings, re-animating senses methodologically “creates new main ‘characters’ as part of the research data—previously overlooked when transferring observation into written words that represent or stand for the world that is represented” (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020, p. 151). Therefore, this section will explain what it means to re-animate senses in research. The methods of re-animating senses involve recognizing diverse types of data, cultivating the responsibility of researchers, and disturbing the traditional senses and data on time and space. Last, I will give an example of bringing sounds into academia to transform our ways of knowing and experiencing.

Re-animating senses in research may include – but should not be reduced to – touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. That means, at a methodological level, we should consider the non-traditional ways of recognizing, collecting, and interpreting qualitative data. In the tenet of posthumanism that treats the complex entanglements and details in/between human and nonhuman worlds more justly and evocatively, data and so-called scientific evidence should not “exist separately from the researcher” (Barad, 2007, p.

172–175). That means, subjectivity and objectivity are merged with each other in the emerging data, while the methodology of senses’ re-animation illustrates so. By sensing the worlds, multiple contact zones are open for entangling and interconnecting, and research thus becomes a process of unifying humans and nature. In Menning, Murriss, and Wargosteads’ words (2020), the aim is to equally consider everything sensed – “the always already existing human and nonhuman entanglements” – and to explore “how the technology works agentially without necessarily the need for a human actor with both a will and intentionality” (p. 152).

In re-animating senses and using technological data such as recordings, videos, and sounds, collective assemblages consisting of human, nonhuman, discourse, material concretes, and silent elements emerge (Peters et al., 2020). Sturm (quoted in Peters et al., 2020) argues that the co-created assemblages embody the term “response-ability” (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016c) that opposes the idea that “human sovereign and autonomous researcher takes all the responsibility” (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020, p. 160). Barad (2007) asserts that the collective response-ability implies “lively relationalities of becoming of the world of which we (humans and nonhumans) are a part” (Barad, 2007, p. 393). That is, relationality is the core of response-ability because it signifies our capability of responding to others in terms of who or what would be in consideration in research and where to draw the boundary (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020). Senses, in this case, offer a significant form of this capability to respond. It determines what we are willing to know and how we know or feel.

How is this methodology different from other qualitative data collection and interpretation processes? Menning, Murriss, and Wargo (2020) explain the uniqueness of

re-animating senses and technologies from the conceptualizations of time and space in terms of challenging and problematizing human-centric and normative ways of knowing and being. In other words, through bringing other forms of collecting and analyzing data, including sensing, recording, touching, hearing, and experiencing, the post-qualitative study “shifts the role of the researcher, disrupts the habitual human-centered gaze (human exceptionalism) and troubles taken-for-granted assumptions about time and space” (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020, p. 153). Post-qualitative studies and senses re-animating methodology have the potential to “transform the structure of perception which has dominated the history of thought” (Colebrook, 2006, p. 39) and to visualize fresh possibilities for thinking.

For example, with the assistance of the technologies of videos, recordings, and sounds, Menning, Murriss, and Wargo (2020) state that specific understandings of spatiality, temporality, and power relations are inscribed in “different combinations of camera angle and movement” (p. 156), which is viewed as “boundary-making practices that include and exclude” (Barad, 2007, p. 183). Specifically, scholars (Mengis et al., 2016) point out that rather than merely interpreting space as an absolute pre-existing container filled with bodies and activities, video research attempts to overcome the barrier because “spaces do not announce themselves through verbal language” (p. 2) and thus enables space to be seen in its “complex set of bodily presences and absences, movements in the space, material details, colors, sounds, and rhythms” (p. 4). In regard to time, Menning, Murriss, and Wargo (2020) believe that cinema and video editing technologies allow chances to disrupt the linear time frame through several video or sound time assemblages. They describe that “cutting between allows these new

connections to arise, unsettling configurations of time and space while still following a linear development” (p. 158). Based on the idea of diffraction, another example of questioning linear time is also mentioned (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020). Theresa Giorza (2019) diffracts the concept of time and “opens possibilities of regarding the past as not gone and irretrievable but as implicated and threaded through the present and the ‘now’” (Menning, Murriss, & Wargo, 2020, p. 156). In short, sense re-animation based on technologies has “radical political potential that exists in the thick-now of this moment and requires thinking time anew – diffracting the past through the present moment, like the play of light inside a crystal” (Barad, 2007, p. 22).

Particularly, sounds generated from hearing as one crucial sensing data in this methodology is one of the multiple ways that beings use to sense and recognize. It is also “utilized to conceptualize how individuals or groups conceptualize themselves, others, objects, and ecologies” (Gershon, 2013, p. 2). Different from analyzing texts or watching videos, hearing sounds weakens other habitual ways of knowing and perceiving information and thus turns to those easily omitted, marginalized, and even erratic but challenged sonic messages. According to Gershon (2013), sounds should not be examined separately from other effected elements as they intersect with other parts of a system. From an ontological perspective, this means that in research data, sounds are basically not formed in isolation because everything has resonance, and they impact each other’s resonances. Gerson (2013) puts this idea in a relational way, and points out that the ontology of effected resonance will result in corresponding epistemology:

Theoretically, if everything vibrates, then everything—literally every object (animate and inanimate), ecology (“natural” or “constructed”), feeling, idea, ideal, process, experience, event—has the potential to affect and be affected by another aspect of everything. It is the ability of one’s self and/or not-self’s affect (object/not-object, ecology/not-ecology, etc.) to effect in a multidirectional fashion...Phrased in a slightly different manner, resonance is affective knowledge that strongly informs how one “is” and what one knows—what Brian Massumi refers to as “ontogenic,” ever emergent processes of ontology, that lead to what might be called epistimogenic, similarly emergent ways of knowing. (p. 2)

More than bringing sounds onto the academic stage as significant data, Gerson (2013) also suggested that every kind of sound in the data should be equally investigated, which expresses the disagreement with human-centric considerations of sounds. He uses the metaphor of an umbrella to incorporate all possible sounds, “including talk, music, and noise” and he attempts to avoid prioritizing any of them. He explains that “this conceptualization of the sonic does not necessarily value human sounds over sounds made by animals, flora, fauna, objects, constructed or otherwise, and the like” (p. 2).

Speculative Fabulation Experiences

SF, as articulated by Donna Haraway (2013), refers to a series of English phrases starting with the initials “S” and “F,” which intends to offer ontological as well as epistemological space for explaining diverse entanglements among species in multiple worlds. In Haraway’s words, SF stands for “*a potent material-semiotic sign for the riches of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, speculative fiction,*

science fact, science fantasy... and string figures. In looping threads and relays of patterning, this SF practice is a model for worlding. Therefore, SF must also mean 'so far', opening up what is yet-to-come in protean entangled times' pasts, presents, and futures" (Haraway, 2013, p. 9). She emphasizes the tight connections and commonalities between research, writing, and a series of SF which all require "the factual, fictional, and fabulated" elements in terms of "SF's techno-organic, polyglot, polymorphic wiring diagrams" (ibid, p. 2).

By using SF, Haraway suggests opening up creative, diverse, and interdisciplinary possibilities in terms of theories, methodologies, contents, and forms for researchers, moving beyond the rational, scientific, and dominant ways of doing research. She describes that in the ontology of the pluriverse, "*such transdisciplinary inspection actually enjoys the many flavors of details, offerings, passions, languages, things, even while also demonstrating that its own forms of validity are not entailed only within those elegant but divergent parsimonies of explanation*" (ibid, p. 3). While on the other hand, SF's style of investigating concerns the emotional, vulnerable, and unexpected complexities, which blurs the distinct zones in time (i.e., past, present, and future), space (i.e., here and there; Eastern and Western), individuals (i.e., self and others), and species (humans and non-humans). In other words, this methodology creatively and speculatively challenges the dualism and exclusiveness in traditional qualitative research and explores neglected alternatives based on an encompassing and open principle. In short, the SF style of research illustrates "a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding" by means of providing other ways of noticing, "imagining and designing

alternatives to the world...It pays attention to the conceivable, possible, inexorable, plausible, and logical” (Haraway, 2016c, p. 213).

Among many SFs, I am interested in applying speculative fabulation (Haraway, 2013) in my research as a methodological approach. Speculative philosophy, developing the idea “philosophy cannot exclude anything” (Whitehead, 1957, 1966 [1938]), intends to stress the importance of multiplicity’s existence by situating “itself on the ground of experience in its multifariousness.” In other words, the significance of fabulating locates not only what it speculates, but also depicts experiences’ existence per se, relative to other traditional dominations. According to Debaise and Stengers (2018), “to make a situation important consists in intensifying the sense of the possible that it holds in itself and that insists in it, through struggles and claims for another way of making it exist” (p. 13). Specifically, speculative philosophy stipulates refusing “the right to disqualify,” not excluding anything by privileging something else and rejecting “a principle of judgment outside the situation” which might assimilate “multiplicity in terms of categories or requirements alien to it” (p. 15).

On account of the speculative philosophy, speculative fabulation is parallel to thinking experimentally which opens space for the entering of multiplicities and their encounters. In Haraway’s words, it is a “niche space for multispecies becoming-with” (Haraway, 2013, p. 10). Haraway (2016d) explicates the method of speculative fabulation in a more specific description,

Because what I mean by speculative fabulation...is much more closely tied to the everyday storytelling practices of storytellers who aren’t all writers or

professionals...maybe the ways mothers and fathers tell stories to their children, or the way someone tells the story of their life to a reporter. I think of speculative fabulation as this fabulating, making, as the fable, ...as wild facts—facts that won't hold still—inhabit in fables. [Speculative fabulation] ...is full of creatures of the imagination. ...For me, SF is absolutely a critical germ, a point of eruption of my own work. ...We need to talk about speculative fabulation and science fact in the same SF figure. (Interview video transcript).

This means speculative fabulation offers the chance of “creating relevant modes of togetherness between practices, both scientific and non-scientific; finding relevant ways of thinking together” (Stengers, 2018, p. 145). On the one hand, it aims at seeking methodological alternatives in terms of enabling the tentative and imaginative explorations of “what ifs” beyond traditional sciences and rationales. On the other hand, speculative fabulation also builds connections between multiplicities in ontologies, epistemologies, as well as in methodologies, in order to uncover the intertwined entanglements across categories.

In the educational field, Carstens (2020) ambitiously contends that speculative fabulation should be introduced into pedagogies venturesomely in the Anthropocene. SF results in the fusion of “both sides of the assemblage of meaning-making, taking in the conscious and the non-conscious, the intense, empathic and radically relational, along with the stratified and rational while attempting to find a productive middle ground” (p. 15). Truman (2019) also innovatively applied speculative fabulation in the middle school English class teaching and school writing project. In this project, she describes how

speculative fabulation and homologous feminism are entangled in the process of writing and conducting research. Besides, Silova (2020) also conducts two speculative thought experiments to reimagine the horizon of education and schooling, in terms of inviting researchers to configure education as an assemblage of entangling between human and more-than-human worlds.

In general, speculative fabulation as a method liberates possibilities of thinking across multiple worlds and simultaneously blurs the sharp boundaries between them, while creating imaginative scenarios and bringing new forces as potentialities into conversations to reconfigure worlds of humans and more-than-humans. I plan to use SF and especially speculative fabulation in my study because this methodology fundamentally refuses the dualism in the teacher concept (i.e., be or not be a teacher with a qualification in schools), the universalism of teacher's definition (i.e., the teacher is a social profession in human society), and breaks the contextual boundaries of using the specific term (i.e., the concept of a teacher can merely be seen or mentioned in the modern schooling related contexts). Instead, it acknowledges the complexity and diversity in relational concepts and allows the existence of fabulation, which implies other possibilities in conceptualizing and perceiving the notion of a teacher.

In my research, the speculative fabulation will be concretely embodied as three speculative experiences or thought experiments, which follow the combination of posthumanism, Confucianism, and Taoism frameworks. The three designed experiences are “teaching without words/actions”, “*Ge wu zhi zhi*”, and “sitting and Wu.” It is worth mentioning that although the methodology of speculative fabulation is usually applied in posthumanist studies, the above three designed experiences which are rooted in Taoism

and Confucianism are brought into this speculative fabulation framework because some ideas about coexistence and “others” as teachers echo posthumanism and resonate across the different philosophies. I regard the three experiential methodologies as speculative fabulations because they enable us to tentatively ask “what if” in those scenarios and explore the traditional concept of a teacher in alternative ways.

First Speculative Experience: Teaching Without Words/Actions

As previously discussed in the theory chapter, the logic of Tao is vague, elusive, and mysterious to achieve, while Laozi (2011) believed that it acts on various kinds of things in human society and more-than-human worlds in terms of showing many characteristics to be aware of and imitated by humans. Therefore, to understand and practice “Tao,” this study invites researchers and participants to observe and synthesize the phenomena of “teaching without words/actions” in broad educational contexts, as the first speculative fabulating experience. That means, who might be considered the “teacher” in those scenarios of teaching without words, and how does that impact the understanding of teachers?

Laozi proposes the method of “teaching without words” in education (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 43). He attaches great importance to intangible education, especially with his own example to imperceptibly guide the learning process, rather than instruct with authority and indoctrination. However, his advocacy for silent teaching does not imply that he argues against tangible teaching in words or concrete actions which is seemingly opposite to silent teaching. What he emphasizes is that the method is supposed to comply with the logic of nature and the natural patterns of learners who are capable of self-

cultivation. Summarized in his words, “the universe has no preference, and all things naturally grow by themselves; The educator has no partiality, and people transform and develop by themselves” (ibid., Chapter 5).

Nevertheless, there is an essential difference between his “teaching without words/actions” and *laissez-faire*. In his opinion, the best cultivation from teachers, “silence,” is the method for educators to attempt to not make learners feel constrained and suppressed, while still providing the necessary general direction. In other words, education should not be regarded as an outside force exerted on the educated ones but should enable people to comprehend the Tao of social and natural worlds in the inner mind and to generate real resonance, so that people can consciously understand the logic and achieve their goals.

In addition, “teaching without words/actions” also addresses the environment of education, which refers to the non-human elements. Laozi asserts that the elements in the category of materials and surroundings should also be included in the consideration of pedagogy. This viewpoint, in fact, contains not only “teachers” other than human exemplars, but also “teaching methods” other than uttered words and visible texts. That means, learning could occur with other species and the direction of teaching and learning is not a one-way path: humans are learners and non-humans could also be the holders and sharers of knowledge. The relationships between teachers and learners are no longer non-recurring and mechanical connections but are complicated, cyclical, and interactive communications. “Teaching without words” diverts the forms of knowledge from “normal” and dominant human readable and understandable knowledge only, to those

oddments and invisible segments which are marginalized and excluded from the modern educational system.

Hence, the first step of this speculative experiment is to observe the appearance and phenomena of things and to accumulate diverse perceptual and sensory experiences. This argument related to “observation” (Laozi, 2011 Chapter 1) essentially coincides with *Ge wu zhi zhi* (格物致知) in Confucianism as well. Laozi states that “Observe the others with the way of self-cultivation; To investigate other relationships in our own relationship; And to view the world with the way of other peaceful worlds. How could I know that the world was like this? It is because I used the above method and logic” (Chapter 54). This statement implies that in fact, Laozi summarized the Tao and reasoning by observing the operation of nature. Relying on quiet and careful observations, he developed the cyclic operation logic of everything in nature practically and deeply from the vigorous growth of all things. Moreover, he often observes the secret of Tao from the “non-existence” (Wu, 无) of the beginning of heaven and earth, and seeks the light of Tao from the “existence” (You, 有) of all things. That is, it requires observing things from multiple sides and perspectives while avoiding mistakes caused by confining oneself to one binary or the other. In short, Taoism similarly contends that observation of nature is a fundamental method to explore the logic of Tao in the speculative experiment of “silent teaching”.

The second concern in seeking the Tao, in the Taoist view, is being “intelligibly clear” (Ming, 明, Wang, 2018, p. 24). This term is connected with the method of observation but from the aspect of the state or the result of the observation process. In

explaining this state, three connotations are discussed in the concept of being intelligibly clear: investigating fine and micro clues, self-acknowledging, and recognizing, and comprehending the reasoning of things. Laozi (2011) asserts that Tao often reveals itself in detail. Thus, during observation, investigators should be meticulous and comprehensive in order to notice the subtle and marginalized things. He also reminds people to stay cautious when examining themselves because it is easy to be judgmental and opinionated with others while being tolerant of one's own weaknesses. In his words, "it is the best state to realize that [he]self has confusions or insufficiency in [his] knowledge, and it is dangerous to be self-approration when he is ignorant about some aspects" (chapter 71). Thus, being intelligibly clear requires individuals to observe themselves as well, intending to have a high sense of autognosis and a fair estimation of themselves and further on other beings. Last, the aim of observation is to explore the patterns of nature, i.e., Tao. Through observing things, the accumulation of rich knowledge and experiences allows further and more comprehensive integration of reasoning. Hence, the primordial state and basic logics of the universe and all entities naturally emerge, and it would be achievable to understand the manifestations of Tao's operation in order to practice in accordance with Tao. That is, who are the teachers and what are the teaching activities following the Tao in teaching without words? How do they teach without words, and how have we habitually ignored them?

Second Speculative Experience: Ge Wu Zhi Zhi

As I have mentioned in the framework, "studying or observing the phenomena to learn the nature of things" (*Ge wu zhi zhi*, 格物致知) is regarded as one outstanding

embodiment and theoretical branch of Confucianism. Meanwhile, it also involves the practical methodology of knowing and being within harmoniously co-existing worlds. Thus, my project of examining the concept of teacher intends to apply *Ge wu zhi zhi* as one research methodology in a speculative thought experiment. The second speculative experiment is, what if we study the “things” without being confined to humans only? What if we take “things” and “phenomena” as our teachers and educational opportunities to learn?

The first main argument as well as the foundational method of *Ge wu zhi zhi*, is learning from the objects. In Zhu Xi’s view (2002b), the natural world and human society are co-existing, which is the result of the interactions of reasoning and vitality (Li and Qi, 理与气). Since everything is fostered by the same harmony of reasoning, there should not be any contradictions between nature and human beings. Given the mutuality between humans and nature, which are seen as an organic whole, and because everything is interlinked and interdependent, individuals can speculate and learn from other beings and non-beings.

Zhu Xi (2002a) attached great importance to the enlightenment of humans from nature, and as part of obtaining knowledge from entities, it requires individuals to put efforts into intensive observation of nature and things in it. He also advocated for learning and thinking in daily life to incorporate the phenomena in nature into his system of reasoning. For example, Zhu Xi (2002a) tells about the growth of grain to imply the reasoning behind it. He illustrates that the grain would germinate in spring, grow into seedlings in summer, mature in autumn, and be collected in winter. In its growth, “the vitality is still wrapped inside” (Li, 1986, p. 465). Here, although the process he depicts is

a common and natural occurrence for plants growing, what he learned from it is the implicated theory of plants transforming and the continuous, powerful, and indivisible vitality in the different forms of plants regardless of the seasons transforming. In this sense, humans could be inspired by such corresponding reasoning that is articulated and made concrete through “things,” while other logics and theories of various “things” can also be deduced by drawing inferences from one another.

Besides, this methodology requires individuals to broaden their horizons and expand the scope of “things” which can be learned as widely as possible in the phase of accumulation and learning of the phenomena. Zhu Xi (2002b) argues that a positive, enterprising, and humble spirit of learning and seeking is desirable in the process because accumulation might lead to mastery in exploring the theories of objects. According to Zhu’s (2002b) opinion on the relationship between core reasoning and multiplicities, everything follows similar logic and despite the seemingly tedious, fragmented, and complicated observations and learning processes of every entity, the possibilities of the enlightening logic are concealed in it. In other words, learning from and observing “things” as diverse as possible is an inevitable but helpful method, because knowing the nature and the reasoning of things help to perceive “sudden and thorough connections,” which is a process of starting from the shallow to the deep, from the surface to the inside, and from the coarse to the fine. This statement also mirrors the harmonious unity of the reasoning of everything, which suggests that the concrete knowledge of an individual entity is not separate from its/their logic, and the more diverse knowledge is obtained, the further we can explore our human selves and intrinsic principles.

The last crucial concept in this methodology is respect with modesty (Jing, 敬) in both knowing and being, outer and inner. Qian (2014) believed that “respect” in Zhu’s perspective has six meanings, and one of them is “holding in awe and veneration” (p. 68). That means, during learning from others—whether they are human beings or not—the inner mind is required to be in an equally respectful attitude. Being respectful suggests combining inner awe with external courtesies and expressions. Zhu Xi (2002a) believed that external expressions and individuals’ thoughts are supposed to be conformably unified because an individual is viewed as a whole and one’s inner and outer selves are in harmony. He takes filial piety as an example in explaining respect to parents: if a person appears to follow filial piety but his heart does not take it seriously, it is not sincere respect in knowing and being, and his effectiveness of learning would be greatly reduced.

Third Speculative Experience: Sitting and Wu

The last speculative experiment or a thought experiment, sitting still as a meditation for enlightening (Jingzuo and Wu, 静坐和悟), stems from traditional Chinese philosophy combining Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. This methodology, happening metaphysically and abstractly in individual minds and bodies, highlights the self-perceptive and self-therapeutic aspects of education. In other words, this mindful therapy, as one speculative methodology in my research about the concept of teacher, prompts participants to tentatively resort to experiential and intuitive speculation and to explore the so-called “answers” from ourselves. That is, individual selves and our life experiences can also be regarded as one kind of teacher, in comprehending the relations

between us and others, humans and nature, and the self-determined meaning of life for each entity. It epistemologically appeals to a slowing-down research and knowing process, aiming at experiencing the inner potentiality within the fusion of split categories and breaking away from modern binaries and hierarchies in life. What if we are our own teachers? What can we learn if experiences of our daily lives are teachers?

Although all three branches of philosophy advocate for sitting still with meditation as the common method of intellectual cultivation, according to Zhang (2013), there are subtle differences due to multiple purposes. In Confucianism, it is named “sitting quietly” (Ma, 2020, p. 19), referring to physically sitting uprightly, making neat clothes, and clearing the mind silently, which portrays a dignified and sober image. The places of sitting are mostly the bedroom, study room, or any casual space. Buddhism names it “sitting in meditation” (Zhang, 2013, p. 56), and the purposes depend on various schools of Buddhism. The body gesture usually adopts cross-legged sitting with a straight back, taking place in Buddhist temples. Taoism promotes the philosophical idea “the universe and I are in a whole,” urging invigorating “sitting upright” (p. 34) to experience the boundary-crossing feelings of non-enslaved relationships between body, mind, self, and nature. Traditionally, it may happen in a secret cave or a quiet place in nature. Meanwhile, they also burn incense, make tea, or hang images of ancestors in their doctrines to prepare a mysterious religious atmosphere for sitting still (Zhang, 2013).

Confucianism epitomizes the idea of sitting still and thinking and develops it into explicit methods related to self-cultivation and engaging with surroundings. Zhou Dunyi (2000) regards sitting quietly as a Confucian method of improving one’s morality, believing that sitting still in a quiet environment allows “humans to understand the nature

of Tian” (p. 48). Deriving from Zhou Dunyi, Zhu Xi (2000) realized the function of quietness in sitting still, arguing that the calm in mind that emerged during sitting enables restoring individuals’ nature. He states that when inner mindfulness is calm, individuals situate themselves in an undisturbed state and are free from being bothered by their own private selfishness (Zhu, 2000). However, this quietness and calm of mind are not an idle, empty, and meaningless absence of mind. Rather, the so-called quietness in sitting time is preserved and facilitated by a high level of self-cultivation. Sitting still quietly, as Zhu Xi (2002b) proposes, aims at “restraining miscellaneous and disturbing thoughts” (p. 1419) instead of abandoning all the ideas and being unaware of or indifferent to happenings. In other words, the vibrancy of thoughts and the physical stillness of individuals are “one simultaneous process” (Zhu, 2000, p. 73), and they are interconnected.

Wang Yangming (Chen, 2013), on the other hand, discusses the dialectical relationship between practices and sitting quietly, which also mirrors the dialectical wisdom in Tao. It has been criticized that putting thoughts into practice and merely sitting still are two opposite methods of cultivation, because the former is outward, action-required practices while the latter is inward thoughts and speculations (Wang, 2010). In fact, Wang Yangming contends that there is an intimate logical relationship between them that complements and promotes each other (Ding, 2020). Specifically, practice in the real world involves responses to others (e.g., troubles, relations, business, work, humans, non-humans, etc.), while the question about “how to respond” and moral principles followed in interactions are ruminated in the silence of sitting still. To put it simply, sitting still is one kind of “inward practice” (Chen, 2013, p. 58). Despite sitting still is to “eliminate the thoughts” (Zhu, 2002b, p. 1419), the purpose of eliminating the

thoughts is not to refuse any emergence of ideas, but rather to clarify and straighten the inner thoughts and lead them to be harmoniously corresponding with the nature and principles, and eventually answer the practical “how to” question. Therefore, Wang (Chen, 2013) suggests that the perfect state of sitting quietly and “eliminating thoughts” is knowing and treating things appropriately as they naturally are, without arrogant assumptions in practice.

The concept of “Wu” (悟, comprehending, realizing, or enlightening in English) in Chinese philosophy is derived from Indian Buddhism and Chinese Zen Buddhism, with its original meaning of physiological awakening, which refers to waking up after sleeping. Afterward, the term was gradually introduced into philosophy, and its connotation was extended from the body awakening to psychological and spiritual enlightenment and comprehension. In Buddhism, the basic meaning of “Wu” indicates the thorough recognition and mastery of the true essence in life through self-introspection in Buddhist learning, and the integration with the true Buddha nature (Ji, 2003). From the perspective of Zen Buddhism, it also particularly implies the Latent Buddha nature inscribed in the self-nature of all living beings. Through introspection, it would be revealed and realized instantly. With the rise of Zen Buddhism in China, “Wu” was further pushed to “sudden enlightenment” (Ji, 2003, p. 34).

“Wu” is a unique, mysterious, and irrational method of thinking that is empirically iterated but merely through intuitively experiencing, without the aid of logical procedures or visible texts, in order to achieve the highest level of understanding. Satori (Pu, 1984) in early Chinese Buddhism required tedious, long-process, and hard-effort-taking self-cultivation, while with the increasing Sinicization of Zen, it combined

with Taoism that emphasizes the inner experiences to the outside worlds, pursues spiritual realization, and argues against knowing and interpreting via rational cognitions, inferences, and visible texts (Fang, 2001). What Buddhism explores is the essential nature of life and the universe, to facilitate living beings pursuing the realm of liberation in life through experiential speculation. In this sense, “Wu” belongs to a spiritual intuitive thinking method in terms of liberating from the state of confusion, loss, and delusion and finally realizing the highest truth of Buddha (Wang, 2008).

The method of “Wu” in Zen Buddhism endorses traditional Chinese intuition theory (Ma, 1997). The western mode of thinking adopts a formal style of analysis, stipulating rational, analytical, empirical, accurate, and systematic logic as its main content. Rationalism, derived from this, thus consists of the separation and opposition of subject and object in cognition, and the task of knowing is to grasp the essence from phenomena. However, as I mentioned previously, Chinese philosophy stresses a holistic ontology in terms of Tao, *Tianrenheyi*, and harmonious relationships. It features integrity, continuity, intuitiveness, “metamorphosis” (Silova, 2020, p. 143), and fuzziness. And “Wu” in intuition thinking is a method inscribed in this philosophy. Compared to the rational ways of thinking, intuition thinking and the method of “Wu” adopt experience-comprehensive thinking modes, focusing on personal experiences, feelings, and enlightenment rather than analysis, argumentation, and distinction (Wang, 2008). It highlights the direct transcendence of perceptual experience while maintaining direct and diverse connections and fusions with dynamic entities.

Determination of Research Design

As I have noted earlier, the perceptions and conceptualizations of the notion of a teacher in China intertwine with various elements in culture, history, politics, society, and policies. Thus, the experience of collecting and analyzing data about the concept of a teacher was full of uncertainty and challenges, especially when inviting participants to reconsider, reexperience, and redefine a fairly common concept and social career in the cracks of the dominant educational system. The challenging part was not only reexamining this common concept in its complex contexts but also attempting to encourage diverse decolonial visions from participants in redefining this notion. Luckily, I was able to partially recognize the challenge of embracing and understanding the unknown and sophisticated situation beforehand, which helped me to rise up to it.

My dissertation is designed as a multi-scenario, multi-sense, and multispecies ethnography that applies lenses of posthumanism, Confucianism, Taoism, and multiple decolonial trajectories. Hence, I conducted my research in two different scenarios - activities with my family members in Scenario A and activities with in-service teachers in Scenario B. In each scenario, multiple settings (e.g., indoor/outdoor) also alternated according to instant situations and participants, so I used “step” to mark the setting alterations and processes. In each of the following, the more-than-human participants (e.g., beings, non-beings, etc.) were different and the methods for collecting and analyzing various forms of data also changed accordingly. Another clarification I need to make is that although I seemingly have made a list of research methodologies and classified them into distinctive theories, this classification is used only for the clarity of writing. Similar to the multiple theoretical frames, during the practical data generation,

different methodological approaches were interwoven with each other all the time, contributing to the common goal of exploring and reimagining the concept of a teacher in the entanglements of human worlds and more-than-human worlds (see Table 2 for a clearer presentation of the general methodology design and data analysis).

Table 2. Methodology Design

Scenario	Human Participants	Steps	Methodology
A	My mother (Wei), my grandmother (Ding), and me (Yu)	1	Memory
		2	Speculative Fabulation 2: <i>Ge Wu Zhi Zhi</i>
			Speculative Fabulation 3: Sitting & Wu
			Reanimating sounds
B	Five in-service primary/middle/high school teachers	1	Observation Speculative Fabulation 1 (Teaching without words/actions)
		2	Speculative Fabulation 3: Sitting & Wu
			Reanimating sounds (playing audio excerpts)
		3	Interview

Scenario A: Re-remembering and Speculative Fabulating

Participants

The human participants in this scenario were my mother, my grandmother, and me, while more-than-human beings and nonbeings also participated in outdoor and

indoor scenes during research. My mother, Wei (Alias), is a 57-year-old female who has just retired from middle school. Before retiring, she has chosen to be a middle school politics teacher as her lifelong career for more than 25 years. My grandmother Ding (Alias) is 88 years old, and she is still living in good health with a clear mind and senses. She has been a middle school Chinese teacher and primary school history teacher at a young age for about 20 years as well. Both of them live in a small town, Anqing, Anhui province in China. And I, named Yu when narrating in the third person, participated as both researcher and participant in this scene. Although I have not chosen the role of teacher yet, I have been cultivated in one of the normal universities in China as a student-teacher and had my internship for several months in a high school in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. I chose to have the three of us as human participants in this scenario because our memory sharing, recreation, and analysis, as well as following speculative fabulation experiences, required relatively intimate and close relationships. Besides, my mother and my grandmother are both experienced teachers and they represent specific voices from different generations and histories of being teachers in Chinese society. For the sake of clarity, this scenario has mentioned human and non-human participants as if they had clear boundaries. But in actual practice and data generation, the entanglements and interactions among participants, regardless of the categories of participants, were focused and considered equally and simultaneously, because the data was generated upon and with them.

Step 1: Memory and re-membering

My research data was initially generated among three family members – my mom (Wei), my grandmother (Ding), and me – in my grandmother’s old house in Anqing, Anhui province, which is full of memories about their experiences of being teachers as well as about my childhood up experience (see Image 1). The reason for choosing this place is because old furniture, displays, and decorations also preserve memories, and they can be regarded as one measure of visual ethnography (Keightley, 2010) and “art of contextualization” (Hall & Ames, 1997, p. 40) which may trigger and initiate our recollections. When I conducted this re-membering activity this summer, I indeed realized that our touch of the old furniture, the smell of the house, and the style of decoration had elicited our memories and stories of being a ‘teacher’ in specific life experiences. Thus, here, except for the three of us as human participants, the settings in the old house which had induced our memories about the concept of a teacher were regarded as non-human participants. The goal of conducting this memory activity was to offer us a chance of re-membering, “enlivening, and reconfiguring of past” (Barad, 2007) and meanwhile to weave, recreate, and recontextualize our memories and narratives about the concept of teacher in three different generations together. It also provided a historical and cultural perspective, presenting a marvelous conceptual landscape of ‘teacher’ with coexisting multiplicities.



Image 1. The Front Door of The Old House. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Here, I conducted our fluid and interwoven memory work (Keightley & Pickering, 2012) related to the concept of teacher based on our experiences with human teachers, more-than-human teachers, and broadly defined teachers as a career, a social role, and ways of being and living. I invited the three of us to collectively recall our memories and stories (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012; Gardner, 2003; Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2018) about what it means to be a teacher in different life experiences, who are the teachers in those memories, our feelings when we experienced the memories, and why. This memory work was characterized as a collective re-remembering activity (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014; Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2018; Pretti et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2023) because it is designed as “an intimate, embodied generative process where researchers are also simultaneously research subjects, working with their own memories and producing interpretations in the intersubjective spaces of their interrelations with each other” (Pretti et al., 2022, p. 5). That means, our three family

members, being both researchers and research subjects in this memory work, collectively decided how to approach the concept of a teacher and how to invoke memories.

In general, the re-remembering process proceeded in the following way. Because we are family members, I, as the researcher, did not need to introduce myself. But instead, I first briefly introduced my research project, questions, and goals for them to understand this study. This collective memory work was semi-structured, so I prepared a question protocol/prompt (see Appendix E & F) in advance to bring participants into their narration around the topic. In the protocol, I directly guided them to recall experiences about teacher concepts in human and more-than-human worlds. Then, after I handed the protocol to each of us, we agreed to head for the old house together which was kept in its original form but without people living in it. We stayed in the house for the whole morning together to have a walk-through and immersive experience. That morning, the three of us held the question protocol/prompt, walked around and inside the house on our own, touched the furniture, sat down for a while as we wanted, and exchanged a few words occasionally. We also rummaged through some possible sundries, books, and closets, attempting to find specific pictures and documents for teasing out and confirming our related memory fragments sometimes (see Image 2).



Image 2. Sundries in The Box. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Then, in the late morning, the three of us decided to sit around the square table in the house and started to recall, note, and write down the teacher-related memories. Our memory writing and story-recalling process mainly followed the sequence of the question prompt in terms of answering the four questions, as well as the experience in the house. My mom Wei and I chose to type down and organize our memories on our own encrypted phone and laptop to keep a clearer rationale for the stories and thoughts. My grandmother Ding chose to use an oral account (Keightley, 2010) to narrate her memories with the function of “Dictation” on her phone because it was easier than typing for her advanced age. Her phone auto-transcribed her oral memories into texts, and I helped her with the text cleaning and organizing processes. This whole immersive re-remembering activity, including the introduction to my project, conversations and interactions we had in the house, and our written or oral records of memories, were primarily in Chinese because neither of them can speak English. In total, this re-remembering activity was conducted one time and lasted for about three hours. In the next few days after visiting the old house, we exchanged the texts of our memories and read through each other’s memories, and answered the questions for the first time on our own.

Step 2: Speculative fabulating and reanimating listening/hearing in a natural environment

In the second step, I invited Wei and Ding to alternate settings from our old house to nature. This alternation of settings attempted to bring into consideration other kinds of teachers – from other worlds – and to inspire the participants to take a step further into (or from) their memories in order to begin reconfiguring the mainstream concept of a

teacher. To start, I came up with several options for the possible natural environment, such as an open meadow, a distant village with rivers and trees, a camping ground surrounded by mountains, a neighborhood garden, or a botanical garden. There were two considerations for us in determining the outdoor options. First, the selection of this natural setting should not be intentionally kept away from humans, however, there should be beings and nonbeings as participants other than human beings in this scene. Thus, the human participants still were at least the three of us, while in an open natural setting, any other-than-human entities emerging in that scene were included. Second, the outdoor places should be around our residences and easily approachable, considering the relatively high frequency of visiting during this study, the hot weather of this area in June, the convenience of going and lingering around, and my grandmother's age and health. Eventually, after I accounted for the above elements, Wei, Ding, and I collectively decided to take the embankment garden at the Yangtze River side, a neighborhood garden, and a street garden in the town as our main spots for this step.

Being surrounded by nature, we conducted speculative fabulations about the concept of a teacher, including "observing the phenomena in nature" (*Ge Wu Zhi Zhi*, Zhu, 2002b) and "sitting and Wu." Meanwhile, reanimating the sounds was also initiated. In other words, I encouraged our participants to place themselves in nature, choose one element to observe, and meditate on the notion of a teacher while sitting in nature. Those three activities were practically conducted in the same period of time, from the middle of June to early July. During the two speculative fabulations, I did not give any structured or semi-structured plans or prompts which might over-disturb our fabulating experiences. However, the goal of the two activities was clarified by me in Chinese before we started.

Specifically, for the speculative fabulation of *Ge Wu Zhi Zhi*, Wei, Ding, and I determined to observe the phenomena and objects in nature alone rather than collectively. This was because 1) all three of us knew this theoretical as well as practical term well as a traditional Chinese concept, and 2) separation in observations reduced the limitations of respective schedules, the objects we observed, and the sites of happening, so as to embody the diversity of data among us as much as possible. First, Wei and Ding were informed that the focus of “*Ge Wu Zhi Zhi*” (Zhu, 2002b) was observing the phenomena and objects in nature and learning from them in any aspect they prefer. They, including me, were asked to walk into the natural sites on our own, select at least one or one kind of “entity” in the natural setting, regard them as teachers, and intuitively observe, experience, touch, and communicate with them with modest and equal respect in mind. We met and communicated with the objects multiple times, depending on whether they were easy to meet or not. Each of us got along with the observed objects or phenomena for 2 to 3 hours in total in about two weeks, but we called to start or end any time we liked. We took some notes and pictures with our phones to document some thoughts and feelings in the process.

Similarly, in the second fabulating experience, “sitting and Wu,” I first explained the aim to the other two participants. The experience was designed to freely think about the “*Ge Wu Zhi Zhi*” (Zhu, 2002b) experience we had with the selected entities, reflect our thoughts and memories, experiences and behaviors about the concept of a teacher, intuitively feel anything we could feel here and now in nature, and return to the inner peace. It could be an extension of *Ge Wu Zhi Zhi* in terms of thinking about what and how to learn from the observed objects or a self-cultivation process based on the teacher-

related memories or the feelings of now in nature. That means it was designed to arouse the awareness of realizing the existence of more-than-human teachers and to reconnect with them in experiencing and getting along with “others” in nature.

Given the outdoor heat in summer and the recurrence of our memories, fabricating experiences, and of our thoughts and feelings, one-time “sitting and Wu” seemed not to be the best choice. Hence, as the other two participants requested, I conducted this “sitting and Wu” activity 9 to 10 times in ten days in late June, and 10 to 15 minutes each time. I invited the three of us to sit on the bench, wheelchair (for my grandmother), or directly on big stones in the three natural locations we chose, brought our own teacups and tea, and initiated the process. In each of the three outdoor gardens (i.e., the embankment garden at the Yangtze River side, a neighborhood garden, and a street garden), we finally finished three times of “sitting and Wu.” In other words, we spent at least 30 minutes in total for each natural environment, but we could call the start or end any time we liked, and the length(s) of this activity was inconstant.

After sitting down together, we took any sitting gestures we preferred (leg-crossing, upright, leg-stretching, etc.) for our own comfort and ease. I did not give any further restrictions on our thoughts and thinking threads during the meditation. I did not play any music or burn any incense, because we intended to fully experience nature in those circumstances. As our eyes were closed for most of the sitting time, our ears became more careful than usual to listen to the surrounding sounds which became clearer as well. Therefore, seeing we were ready to start “sitting and Wu,” I also pressed the button of the recorder on my phone to tape any sound around (Hernández Silva, 2021) made by nature, other beings, and humans. That means the recorded audio was about 10

minutes each in length for 9 times in total. We and other human participants were not required to purposefully make any sounds or speak for the recording, and any forms of collected sound were not artificially prioritized in my analysis and research. I allowed the sounds to equally self-share the salient, marginalized, and ignored nuances. The recorded sounds were saved as multiple audio files on an encrypted laptop. This outdoor speculative fabulating experience, together with reanimating the sounds, took about 2 hours in total.

Collective data analysis procedures

The last step of Scenario A was a process of both data generation as well as data analysis, emphatically applying diffractive analysis (Barad, 2007; Davies & Gannon, 2012; Mazzei, 2014) which will be elaborated more later at the end of this chapter. For the clarity of reading and writing, I describe the details and procedures of this collective and diffractive analysis as the last step of Scenario A here. On the one hand, it should be regarded as data analysis because the three of us discussed and collectively analyzed each others' memories and the previous speculative fabulating experiences in an interactive way. On the other hand, however, while we processed and communicated the written or oral data, we were also generating new ideas, stories, and comments, and rebuilding new connections among us which, again, formed new and more data for my further organization, analysis, and writing-ups.

Following the analytic methodology, the last step of this scenario was a diffractive review and analysis of our three human participants' experiences and memories. Given the intimacy between the three participants, we discussed, commented,

and shared each other's experiences, insights, and memories related to teachers in the previous steps. In essence, this diffractive analysis was designed as a collective data analysis process to carefully coordinate with the collective memory work, the speculative experiences, and the diffractive methodology. During this process, in addition to adopting the familiar form of collective data analysis in terms of collectively reading and discussing the shared memories (Haug, 1987; Millei et al., 2019), we also shared our experiences, feelings, and listened to the recorded sounds together to provoke new assemblages of memories and re-membering about other types of teachers in our lives. I conducted the analysis as a collective procedure (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Gonick & Gannon, 2014; Pretti et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2023) because it asked us to tell, share, recreate, and analyze our memories and experiences together as an intimate group. We read, felt, commented, and accepted each other's stories and memories during the analysis, and thus, we were living in each other's recreated memories and analyses.

Here, three forms of data generated from the previous steps were involved: (1) participants' typed memories in the first step; (2) participants' thoughts, field notes, feelings, as well as experiences in the two speculative fabulating experiences in the second step; and (3) the simultaneously recorded sounds in the natural environment. All three of them were diffractively analyzed by Wei, Ding, and me. For our typed memories, I had data transcribed and organized into clear text, but not translated into English, and they were ready for our collective and diffractive analysis.

Specifically, our diffractive analysis started right after step 2, but the specific start time and date were confirmed after the multiple times of everyone's observations and "sitting and Wu" being completed. In early July, the three of us came to the old house

again, sat down at the square table in the house, and started the collective data analysis. First, we quietly read through and reviewed the other two participants' memories about the concept of a teacher again. Then, we made about one or two paragraphs of comments and reflections on each others' memories in typed or dictated form. That means, everyone's memory was read through and each of us added their reflections, which means that everyone's memory was followed by two reflections. This process took about one and a half hours.

Next, we talked about and discussed each other's comments and thoughts, including why we had made the comments to the specific memories, feelings in the speculative fabulating experiences, what we gained, and what new thoughts or memories the memory had induced. This process aimed at eliminating possible misunderstandings of the memory and encouraging new related stories. The conversation focused on the concept of 'teacher' in a broader sense and the contexts of the emerging diverse or common connotations of a teacher. The potentially emerging ideas involved but were not limited to the following: what we had learned from entities in nature, who the teachers were in these various situations, the feelings we had in the sitting and meditation, the teachers we had never thought about, and the emotional connections we made among each other based on our past experiences, etc. I took notes about each others' thoughts and possible themes on my laptop.

Then, in the middle of our conversation, the 90 minutes of recorded sounds or excerpts from the audio were replayed multiple times as requested in our group discussion and analysis to trigger deeper understanding and another round of conversation about the concept of a teacher. In the discussion, I shared my plans for

Scenario B, so we decided to present the sounds in a conversational way in terms of inviting the five in-service teachers to listen to the sounds and have an “imaginary dialogue” across space through the natural sounds in future interviews. We came up with selecting the five most impressive ones out of nine (or mixing some of them). For each of the five recordings, we posed one triggering question which was prepared for initiating the imaginary conversations with in-service teachers (see this in more detail in Scenario B, Interview, and Chapter 5). I also took notes during the analytic discussion to write down the important and frequently mentioned themes. After listening to the recordings of natural sounds and the discussion several times, I had the typed draft of our reflections and thoughts for each one of the five recordings.

Last, based on our collective discussions, speculative fabulation experiences, and transcribed memories and comments, we selected the most interesting themes and respectively wrote down several paragraphs in Chinese on our laptops or phones. Again, Ding used the “Dictation” function on her phone to do the creation. The draft paragraphs were mainly about analyses on one theme, supplements for original/additional memories, feelings and thoughts in rehearing the natural sounds, or detailed descriptions of observed natural objects, in order to clearly summarize and articulate our organized and discussed ideas and themes. Finishing our writing, we sat together and presented our ideas and analyses in this intimate group to make sure our thoughts were accurately elaborated. Finally, the three of us spent about two hours together having all the analysis typed, reviewed, integrated, edited, and adjusted into the relatively clean texts on my laptop.

Scenario B: Speculative Fabulating in Modern Schools

In addition to including experienced and retired teachers from different generations, I also invited in-service teachers in schools to participate in my research as well. This scenario was conducted to understand perceptions of a teacher notion from in-service teachers who were working in the modern urban area and formal school system in China. It was also aimed at learning more about their connections to and interactions with ‘teachers’ in their careers as well as inspiring them about “other” kinds of teachers outside of their career and in some informal contexts.

Participants

In June, I contacted five in-service teachers working in primary schools or middle/high schools in Shenzhen, and encouraged them to participate in the research experience and interviews and to share their interpretations of the concept of a teacher. There was no restriction on their gender, age, school type, and grade level as well as the subjects they were teaching when recruiting. The recruitment followed the rule of “first come, first serve,” and the recruitment letter was announced remotely through my social platforms in the summer. Interested participants were recruited from my classmates who have become teachers, their colleagues, my middle/high school teachers who are still in service, and teachers who were introduced by friends or participants to meet and join. Therefore, although there was no compensation for teacher participants, we had personal interactions and socials (e.g., having coffee, dinner, desserts, etc.) on account of our friendships before or after the research activities. In the process of communicating about the recruitment of in-service teacher participants, I always briefly informed the

participants in Chinese about my research project, my identity as a researcher in the university, the goal of this research, and the whole experience and activities in it, and their roles in this participation. Eventually, five teachers agreed to participate in this study and go through the complete experiences launched in this research. The five in-service teachers are Caicai, Meng, Wang, Wu, and Zhang (See Table 3). Critical identifying information mentioned in this dissertation, such as participants' names, names of employing schools, and addresses of experiences happening in data generation, are all pseudonyms.

Table 3. Basic Information of In-service Teacher Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Employing School	Number of Years Working as a Teacher	Current Teaching Grade	Teaching Subject
Caicai	F	28	Baocheng Primary School (Public School)	6	6th Grade	Chinese
Meng	F	28	Yantian Middle School (Public School)	3	9th Grade	Chinese
Wang	M	30	Guangming Primary School (Public School)	1	1st Grade	Chinese
Wu	F	28	Xingzhi Vocational-technical School (Voluntary School)	6	11th Grade	Math
Zhang	M	26	Nanshan Middle School (Public School)	4	10th Grade	Biology

Step 1: Observation

The first step in this scenario was the observation, which is a required process of understanding “teaching without words/actions” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 43). I originally planned to select 2-3 lessons from each one of the five in-service teachers, walk into their classrooms with their permission, and observe the typical teaching and learning practices in modern schooling. However, as the cases of Covid-19 repeatedly bounced back and forth in Shenzhen that summer and the number of cases could not be cleared to zero for several months, the public policies of epidemic prevention for the whole city were kept extremely strict, especially for public authorities, institutions, and units such as schools. Therefore, all five in-service teachers’ and their schools’ replies to my request of walking into their classrooms and conducting observations in their sites were all refusals without exception, citing the reason as “non-staff/students in this school prohibited.”

In this case, after consultations with the five participants I have contacted in June, they allowed me to audit and observe two classes for each of them online, via TenCent Meeting or the classroom camera system (front and back cameras) designed for remote instruction to proceed the remote observations and class auditing with no recording. Meanwhile, the teachers and students had their classes as usual in the classrooms or took online courses according to the specific requirements of their schools. That means, I selected 2 lessons from each one of the five participants, 10 lessons in total, and remotely observed the typical teaching and learning practices in modern schooling, in terms of “teaching without words/actions.” Each class lasted 40-45 minutes, so my observation unit was this length in time.

Schools are normally open until July 15th and then reopen in September during each academic year. Hence, my observations of 10 classes were conducted and proceeded from June 20th to July 15th, and from September 1st to 10th with the facilitation of net class equipment in the classroom, online meeting software, and the five teachers' collaboration. Teachers' collaboration included sending me the specific Tencent meeting link of their online class, setting me up in the classroom camera system (front and back cameras) designed for remote instruction, and also giving a short introduction of me to their students before the class. Therefore, the typical process of my remote class observation was the following: first, before the beginning of the remote observations, the teachers would announce to the class that there would be a remote auditor in the specific class; then, during the class, the teachers were asked to naturally and normally proceed with their teaching activities as usual. The students in the observed classroom were also observed in specific situations (e.g., the silence collectively created by the teacher and students, and some interactions between teachers and students). In the process of observing, I did not participate in any class activities or have any interactions to impact any emerging silences. I did not have any kind of communication with students in classes, either. Instead, I muted myself and turned my video off to reduce my potential impact on the scenario as much as possible. I observed how we stayed with and engaged with the silences in teaching and learning interactions. I used the protocol (see Appendix M & N) to take field notes about the happening silences and "teaching without words/actions" as possible as I could through my laptop screen for every observation unit. I did not take any pictures of the online class or any recordings of the classes.

In addition, during the process of recruiting participants and communicating with them in late June, I also asked my five human participants to observe and experience their self-cultivation and silent teaching or learning moments in their daily scenes in life which does not have to happen in their working places. The participants were not required to regard this “observation activity” as one have-to-do task and strict-structured research process, but to keep it in mind and start noticing those silent moments. Thus, there weren’t many restrictions on the forms and resources of their observations. They were informed that they could take field notes if they intended, which was not required. This participatory observation was designed to provide in-service teachers opportunities to notice and speculate the ambiguous concept of a teacher in those learning moments without neat boundaries. Because most of the following speculative fabulating experiences and interviews with them were arranged in August, they were left with over a month to recall, observe, and reflect on the theme.

Step 2: Sitting and Wu, and reanimating natural sounds

Near the end of July, I contacted each of the five in-service teachers to participate in the fabulating experience of “sitting and Wu.” Before the experience, participants were informed that the aim of this meditation was to relieve the anxiety and pressure in their teaching work lately, speculate about their potential “teaching without words/actions” experience and stories, and intuitively feel anything we could feel here and now in this meditation space, as well as return to the inner peace and relief. For the privacy and efficiency of this activity, the experience of “sitting and Wu” was in a one-to-one form

(conducted five times), and the human participants for each time were me and one in-service teacher.

I asked each of the participants in advance to select a convenient and comfortable setting outdoors (e.g., playground, the lawn on campus, or city central park) or indoors (e.g., teachers' office, lounge, library in the school, or coffee house) to sit down. After discussions with me, all five teachers chose five different outdoor parks that were accessible for them to have this meditation (see Table 4). When the participant met with me at a specific spot near the park, we normally walked in the park for a while and had some casual talks. Then, we selected the place we preferred to sit for a while. Participants could take any appropriate sitting gestures they liked (leg-crossing, upright, leg-stretching, etc.) for their comfort and naturalness. There weren't any restrictions on our thoughts and thinking threads during the meditation. I also asked them if they were willing to "sit and Wu" with the recorded sounds or excerpts (from the "reanimating sounds" in Scenario A) playing simultaneously (see Table 4). The aim was to trigger more entanglements among time, space, and species. All five of them agreed to have the sounds played, but they were also informed that they could take on and off the earphones any time they wanted during "sitting and Wu," if they thought the recorded excerpts would disturb their experience of meditation. In consideration of in-service teachers' compact schedules, the whole "sitting and Wu" experience took about 15-30 minutes on average for each, while the participants could always call start or end any time they liked, and the length(s) of this activity was inconstant. After finishing the "sitting and Wu," I would take pictures of the spots we were staying and some views of the park, without picturing participants.

Table 4. Information of “Sitting and Wu” with In-service Teachers

	Caicai	Meng	Wang	Wu	Zhang
Parks for “Sitting and Wu”	Shahe Park	Dapeng Seaside Walk	Tanglang Mountain Park	Xili Park	Shenzhen Bay Park
Playing Recorded Sounds / Excerpts	Riverside in the afternoon	Midmorning in the neighborhood garden	The big rock deep inside of the street garden, after rain	Right after the noon in the neighborhood garden	Riverside in the early morning

Step 3: Interviews

In the last step, I conducted a 35-50-minute interview with each of the five in-service teacher participants. This interview was designed to allow teacher participants to share their reflections and thoughts about the “teaching without words/actions” experience in their possible speculative observations, their “sitting and Wu” experiences, and their understandings of the concept of a teacher. Interview questions were semi-structured (see Appendix K & L). I made every effort to interview participants at the places of their choosing for their convenience. All the interviews were conducted in Chinese. Interviews were audio recorded on an encrypted laptop and then transcribed, but not translated into English in the data organizing and analyzing process. Interviews were only translated into English for this dissertation writing.

Here, it is necessary to bring up the five questions and the five selected recordings which I and my family members posed and prepared for initiating the imaginary conversations with in-service teachers in Scenario A. In interviews, those questions were

not asked to or known directly by those in-service teachers, but they were only posed for data presentation and writing. That means, I did not ask those questions to generate teacher participants' direct or related answers and feelings in our meditations or interviews, and I was not sure whether teachers would react to the natural recordings or not. However, in analyzing and writing (see Chapter 5), I chose to arrange the five questions together with in-service teachers' responses – their feelings and thoughts of hearing the recorded natural sounds – in order to explore and show the echoes and “reactions” between our family members' reflections and in-service teacher participants.

In interviews, emerging content involved but was not limited to some subtle and informal learning or teaching experiences in their daily life, the silent teaching and learning moments in their both working and life circumstances, some alternative conceptions of ‘teacher’ and learning contents in diverse stories, participants' conceptualizations of the teacher notion, some worries and anxieties in their teaching profession, and some feelings experienced when they heard the animated sounds in meditations. Besides, some fresh memories, stories, and narratives about interpretations of teachers outside of their careers were also recalled and shared, which might also be mentioned in our casual conversations outside of the interviews. The five participants told me their own stories and gave examples to express their ways of interpreting the ‘teacher’ notion in specific contexts.

This step was not only designed for more data collection and comprehensive analysis but also to tentatively invite more teachers to start considering other connotations of being a teacher, broadening the concept of a teacher as a social profession only. In other words, in the experiences and feelings the participants narrated,

the in-service teachers did not have to be “teacher” anymore. They could temporarily free themselves from the shackles of teaching as a profession and transform into “learners” and “observers” in order to recognize other forms of teachers. This also echoed my goal of this research – instead of confirming a universal and certain definition for the teaching profession, I would like to advocate for opening the space and bringing more possibilities into the concept of a teacher in the future. More importantly, more people would be invited to practice multiple possibilities of conceptualizing ‘teacher’ in their daily life. I will continue with introducing diffractive analysis in the following section of this chapter, describing my ways of using it in data analysis. In closing this chapter, I outlined the basic structure of presenting the data and my analysis, in order to give readers a general map before entering the diverse worlds of teachers.

Diffractive Analysis

Diffractive analysis is a method of analyzing data, which is conformingly undertaken in coordination with the memory methodology and SF experiences in this study. Diffraction, in Barad’s (2011) words, is “the practice of reading insights through one another while paying attention to patterns of difference” (p. 3). This concept uniquely matches the memory methodology and SF experiences which concern interconnected but dispersed and marginalized entanglements among relational entities (Aslanian, 2018). This is because the term diffraction and diffractive ways of analyzing “highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world, including the ontology of knowing” (Barad, 2007, p.73). That means, through memory and SF experiences, the world or world(s) are ontologically known as

intertwined complexities, multiplicities, and in-betweens that are constantly reshaping and reassembling, while the diffractive method performs, practices, and extends them both reflectively and creatively. In short, in Barad's words, "Diffraction not only brings the reality of entanglements to light; it is itself an entangled phenomenon" (Barad, 2007, p. 73).

Here, Barad also reminds us of the distinctions between reflection/reflexivity and diffraction. She suggests abandoning the popular concept of reflexivity in qualitative research because "the concept of reflexivity catches us up in representationalism—the belief that our task is the representation of individual entities" (Davies & Gannon, 2012, p. 370). That is to say, from the perspective of representationalism, entities are separately connected and functioning, and the researcher's work with reflexivity is to simply and directly report them, while the processes of reiterative and interactive mutual shaping among entities are not explicated in the lens of reflexivity. Davies and Gannon (2012) echo this interpretation through their collective memory research:

It (mis)leads us into searching for origins even when the conceptual work we are doing tells us there is no such thing as the original. Reflexivity evokes an original that is reflected as in a mirror, with our brains simply acting as the mirror that can pick up the original by gazing at it. (p. 369)

However, my data analysis process in this research was different from this description of reflexivity. I am not only a reporter and a researcher. Rather, I engaged in a more complex process of conducting this study where data generation, organization, analysis, and writing were mutually intertwined, and simultaneously happening. When I

was determined to adopt one specific way or tone to ask a question, tell certain memories, start an experience with other participants, and enlighten some thoughts in distinctive places or weathers, I might have started analyzing the data in some forms already. I also might have written up some crucial paragraphs of findings while I was casually arranging, connecting, and thinking about the data. In other words, the practice of diffraction was inscribed throughout all data-related aspects and procedures in this study, and hence, the diffractive data analysis was never isolated from other steps.

Barad (2007) and other scholars (Davies, 2014; Davies & Gannon, 2012; Mazzei, 2014) have also developed the concept of diffraction as a method in research in terms of diffractive analysis. Differentiating from traditional reflective methods such as coding, which attempts to find and imply the mirrored commonalities and sameness in data, diffractive analysis is “marked by patterns of difference [e.g., analysis after coding]” (Barad, 2007, p. 71-72). In doing so, the diffractive analysis does not reduce the richness and diversity of data by summative codes or themes in theoretical concepts. “Rather, it takes a rhizomatic (rather than hierarchical and linear shape) form that leads in different directions and keeps analysis and knowledge production on the move” (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). In other words, diffractive ways of analysis enable researchers in qualitative research to jump out of mindset traps and normative analysis, turning towards the knowledge possibilities, unpredictability, and flowability emerging in the dispersed thoughts, experiences, and links (ibid.; Aslanian, 2018; Blom et al., 2020; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013).

To retain the uncertainty and flow in my research data, I ground the theoretical frames into concepts and intensively and organically mingled them throughout the whole

study. From designing this research and generating data with specific methodologies to data analysis and writing up the findings, I was not only thinking through the theoretical lenses, making connections between theory and data, but also coming out of the frames and returning to the memories and experiences to retrieve the scenes in the data. This “going-in-and-out” process has been reiteratively conducted in terms of writing and reflecting on the memories, experiencing the sitting still and Wu, observing certain objects, and also arranging the fragments of feelings, and rewriting the memories and stories. In this recurring process, generating, organizing, and “reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory” (Goebel, 2020; Mazzei, 2014, p. 743) enabled me to stay sensitive to other possibilities in interpreting and presenting the data.

Besides, while using diffractive analysis to think with theory and data back and forth, both data and theory are invigorated with freshness and fluidity from each other (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Mazzei, 2014). For instance, when recalling the impressive teachers in our memories with family members together, we recognized some common features of those teacher-related emotions. But it was at the time when I organized and rewrote the spiral memories that I started to experience and call it “the Tao of being a teacher.” In this sense, Daoism, and the memories of becoming-with a teacher repeatedly infiltrated and fused with each other, and new dimensions of conceptualizing both the notion of teacher and the “Tao” have emerged.

Barad also argues that diffractive analysis is the mode of intervention (Haraway, 1997), because it offers chances for introducing and inserting one concept or text into another and creates “more promising interference patterns on the recording films of our lives and bodies” (Barad, 2007, p. 71), and this emerging interference implies more

entanglements and relations among entities. She contends: “Reflection is insufficient; intervention is the key” (Barad, 2007, p. 50). Diffractive strategy leads to an unstoppable and continuous chain of knowing and understanding meanings in data organization and analysis, and with multiple interventions, data is not treated or created in isolation. Instead, various trails and branches gather and affect each other, and the boundaries between knowledge and ways of knowing are blurred. Barad (2007) states, “knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world” (p. 185). That means, interventions are an opportunity to make diversity intelligible to each other and to embrace the sparkling of differences revealing themselves in the diffractive process of analysis.

In my own use of diffractive analysis in the mode of intervention, I placed diverse types of data together and invited multiple participants as researchers to collectively analyze data. For example, I put memories in written forms, pictures, written reflections, sounds and feelings, and even some contents in daily causal chats together on the table or directly on the floor, picked one of them to read and think with, and went with the threads and feelings to pick or read another one. The information from various scenarios and experiences was messy and chaotic in my mind, but they also intervened, connected, intertwined, and collided with each other and the differences or commonalities of them would be revealed. In addition, in Scenario A, my mother Wei and my grandmother Ding had actively engaged in the diffractive data analysis, and their participation, viewpoints, and ways of dealing with the data have become one kind of fresh “interference” for me. Their engagements not only impacted the data we generated and created together but also inspired data generation in Scenario B and changed my way of data writing and sharing

(e.g., the sonic conversations and spiral memories). For instance, it was in the discussion with Wei and Ding that I came up with posing trigger questions to bring different data into conversation with each other (see above, Collective Data Analysis Procedures). It was also in the discussion with the research participants that I realized some recurring characteristics of “teachers,” and so wrote up our memories in a recursive way.

This diffractive intervention also facilitates the differences to equally emerge during the analysis. It does not prioritize one difference or thematic reference of the data over others, nor enables pre-existing concepts or frames, but instead focuses on the details that are not easily visible or tangible, and the marginalized differences would appear through analyzing each other (Barad, 2014). Barad (2007) puts this in more specific detail, pointing out the inscribed innocence, fluxility, and interactive trajectory in data:

Diffraction does not fix what is the object and what is the subject in advance, and so, unlike methods of reading one text or set of ideas against another where one set serves as a fixed frame of reference, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter. (p. 30)

In addressing the equality among data in diffractive analysis, I used a relatively verbose and meticulous way to depict the data—instead of summarizing them in themes and codes, I told stories, retold memories, and focused on feelings in exploring the concept of a teacher. Besides, I also replayed and presented the recorded natural sounds

with descriptions of the vibe and context of those moments. There is no one correct or main approach(es) to interpreting the concept of a teacher throughout the data analysis, and any emerging insights are equally and diversely significant. I believed that most details in the presented data would be unneglectable and incommensurable in the way of reimagining the notion of a teacher in the future.

To sum up, the diffractive analysis was appropriate to use with innovative methodologies applied in this research, including memory methodology, reanimating sounds, and speculative fabulating experiences to re-examine the concept of a teacher. It was emphatically useful in data organization and analysis because it essentially changed my ways of generating, processing, analyzing, and writing about the data. Diffractive analysis has provided my interpretations and write-ups about ‘teacher’ with much more distinctive possibilities in shuttling between theories and the data. It has also refused to regard the relationship between researchers or the research and the data as isolated objects that require simply information mirroring and presenting but to consider the relationship as dynamic interactions and engagements when generating and narrating memories to exploring alternative connotations of a teacher. Besides, in this scenario, the process of re-membering and speculative fabulation has constituted a collective and relational data generation, collection, and analysis. This has involved multiple intimate participants in human and more-than-human worlds and multiple forms of data. Hence, features of diffractive methodology also align with the connectedness between participants, the intercommunity in experiencing, and the curiosity in reimagining the traditional concept of a ‘teacher.’

The Outline of Findings

The findings of this research will be presented in the next chapter, following four sections: (1) Recurring memories of three generations: Becoming with a teacher; (2) Transient silence in the classroom and in-service teachers' daily pressure (a transition section); (3) Sounds and sitting still as the teacher: Decomposing pressure through the sonic conversations; and (4) A collection of stories: What if/And if ____ Becomes Our Teacher. Apart from the transition section, for sections 1 and 3, data presentation is followed by my corresponding analysis in order to tentatively show one possibility and path of broadening the concept of a teacher within the mentioned theoretical frames among countless others. However, it is even more fundamental and influential to recognize the coexistence of interpreting the notion of teacher in multiple dimensions and aspects. Hence, to encourage more diverse insights and empower readers to conceptualize the 'teacher' notion on their own, I kept the fourth section open as a thought experiment in terms of applying theoretical lenses in analysis.

Those four sections are designed to be arranged in this sequence to parallel the evolving process of a teacher's professional development in a modern career sense as metamorphosis – from acquiring the qualification of being a teacher and taking teaching as a job, to confronting struggles in the middle of working as a teacher, and to the future possibilities of being a teacher. Nonetheless, with this linear process of a professional occupation, I am not emphasizing the professionalism and modernity in the concept of a teacher. Instead, I use it critically to challenge the linear evolution of teacher professionalization. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the experiences, feelings, emotions, categories, and connotations of “teacher,” which were impressive and

mentioned by the participants and emerging in the following findings, are not restricted to interpreting it as an occupation in the frame of modern schooling only. Instead, it is precisely the career of teaching and its linear process that have brought the common pressure and anxiety to teachers' daily life in modern schools. This ironic layout aims to remind us again and again of the need to rethink and reimagine the concept of a teacher and teaching/learning beyond time, and space, as well as beyond the present, modernized, and taken-for-granted horizon(s).

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: ENGAGING WITH 'TEACHER' IN MEMORIES, SILENCE, SOUNDS, AND STORIES

In this chapter, I am going to tell you a variety of memories, experiences, and stories about the concept of a teacher with the goal to better understand and boldly re-imagine the notion of a teacher. Some of the memories are age-old and dusty in the individual histories, while others are infectiously descriptive and realistically reflective of the narrators' confusion and anxiety. Some of the stories are told in an imagined conversational way, while others invite you to pause and ponder the meaning from multiple perspectives. Our road towards exploring the concept of a teacher starts with the recurring memories across three generations, weaving together stories about young girls who gradually grew and became (with) teachers in their lives. Then, the readers will pass by silent classrooms in modern schools and enter into the stressful lives of in-service teachers to understand how the mainstream schooling environments constrained the diversity of meanings of what it means to be a teacher. After that, we will follow the intertwining paths of my family members and in-service teachers through imaginary conversations to experience how reanimating our sense of hearing natural sounds (re)connects and teaches us to broaden the notion of a teacher. Lastly, we will immerse ourselves in a collection of short stories to begin re-imagining the concept of a teacher in multiple worlds by asking the 'what if...' questions.

All aboard and welcome to the multiple worlds of teachers.

Recurring Memories Across Three Generations: Becoming-with A Teacher

In this section, I am going to share several memories from three narrators belonging to different generations about their teachers and how they chose teaching as their life career. Following the collective biography approach (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012; Pretti et al., 2022; Silova et al., 2018), these memories are written in a third-person narrative. The memories are intentionally analyzed and written in a cohesive end-to-end memory series in order to reveal some common features and experiences related to the concept of a teacher. These memories are long and some of their details might even be trivial and negligible in relation to the grand history and the broader concept of a teacher. Nevertheless, I insist on retaining these details in the following text to help regain some of our lost memory fragments in conceptualizing teachers over the years.

Memory Series: The Young Girl Becoming-with Teachers

She was born in a turbulent era in China. When she was at the age of starting school, there were not many foreign schools (yang xue tang, 洋学堂) which was what they called “modern schools,” so she studied in an old-style private school (si shu, 私塾) for one and a half years, learning the Four Books and Five Classics (Si shu wu jing, 四书五经). Later, due to some changes in the family, she was not able to go to private school any longer. In her teens, she learned to make shoes, prepared shoe soles, did sewing, helped manage the family’s farmland, and did farm work at home. When she turned 15, China was liberated, and the Land Reform started. In this movement, her family was unfortunately classified as the landlord class (Dizhu jieji, 地主阶级), and the whole family was forced to move to the corner house (角屋) with poor living conditions. In that

era, if a girl from a bad family background (low-class origins, 出身成分不好) reached her age of marrying, her next arrangement in life was basically to seek a good family (who had a higher class status) to marry as a way out. And that was her situation at that time. However, her second uncle, who was the only person against the marriage idea, had some further insights and insisted that females still need to attend school and be educated. So, he sent his young niece to a modern primary school when she was almost 16 years old.

The primary school did not have a **separate house** or **decent building** at that time. It just borrowed **the place of the ancestral temple**, and there were several suites in that temple (好几进). That temple was very far away from the young girl's home, so it was impossible to shuttle back and forth between her home and the school every day, and there was no specific residence there. Thus, she could only make a small bunk with a few pieces of wood and some quilts brought from home, in the most remote corner of the ancestral hall. She entered the fifth grade directly, but without knowing a single Arabic numeral. She could not catch up with the progress in math entirely, so she failed on the first attempt of the junior school entrance examination and prepared to drop out of this informal modern school.

Her teacher, Miss M, who taught her both math and literature, gave this bewildered young girl the most **courage, confidence, and support** she could give as a teacher. Miss M wrote a letter to the girl's family, earnestly and kindly urging them to give this young girl another chance and to let her continue to study. In the letter, Miss M expressed her **trust and knowing** of this girl's capacity. The girl's uncles were persuaded by Miss M's letters and sent her 5 RMB every month to cover all her expenses at school.

Because of Miss M, this young girl was able to keep her chance of going back to school and getting educated. **She was very touched** by Miss M's **unique support, appropriate partiality, and encouragement** because she felt **seen, cared for, and believed in** by important **elders**. More importantly, she **was believed** to have both **the competence** and **the courage to strive** for what she wanted—finishing her school. She was determined to grasp the hard-earned chance of being educated (see Image 3).



Image 3. Ding in Her School Period. Achieved in Family Album.

Image 5. Ding's First Day at Work with A Colleague. Achieved in Family Album.

Nonetheless, the learning and living conditions were still practically poor. It was very dark in the temple at night. There was no electric light at that time, and she could only use kerosene burners at night to light up a small corner of the temple. In the dark, this young girl could not help thinking of some terrifying sayings. Old people always said that the weasel immortals resided in the ancestral hall, just behind the memorial tablets,

always making creepy and creaking sounds at night. Thinking about this, the young girl was very scared and trembled.

At this terrifying moment, it was her teacher M, again, who aided her by letting her live and sleep in the teacher's room with Miss M and her daughter. Because Miss M was here in this primary school as a teacher, she was **assigned a small separate room** to live in with her daughter. Additionally, at a time when every family was pretty poor, Miss M was concerned that it was the age for the young girl's body to grow up and the girl's body was in great need of rest and energy. She was so **kind-hearted** that she saved a little home-brought lard for the young girl to mix with porridge and eat as breakfast. From then on, living with Miss M and her daughter, the young girl felt much better at night and **was not so afraid anymore**. Instead, she felt **the warmth, brightness, and hope** on such dark and cold nights, which were just like mom's **love, care, and kindness** (see Image 4).

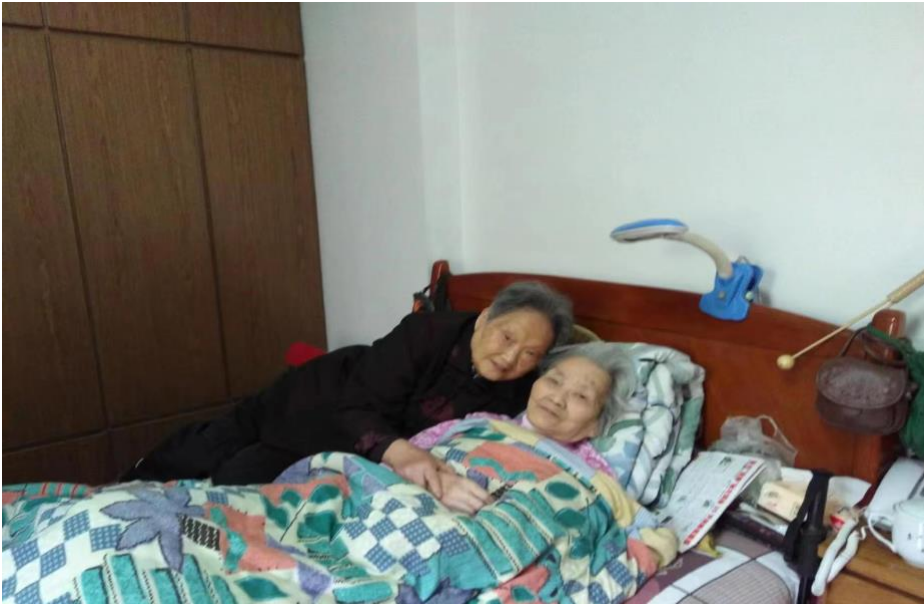


Image 4. Ding and Miss M. Achieved in Family Digital Album.

After several years of hard work and with Miss M's **loving care**, the young girl was admitted to Girls' Middle School in the town. She performed pretty well in high school and college entrance examinations, but unfortunately, she was constrained again by her "bad" family composition and social status. Her parents were cast as rightists (被打成右派) for their overseas connections or landlord family background. It was in the 1960s when the country was in need of qualified persons and teachers, so the young girl and her classmates were "forced" to stay in the middle school as teachers. The reason for "being forced to stay" was that their personal records in the educational committee had already been stamped "not admitted to the college" even before they took the college entrance examination, only because of their family class. Even if universities could not recruit enough students and they could only admit second-year high school students who came from a "Red" class, they were not willing to admit high school graduates with poor family backgrounds. In fact, many of her peers were in similar situations. Six of them in her class were forced to stay in school and the local labor force to prevent the outflow to other cities and areas¹. Due to all sorts of accidental circumstances in her destiny, since then, the young girl became a teacher in her own school, and she did not have any other career choices.

After becoming a middle school teacher, the young girl was assigned **a school dormitory** to live in for a while. It did not count as a serious dormitory. It was **a rough**

¹ According to my grandmother, the government/school administrators believed that the middle/high school students already had the ability to work in any kinds of jobs, so they were regarded as productive "labor force." And at that time, (educated) labor force was valuable for the local city/town, and to confine their mobility and expectations of going out of the town for higher payment in big cities, they were not allowed to find jobs outside of the town. By keeping students' files locally, the aim could be achieved.

shelter at most in **a little long corridor of the school cottage**. With countless life difficulties, she lived there and began her teaching career (see Image 5).

The young girl was in her teenage years, and she lived in the suburbs, but her middle school was in an urban area. At that time in China, there was no such developed and convenient transportation to commute from home to school in the early morning, so she could only rely on walking to school. It was a very long distance for a teenage young girl, which took her about two or three hours every morning. To arrive at school on time, she had to get up at three or four in the morning every day and walk for a few hours.

Her head teachers changed several times during middle school. Among them, Miss Z came to take over the young girl's class after finishing her maternity leave. The whole class, including this young girl, seemed to have antipathy and resistance to Miss Z because of how frequently other teachers leading their class had changed in a very short period of time. Besides, her classmates were very naughty, and Miss Z sometimes worried, lost her temper, and got angry with them. Many classmates and the young girl thought Miss Z was an impatient teacher and could not bear them long, just like other teachers'. But what changed the young girl's attitude toward Miss Z and made her feel that Miss Z was really her teacher over the years, was the sense of **love and warmth** she gave.

It was June. When the young girl was on the road walking, all of a sudden it started to rain heavily. The rain was so heavy that when she finished her long walk and finally arrived at school, there was not a dry part of her clothes. She was completely

soaked, although she was holding an umbrella all the way. The young girl could only struggle to her seat in all her wet clothes because she didn't prepare for this at all.

At this moment, Miss Z was observing the class during their morning reading. Miss Z saw the soaked young girl, called her name immediately, and motioned her to follow Miss Z to her dormitory in the school. The young girl trembled as she walked to the dormitory. It was not **a serious dormitory**, but **a rough shelter in a little long corridor of the school cottage**. Miss Z's children were in the bed, sleeping. Miss Z edged into the corridor and walked to the cabinet at the end of the corridor. She quickly flipped out a set of her clothes, even without having a look at her children, passed the clothes to the young girl standing at the door, and asked the girl to change them there.

The young girl was touched so much. The subject Miss Z taught was math, but in those years, the young girl could not remember a single mathematical formula that Miss Z had taught her. The only thing she could remember till today was **the warm feeling** of Miss Z's dry clothes being put on her body and **the loving care** Miss Z gave her. Miss Z was **so kind-hearted** as she noticed the young girl's situation and offered her **honest care and kindness** when the young girl needed them the most (see Image 6).

Since then, the young girl always had a great impression of teachers, including both teacher individuals and this career. In fact, the girl's mom and dad were both teachers, and in her eyes, it was **really noble and respectful** to be able to stand on the platform and convey knowledge to their students. Plus, throughout her educational experience, especially during middle and high school, almost every night, the young girl would spend her time with her parents, watching them sitting there, preparing lessons, or

correcting students' homework on the square table (see Image 7). She and her brother also sat around the table and did their homework.



Image 6. Wei and Miss Z. Achieved in Family Album.

Image 7. The Square Table Where Wei Spent Time with Her Family in the Old House.

Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

This scene was so special and impressive to this young girl because she **felt at ease** and **so reassured in her mind** by picturing and remembering it. She really loved this **family ambiance**, with **books around** and **peace of mind**. This **peaceful vibe** in the house gave her a sense of **steadfastness, warmth, comfort, and sweetness**. Therefore, she aspired to be a teacher from a very young age and was determined to apply to normal colleges in her college entrance examination.

Now, in retrospect, she knew **this peaceful family ambiance** that she tightly buried in her heart for many years was not necessarily related to “parents being teachers,” but she was so impressed by those memories and cherished the features of **security**,

bookishness, and calmness in her home. She just wanted to attribute those features to them being teachers, and most importantly, she wanted to **inherit** them.

People and peers around this young teenage girl always said, “you grew up in a knowledgeable, educated, and intellectual family with high qualities (gao sushi, 高素质)” because her mother and grandparents were all teachers working in public schools. In this family, it was easy to see how they were **highly respected and loved** by numerous students of different ages, so this young girl tacitly agreed with this opinion and naturally regarded herself as an “**inheritor**” of being a teacher in the future.

Being born into a teachers’ family indeed had a few advantages. For example, when she was a child, there were always **plenty of various books** in the house to read, and the decoration as well as the furniture’s display such as book cabinets, tables, and desks were considered “**bookish**” and suitable for desk-bound reading, writing, and learning anytime (see Image 8/9/10). Besides, **the family ambiance** in the house had always remained **calm, sweet, secure, and peaceful**, which enabled her to **feel at ease with the peace of mind** and to **settle down** for quiet reading and learning. During the young girl’s childhood and teen years, she might choose to enjoy her leisure by sitting at this desk and reading a variety of novels, while it was hard for many of her classmates to have their own desk and a quiet space for doing homework. This **scholar-gentry family** has basically shaped the young girl’s personality, hobbies, and her whole family education experience.



Image 8. Archived Books and Documents in the Old House. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Image 9. The Desk Used by Family Members to Read and Write. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.



Image 10. The Bookshelf and An Attached Desk Used by Yu in Her Childhood. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Under the **teacher-style family** influence and education, this young girl made up her mind at an early age to enter a normal university and become a teacher as her future career. However, the reason for this determination was superficial at that time. She would like to enjoy others' respect as her family did, and also to choose a preferable occupation—teaching—which was stable, appropriate for females, and had a high

reputation as well as social status. Until meeting her middle school teacher, Mr. L, she started to understand why some teachers were memorable and well-respected by their students after all these years.

Mr. L was the young girl's class director and also her Chinese teacher. Because he taught Chinese with thoughtful and intriguing approaches and patient explanations, the teenage young girl admired him and benefited from his methods of reading and learning Chinese for her whole compulsory education period. But the story was not about his teaching approaches and learning skills. What she remembered most, and desired to pass along in her upcoming career life, was the **feeling of being seen, cared for, and believed in by elders**, and how they offered exclusive **courage** and **inspiration**.

At the very beginning of the first year in middle school, the class planned to hold a campaign for the class committee election. One day, during a morning exercise break, Mr. L had a small chat with this young girl and asked her if she would join the election. As an extremely cowardly and shy girl back then, she answered him with a barely audible voice and a timid tone, "I like Chinese very much, and may I want to be a representative of the Chinese course? I am not sure..." In fact, she was not even comfortable opening her mouth and speaking in front of several people, not to mention walking onto the stage and expressing herself or making a campaign declaration in front of the whole class.

On the day of the election, she watched her classmates passing by, one after another; while she could only sit on the stool and did not dare to get on the stage, hesitating, waiting, like sitting on pins and needles. The platform seemed so close to her that she could arrive at it with just a few steps. But it seemed so far from her as well that she got stuck in her anxiety and deep fear. At this moment, Mr. L quietly walked to her

seat, stood next to her, lowered his head, and used a small voice that only the two of them could hear saying, “Hurry up. It is almost the end. Don’t be afraid and take it easy... I’ll let you be elected as you want.”

His actions and words suddenly made her feel that she was in the center of the spotlight, and that light was only for her. She was not the one who might be ignored and discarded but could also have the leading role in her own life because she deserved others’ **care, support, encouragement**, and sometimes **appropriate partiality**. She **was believed** to have both **the competence** and **the courage of striving** for what she wanted. With his **trust, encouragement**, and **this belief**, this young girl **was not afraid** anymore. She stood up, walked straight forward to the front, for the very first time in her life, introduced herself in front of more than 40 students, and talked about her preferred position and why she was qualified to be the representative of the Chinese course, bravely and loudly. And in the distance, she seemed to see Mr. L smiling and looking at her with praise. As a result, she was successfully elected as the representative of the Chinese course by her classmates with the highest votes.

Mr. L is one of the most important teachers she ever met not only because of how well he taught, but also for generously giving her—a timid and shy girl—**courage, confidence, and support**. In fact, it was inaccurate to use “giving” here because what he did was **embolden her**, wake her up, and help a child find her own confidence and courage deep inside her heart. Like a splendid steed meeting its Bole, his **unique support and encouragement** were built on his **trust and knowing** of her. Since then, this young girl has devoted herself to becoming a teacher who could give others **the courage** to be

themselves, give students **brightness, warmth, and hope**, and **support** them to strive for what they really want.

As she wished, she entered a normal university and her aim of becoming a teacher became closer and closer. In the last year of this young girl's undergraduate program, she got a chance of trying a teacher's life—being an intern teacher working voluntarily in a village that did not even have **a decent school building** or **a separate house** for education. The village head cleared **an outdated temple** for the intern teachers and assigned **a small separate room** in the temple for each of them to live in. And the story goes on from here.

Recursive Themes: The Tao, Relationality, and Shared Emotions in A Sympoietic Remembering of A 'Teacher' Concept

The above stories share life memories of how we were inspired by respective human teachers in different ages and how we became three generations of teachers in various contexts and situations. At the same time, the stories can also be regarded as one long (and continuous) story instead of three separate ones, tracking down how key elements and impressions of human teachers were passed along generations, how these elements became effective and memorable in the girls' pivotal life points, and eventually, how these elements influenced individuals' career choices of becoming a teacher.

Situating the above narratives in the Daoist framework, those memories could be a clue for understanding the mysterious "Tao" in the concept of a teacher. Laozi argues that the Tao is the ontological root of all phenomena and the ultimate destination of all things. More importantly, it implies the general process of natural development and

change, in which things “all occur naturally” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 51). In other words, although Laozi classifies almost every law and pattern of things changing and performing in one name, the Tao, it can be diversely different in each nuance. Therefore, what exactly and specifically is the Tao of being a teacher and becoming students’ appreciated teachers in the above life memories?

I am not going to give definitions of the Tao or generalize it to explain the narratives, because, in each piece and scene of the story series, the connotations and implications of the Tao of being a teacher are individually different for each protagonist, even for the same narrator’s different stages of life. For example, for the teenage girl who was freaked out by the old sayings and the darkness of the shabby temple, the light from the mother and her daughter’s room and their companions on every dark night was the “Tao” of being a kind-hearted teacher. While for the sopping girl in the pouring rain, a set of dry clothes in a female’s cabinet was the “Tao” of a teacher giving warmth and loving care. With regard to the shy and timid girl in her class committee election, an elder’s kind partiality and back-ups represented the “Tao” of being a supportive teacher with a wise eye and careful consideration. Yet, the girls who were facing various life circumstances such as almost losing a chance of being educated, yearning for a settled and quiet family atmosphere, and deciding to continue the inherited scholarly style in an early age, may not explain the Tao of being and becoming an impressive teacher in the same way. Hence, as Laozi contends, the “Tao” always refers to movements, changes, and transformations of existences (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 40), and it can only be felt, experienced, and understood within the uncertain changes of things (Chen, 2008).

Meanwhile, the laws of the “Tao” are “cyclical and reiterative” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 40), and that is also the reason for telling and arranging the series of memories here in a recursive way, sometimes crossing similar themes across one another, like a spiral. As I have mentioned at the beginning, I use some of the same or similar terms and expressions at both the beginnings and the ends of each narrative about the concept of a teacher, in order to present the coherences, successions, connections, and subtle threads that connect generations, emotions, and various kinds of teachers across time and space. For instance, the most evident clue of that spiral thread in the above memories is those bolded words and phrases which imply similar surroundings or environments (e.g., a decent school building, an outdated temple, a small separate room, a rough shelter, a little long corridor of the school cottage, etc.), similar feelings and emotions (e.g., warm, bright, courage, trust, peace of mind, bookish, etc.), and similar features of the described teachers (e.g., supportive, caring, loving, kind-hearted, etc.). In other words, they can be regarded as the “Tao” in the teacher-related contexts, or the most simple, intuitive, but indelible impressions on specific matters and persons in our long river of memories. It is to remind the readers and also myself that, although memories, time, and space may be all different, the “Tao” of becoming with teachers has been inscribed in those repetitive bolded terms and it can be circulated as well as transmitted among generations. This is because some sympoietic emotions and feelings toward teachers are beyond time, space, and individuals. Like the ending of this series of memories, our re-remembering experience ends here, but the story of the teacher and the “Tao” of becoming-with a teacher continue to pass on.

Another concept, sympoiesis in posthumanism, can also be inferred in this memory series. Although Haraway (2016b) proposes this term to articulate multi-species relationships addressing the resonant connections between humans and more-than-human species, some features of sympoiesis are demonstrated in the above memories, especially after I rewrote and re-choreographed its structure. For example, some settings which occurred repeatedly in different memories, such as the old temple, the teacher's rough dormitory, and the peaceful family ambiance, are designed on purpose to break the "self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries" in this "collectively-producing system" (Haraway, 2016a, p. 33). Those features of settings are more or less mentioned in our memories and discussions, and were emphasized and reiterated purposely in the analysis and writing. In other words, I aimed to unfold our precious individual memories about teachers as several "poly-temporal, poly-spatial knotting(s)" (Haraway 2016a, p. 60) in one contextual, complicated, and responsive system. This interactive system enables multiple diversities and possibilities of our recalled stories to thrive in their becoming because no episode is single and isolated in our closely connected relationships among family members.

Furthermore, the common feelings and reflections about our own teachers, including the warmth and brightness we experienced in the dark temple or on a rainy day, the trust and careful gaze we received in our bewildered or panicked moments, and the love we actually felt from our teachers, were not completely ready to be summarized until we went through the process of re-remembering and retelling these memories in the intimate company of each other. During our recalling, we realized some qualities of a memorable teacher, those impressively vivid feelings given by our teachers, and some

key elements that lead us to want to be an expected teacher, are surprisingly alike and present across different decades. For example, one commonality was that our memories of the most impressive teachers were never about textbook knowledge or their teaching approaches, although we were situated in different eras and confronting different life experiences. What we shared and reiterated for many years was the perceptual and invisible emotions and spirits of caring and loving offered by our teachers, which started to become visible and underlined in our sympoietic-memory system. Here, the three narrators, as well as the contexts, dated feelings at that moment, and fresh feelings in remembering gathered together to shape, live, and transform with and within each other in this reiterative, generative, and reciprocal structure. That means that the repetitive words are not only used for simply describing how similar the settings and emotions were, but also to reveal the sustaining, consistent, and mutually impacted becoming-with-process across our three generations of teachers. In our memory stories, we encountered each other with our teacher identities, and in this becoming or shaping with teachers' processes, we were in each other, related with each other, and eventually, we co-evolved, co-constructed, and made each other as teachers and women.

The last concept that is worth mentioning in our memory series is the relationality between the individual self and society which has been introduced by Hall and Ames (1997) about Confucianism. Hall and Ames (1997) argue that from the Confucian perspective, the "self is contextual, it is a shared consciousness of one's roles and relationships" and individuals exist "in the sense of being aware of oneself as a locus of observation by others" (p. 26). That means that contextualization is necessary for analyzing and presenting our memories. I needed to read this series of memories and

interpret some connotations of ‘teacher’ as well as the becoming teacher experiences in their immersed contexts. Hence, I attempted to keep the original depictions about “before and after” of each story as much as possible in order to present three relatively integral life experiences. This required me to be concerned with how the individuals were shaped and impacted by their social relations and characteristics of the specific times.

For example, the memories of each narrator have their unique imprints of times and conditions. The girl who had “studied in an old-style private school” might need to face dropping out of school, not knowing Arabic numbers at all, and marrying when arrived at a certain age. Similarly, at a certain time in China, the girl had to walk three to four hours to go to school, which resulted in catching up with the pouring rain and having her teacher’s timely help. Finally, the election of the class committee and having the ambition of choosing teaching as her future career at a very young age could happen in a relatively mature modern educational system and decent classroom, rather than in other difficult times. In particular, I would like to further the discussion about the context of the first girl’s memories. Through the memories’ contexts, I realized how the national policies and social background practically impacted individuals’ life experiences, personal career choices, and even their destinies. During the Land Reform Movement and the Cultural Revolution times, the young girl could hardly take the initiative to make choices for herself and control her own life path. She was forced to quit school, switch to go to a modern school, and was forced to stay in her middle school as a teacher. It was also because of those difficult circumstances that her teacher, Miss M - along with the care, support, and love Miss M gave to her - became so memorable and touching for this young girl. Confronting the great changes in society, this young girl was not able to hold

the right of making crucial life decisions in her hands and could only follow the direction of this changing society, just like the sea mud moving with the current. When a tiny grain of sand of the times falls on every person's life, its influences may be as huge and heavy as a mountain for each individual. From this young girl's memories about her teacher and becoming a teacher, I can recognize the multi-dimensional changes in Chinese society, such as ideological and institutional transformations, through the concept of a teacher and ways of being a teacher. It reveals the relational aspect of becoming a teacher, in terms of connecting individuals and society in a rhizomatic and intimate net, in which both shape each other. Individuals living in it could barely get rid of its ubiquitous impacts from society on what or how they are going to become.

However, with that being discussed, how would our memory series inspire us to reimagine the concept of a teacher? Besides the diverse Tao of being teachers, the sympoietic settings and emotions in becoming-with teachers, and the relationality in the career choices in specific times, what else can we learn from our memories? Like the colorful and varying memories and nuances about teachers, the answers to these questions may be distinctively different from reader to reader, and the story series of (human) teachers are still open for more memories. Yet, I intend to point out here that those impressive features of a teacher imprinted in the cherished memories and experiences being inherited, shared, and transferred beyond time and space, are not only because they are related to the teaching career. In fact, now that those features revealed themselves to us across histories, contexts, and generations, they are not necessarily bound to the modern career of teaching - they are just the purest, simple, and unadorned emotions and connections between beings.

Transient Silence in The Classroom and In-service Teachers' Pressure: A

Transitional Section

After exploring the concept of a teacher in my family members' memories, I was curious about the stories and experiences of in-service teachers in modern schools today. What would an in-service teacher look like in class? How to approach the concept of a teacher in public schools beyond understanding it as a modern career? Are there any possibilities and open spaces for multiple forms and diverse interpretations of 'teacher' in today's educational system, like what we had in my family members' memories? Hence, rather than emphasizing the traditional ways of interpreting this notion, I attempted to re-conceptualize the 'teacher' notion in practical classrooms in terms of exploring other types of being a teacher or teaching more broadly in a mainstream schooling context. In doing so, I brought my curiosity into the remote observations of classes in modern schools in Shenzhen and further interactions with my in-service teacher participants.

Therefore, the second episode of my findings is constituted by 9 short descriptions of class excerpts and in-service teachers' explanations and narratives on the current pressure of working in modern schools. This episode plays the role of a transitional section in this chapter, aiming to offer realistic insights into schooling contexts and practical teaching and learning activities in modern Chinese classrooms, in-service teachers' concerns and anxieties, and the implicit causality behind them. In other words, this section invites readers to alternate scenarios within this study and meet "teachers" in the middle of their daily working lives in a modernized and

professionalized educational environment before delving into the “transformations” of their state of being and thought in the next section.

Transient Silence in The Classroom

These nine short descriptions of class excerpts were depicted, analyzed, and re-written based on my remote observations of classes of in-service teachers in primary or middle schools, my field notes while observing and auditing, and my reflections and comments recorded afterward. As I mentioned in Chapter 4 (Scenario B: Speculative Fabulating in Modern Schools), being led by the different theoretical frames and methodologies, my focus of online observations was on the silences and “teaching without words/actions” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 43). Those silent moments constitute the following descriptions and excerpts, and through diffractive analysis, I roughly differentiated some typical class excerpts into two categories: Interactions in Class and Human Teachers’ Dominance in Class. The following 9 short descriptions of the silent excerpts in modern school classes are included in this transitional section, aiming to embody how silence taught us in schooling contexts and who might be the “teachers” in those quiet moments. It also facilitates our interpretation of the multiple layers present in the concept of a teacher – “modern pressure and expectation” (Jiang et al., 2023, p. 3), roles and responsibilities within the institution, and the distinct contrast of teachers’ figures inside and outside of work – from my perspective of remote observation.

Interactions in class

Sometimes, in modern schooling contexts, the interactions between the human teacher, students, and the ambiance in the room could themselves “talk” and teach. In one

observation, in a six-grade Chinese class, the teacher started the class by continuing the content from the day before. She asked the class a question: “From yesterday’s learning, in our textbook, who was the person that the author recalled, and what did the author remember?”

The sitting students began to open their mouths and responded positively.

The teacher saw the students scrambling for answers, so she raised both her arms into the air forming a right angle — keeping her left arm flat, and the right elbow standing on the back of the left hand. She used the action of “raising hands” to indicate to the students they should raise their hands to answer the question instead of answering chaotically.

When the students saw the teacher doing this action, they raised their hands one after another, to show that they would like to be called by the teacher to answer the question. The sounds in the classroom went from a jumble of answers to silence. No one spoke. The teacher extended his arm towards one student, to signal a girl who had raised her hand to answer.

In another Chinese class at a primary school, the teacher asked this question, “Could someone please tell me in your own words, what impression do you have of his father (the protagonist in the text)?” Then the teacher called the name of girl A, sitting at the back left of the classroom. The girl stood up to answer the question.

At this moment, when A was stammering with hesitation, in front of the classroom, another girl B noticed this situation. B saw that the teacher’s attention had

been focused on student A who was answering the question, and her own seat was in the blind area of the teacher's sight. She seemingly knew she did not have to hold her nerve anymore because the teacher had already called other students (i.e., girl A) to answer. B turned her head sideways and began to whisper to her deskmate, trying not to be noticed by the teacher. At the very back of the classroom, a boy C also began to turn around and rummage in his school bag behind his chair.

In a few of seconds, student A sat down after answering the question. Without any doubt, students B and C returned to their normal sitting position in class and no longer talked with students around.

In a middle school Chinese class, the teacher asked a question: "Why does the writer put these two paragraphs together? What is the effect?" The teacher then called a male student in the third row in the middle of the classroom to stand up and answer.

The boy stood up, tried to put together some words, and replied in a hesitating tone: "It's...it's from personal...personal experience... to a country...the logic...logic is the same, right?"

Although the student was organizing his thoughts and language and speaking slowly, his answer seemed to be on the right track. The teacher saw that the student was speaking reasonably, so she turned her head and began to write on the blackboard. She wrote the content of the boy's answer in a brief way: "From individual to the nation."

The boy who was answering the question saw the teacher writing his answer on the blackboard. He seemed to be encouraged and more confident. His voice became louder immediately, and eventually, he finished his answer more smoothly.

Still in a middle school Chinese class, the teacher asked a question: “The first paragraph...what is the first paragraph of the text about? Can you summarize the content of it?” Then she asked a girl in the back row of the class to stand up and answer the question.

After the girl stood up, she opened her lips, but she did not answer anything. She looked puzzled. She bowed her head, and her right hand kept playing with the footer of the textbook pages. She was clearly at a loss and stayed silent for the next several seconds.

The silence of the girl made the teacher give up, and she did not ask that student any more questions. More than ten seconds later, the teacher understood that the girl did not know the answer. The teacher then smiled and said, “it doesn’t matter... sit down first please, and think about it. ...Does anyone know what the first paragraph says?” The teacher turned to other students in the classroom.

This was a high school biology class. After explaining that phospholipid molecules are bilayer and that there is water both inside and outside the cell membrane, the teacher asked a question to the whole class: “How do you think phospholipid molecules are arranged within the cell membrane?”

The class fell silent. No one seemed to know the answer.

The teacher felt the dull vibe. He paced back and forth in front of the screen on the platform two or three times, and the students remained quiet for about twenty seconds. No students answered or raised their hands.

The silence made the teacher change the way of asking students to answer questions-- using group discussions. He smiled and said, “Or having some discussions in the group?”

The students sitting at their desks turned to their deskmates and began to whisper. Some students started to draw in their notebooks, and the teacher began to wander around in the aisle between the desks.

After about a minute and a half of the discussion, the teacher walked over to the two seats at the back left of the classroom and handed the chalk in his hand to a girl in the seat. He was indicating for the girl to draw the arrangement of phospholipid molecules on the blackboard.

The other students in the class saw the teacher’s action of passing the chalk, and the noises of discussion began to gradually decrease. The students’ attention focused on the girl who walked to the podium. Then, her classmates and teachers were watching her drawing on the platform quietly.

Human teachers’ dominance in class

Sometimes, in modern schooling contexts, human teachers’ eyes or movements could also teach and express meanings to students. In this Chinese class of the six-grade in a modern primary school, the teacher was going to conduct a reading meeting for everyone to introduce their favorite extracurricular books. The desks today were round-

laid—every four desks were laid together into a big one, and six students sat together at each of the big tables to constitute a reading group. And there were seven groups in total. At the beginning of the class, the teacher asked the students to recite the Disciple Rules (Di Zi Gui, 弟子规 in Chinese, Zhang, 2001) in unison.

Since every student in the class was sitting sideways, I was able to observe their expressions and movements on their half faces. Then, I saw one child who did not open his mouth and recite with the class through the classroom camera. At that moment, the teacher was standing on the platform, while setting up the courseware and equipment on the computer and looking up at the students sitting under the platform.

The teacher looked around and noticed that the child did not open his mouth to recite with everyone else. But the teacher did not keep watching the child. She looked down first, adjusted the device for a while, and raised her eyes again to look at the child. Suddenly, maybe the child felt the teacher's gaze. He raised his eyes and met the teacher's eyes "unexpectedly." They had really quick eye contact, and without saying a word, the child began to open his mouth to recite with the whole class.

In the class introducing books, the teacher began with an opening statement, "Today we are going to talk about the benefits of reading, and recommend a few extracurricular books...." While the teacher was talking, the students all sat at their desks.

As she spoke, the teacher stepped off the stage and stood next to a large, assembled desk which was the nearest one to the lectern, next to a sitting student. The student had been sitting and facing directly to the desk, with her right elbow next to the teacher. While sitting, her back was bent, and relatively relaxed at the desk.

Seeing the teacher step off and stop beside her, she immediately turned her head and upper body about ninety degrees to the right. She straightened her back and sat straight facing the teacher, indicating that she was listening carefully.

In a Chinese class at a primary school, the teacher was teaching students to describe some daily situations at home. The first-year students in primary school were sitting on their seats in the first half of the class. However, by the second half of the class, some first-year students were getting restless and began to wiggle back and forth in their seats, chattering. Some also leaned over their desks, turned their heads to talk to the backseat student, and some wanted to get up from their seats.

The teacher realized that it was the moment of having difficulties maintaining a quiet and stable order in the class, so he said, “One, two, three...”²

The students took no notice and kept chirping about their own business.

The teacher then stood in the middle of the classroom. Without moving or speaking, he kept a very serious expression on his face, and his eyes constantly looked at the students sitting in various corners of the room. The teacher’s silence continued for a minute or so.

After about a minute’s silence, the classroom grew quiet. The students adjusted their sitting positions. They sat upright, facing the teacher. No one spoke or did their own things. They all sat in the same position in the chair.

² “One, two, three, I sit uprightly:” 一二三，我坐端 in Chinese. It was a habitual wording of this teacher, in order to manage the first-year students in order.

The teacher then opened his mouth again and said, “One, two, three...” The students answered in unison, “I sit uprightly–”...

In this Chinese class, the teacher would introduce the four seasons to the first-year primary school students. In multiple practices, the teacher had asked students to finish their complete sentences when talking. After facilitating students to recognize the spring and summer by “talking about the pictures,” the teacher pointed out the third picture again on the big screen, and asked, “What do you see in this picture?”

A girl in the front row stood up after being called by the teacher, and answered loudly: “the grain (Gusui, 谷穗 in Chinese)”!

The teacher said nothing. He stood there, waiting.

The girl saw that the teacher was keeping silent and apparently not satisfied with her answer. The teacher did not intend to let her sit down at all.

The girl then said it again, by taking the initiative to complete an entire sentence, “I saw the grain was making a bow in this picture”!

The teacher smiled and said, “Well said! Sit down, please. Try to complete the whole sentence every time you speak. And you also used the phrase ‘make a bow’.”

In-service Teachers’ Pressures and Anxieties

In the above remote observations of the in-service teachers’ in-person or virtual classes, I noticed several “silent teachers” such as interactions of students and the in-service teachers’ expressions and movements which led to a rigorous and disciplinary vibe in regular and formal classrooms. However, although those “silent teachers” were

not regular teachers in a professional sense, they do not imply the existence of more open space and possibilities in conceptualizing the teacher notion. Instead, my observations of those different types of teachers exactly embody some typical features of modern schooling, and to some extent, the “silent teachers” became facilitators in reinforcing the features of the regular rigor in classrooms. Therefore, having experienced some frustration in exploring other ways of imagining teachers, meanwhile, I became more concerned with the in-service teacher participants’ perspectives. That is, I became more curious about how would the in-service teachers, who played a relatively leading part in teaching students and managing their classroom vibes, reflect on their work of teaching as well as the concept of a teacher. What might be the feelings and inspirations of exploring this notion in their jobs and lives, from the professional teachers’ perspectives?

With the above questions as well as my observations of the participants’ classrooms, I proceeded with my intention of understanding teacher participants a step further. In the interviews with the same group of in-service teachers working in modern schools in Shenzhen, each of the teachers more or less talked about the overwhelming pressure they faced and the unsustainable state of their teaching career when they described their interpretations of the concept of a teacher. This also echoed my remote classroom observations in terms of teachers regarding every move in the class as a step toward finishing the job of teaching, rather than natural interactions in a teaching and learning process. Teachers in the classroom felt stressed and tight about their teaching jobs, so they hoped for the class and students to be stable and controllable in order to achieve their goals of teaching efficiently. As I have mentioned in the literature review, the processes of modernization, professionalization, and politicization (Chapter 2, After

1978) affecting the concept of a teacher in recent decades have rendered too many requirements and responsibilities on individual teachers. From the in-service teachers' perspectives, "stress," "multifunctionality," and "tiredness" are unavoidable features describing and conceptualizing modern teachers in China, especially in the aspect of understanding teaching as a career.

For example, as a new biology teacher working in a high school for four years, Zhang had a profound experience of the complexity and pressure of being a teacher:

Today's teachers are really not simply teaching as we thought before, but both needing this and that, like an all-rounder. There are many aspects: as students' teacher, first of all, I must have good and solid teaching skills and a high knowledge level in this subject. Then in order to improve their grades, I also need to choose an acceptable way of communication, including having a great relationship with students and being able to get along with them. That is to say, I get to know what the students think. This requires me to have a very strong ability to empathize with what the students are thinking right now. ... Besides, the capability of students and their parents to report (teachers) is increasingly improving, so there are some subtle changes in the relationship between teachers and students. ... Now the request to teachers turns to ... how to become a harmonious whole with the students, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, maintaining the teacher's majesty and letting students respect teachers to a certain extent. ... Otherwise, students in my class will challenge my authority and refuse to listen to my instructions and requirements, which would affect other students'

attitudes in the class towards me. This was a very troublesome and challenging issue. ...If a teacher can't handle the class, the school or society will put more pressure on him, and the vicious cycle will continue. ...A teacher's job now has the nature of service. That is, he has to serve not only the students but also the community, the parents, and society. Therefore, in the new era, the requirements of the teaching profession are higher and higher for individual teachers.

Another young Chinese teacher in a primary school, Wang, also confronted similar pressure. He mentioned that his overwhelming worries did not only come from the job itself, but also from the stressful metropolitan ambiance in Shenzhen as well as his gender personality. He said,

In fact, I think today's teachers need to be involved in too many aspects, not only (students') life, learning, moral quality, and psychological state... teaching may become the last thing to consider. Teachers are like school parents, especially primary school teachers. ...Perhaps a more maternal teacher would be preferred. This is also why I think there is a large proportion of females in the whole teaching profession. As a male, I should overcome some gender barriers if I want to be a good teacher ... such as being more careful, gentler, and more patient. Teachers have gender preferences.

Now also there is a salary cut (for the teachers in Shenzhen). ...But I am a male. When I consider buying an apartment or a car in Shenzhen, the pressure of survival here is huge. ...So if I dwell on these stresses, it will also become my

emotional burden and make me overwhelmed. ...People may think that teaching is a profession, but in fact, when I am doing it, the things and tasks I need to face every day are not just a profession. There are many requirements not only for the teaching profession but also for the personal life of teachers.

Some teachers might also feel bewildered about various concrete tasks in school, which ask teachers to invest much more time and energy than they should, and this also produces anxiety and tensions in modern teachers' life. For instance, when Wu, a math teacher in an art middle school, described her working life during the Covid pandemic, she appeared to be worried:

In my current school environment, due to the impact of the pandemic, I feel that my work and life are increasingly unable to separate. For example, I was the head teacher before, so I often had to urge students and parents to fill in various forms about epidemic prevention. I needed to teach online and after class, I also needed to answer the questions from students and parents online or offline at any time. I felt like I was at work all day and all night. ...Sometimes I even had no clue about my work, and I didn't know where to start. I had to think about it all day long.

Meng and Caicai also expressed their anxiety and uneasiness about specific teaching issues, such as the conflict between "encouraging students to watch more movies and read books" and "improving the exam grades," how to communicate with the parents to

“solve the unwillingness of joining the latency service³ provided by the school,” and more importantly, how to “improve students’ grade and facilitate them passing the middle/high school/college entrance examinations with a better ranking.”

Sounds and Sitting Still as The Teacher: Decomposing Pressure Through The Sonic Conversations

To relieve the stress of the in-service teachers who participated in this research, and to encourage them to explore other kinds of being teachers in nature, I invited the five teachers to join me in the sitting and meditation one-to-one with playing the recorded natural sounds. However, in this part of the data analysis, I adopted diffractive analysis as well and presented data in a conversational style. When I discussed and analyzed the recorded natural sounds and our experiences in sitting still with my family members collectively, we selected the most impressive five recordings and wrote up reflections and analyses, ending with induced questions in each reflection (see Chapter 4, Scenario A_Collective Data Analysis Procedures & Scenario B_Interview). As I mentioned in Chapter 4, those reflections with the induced questions, which were drafted by our family members (i.e., me, Wei, and Ding), were not presented or asked directly to my five in-service teacher participants. Rather, I chose to present the reflections and questions from my family members, along with the in-service teachers’ thoughts and feelings, in a form of five “imaginary conversations.”

In each conversation, the first part comes from my family members (i.e., me, Wei, and Ding) and it is organized as reflections on our meditations and thoughts of replaying

³ According to the interviews with in-service teachers, the latency service is a service for students staying in school longer after class to finish homework and attend Q&A sessions with teachers.

the recorded natural sounds. Divided with asterisks (*), the second part of each conversation presents fragments of thoughts from in-service teachers after their meditations with me and after listening to the recorded natural sounds. The only connector that brings the reflections from two groups of participants together into one “conversation” is the same excerpt of recorded natural sounds. In arranging the thoughts of meditation or listening to the same sounds together in a conversational format, I intended to see how the natural sounds could connect the experiences of different individuals across diverse times and spaces, and whether our induced questions would be indirectly mentioned or answered by the in-service teachers because of any common feelings after listening to the same sounds. More importantly, the following conversations provided different ways of perceiving and experiencing the common sounds, and thus reveal our diverse ways of conceptualizing our “sonic teachers” and “teachers in sitting still.” Here, we speculatively communicated with each other about what sounds might teach us and how the pressure and problems could be decomposed with the sonic and spiritual guidance in this open and fluid multidimensional space.

Conversation 1: Riverside in The Early Morning

The sound beside the river in the early morning reminded me of my anxiety about sleeping and waking up (see Images 11 and 12). I always had poor sleeping quality and might be woken up easily by light noises. But in the mornings, these old ladies and gentlemen who were idle and enjoying their retired leisure would get up extremely early for exercising, chatting, or playing loud Taiji music. Plus, sometimes there were plenty of steamships used for freight transport sailing on the river. Every now and then in the

mornings, the ships passing by would whistle loudly, giving out the sound of a steam turbine. Besides, the main street near the river was busy with morning traffic being very noisy in the early mornings. Often, when I was sleeping and befuddled in my dreams, I got woken up by the morning exercise music, the sound of the ferries passing by, and the noisy traffic. That ruined my mood for the whole day as I could not sleep well. Because being frequently influenced by these sounds and noises, I felt boredom and complaints in my mind, and I became unsatisfied with the whole environment and the people in this environment--Why these elders could not spend their later life more quietly or try to reduce the exercising noises to avoid bothering the neighborhood?

But when we sat there and were part of the environment, and when we now turned back to close our eyes and listened to the sound aimlessly, something had changed. The sounds no longer seemed so irritating. Instead, they seemed to be full of life and vitality. The noises were telling us to enjoy them because they represented our normal life. I could even revive the experience of sitting there on the sunny summer morning, a group of elders who seemed to have endless energy doing their morning exercises, chatting and smiling, the busy river freighters passing by one after another, streams of cars running on the main road, and even the small sparrows singing loudly on that clear summer morning. So the early mornings could also be spent in an enjoyable and bustling way! Suddenly, the smell of hot cake, deep-fried dough sticks, and steamed buns seemed to waft from the distance. There must be someone walking, going to buy breakfast for the whole family, and bringing it back to share together. The aroma of oil and warmth got into our noses and our stomachs growled with hunger. We hurried from our morning meditation to get breakfast.

Will you enjoy a busy and noisy morning? Will you have time for breakfast?



Images 11 & 12. Riverside in The Early Morning. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

The shallows⁴ and the land of Shenzhen Bay were all formed for reclaiming from the sea, so the water in the bay was a little smelly and stinky. This fishy smell kept getting into my nose. ... The main road was right behind us with the great bulks of high buildings and the subway station in their construction. The vibrations of those constructions made me feel uncomfortable. ... But this was not the only place where these could be felt in Shenzhen Bay. Everywhere in Shenzhen was like this because this was a super huge, modern, magical mega city (see Images 13, 14, and 15).

As a new teacher in this city, I was under a lot of pressure and had to encounter plenty of challenges, which could not be possibly solved by sitting, thinking, and meditating. ... The truth is, the more I think about it, the more I feel anxious mentally. For example, I have just sat at Shenzhen Bay with you for a while. The buildings in the

⁴ The shallow means a mudflat around that area. It was an area that is half-sea and half-mud – the shallow or wetland area beside the shore, but because of the lack of land in Shenzhen, it was designed to be reclaimed from the sea several decades ago.

distance, the prosperous streets nearby, and the noises of subway constructions kept reminding me of the fast pace of life in Shenzhen, and how the more and more work, the more I have to finish as a young teacher, and the huge pressure of surviving in this modern city.

However, I felt different when I listened to the recorded sounds. It was noisy actually, but in a healing way. I heard various sounds in that. There was the kind of music playing like the old people in our family when playing tai chi in the morning. And I also heard the voices of people chatting lively as if they were doing some morning exercises. I could imagine through the sound that kind of leisurely life they were having. ...Also, there were seemingly some birds singing (very slight sound), water flowing and lapping, and sounds of riding bicycles. It should be in the morning, right?

...This voice lets me think of our hometown life. We were very comfortable and satisfied in that kind of morning. ...(I) bought breakfast staggeringly and leisurely in that clear and bright sunshine. I might hear some gossip along the path or in the breakfast store and walk home languidly with unfinished breakfast. ...After listening to the recording, I felt very relaxed, which seemed to relieve some of my anxiety about living and working in Shenzhen. But pretty soon, the sound of the ground foundations being hammered down by the construction machine here brought me back to reality. I came back to that kind of pressure I had to deal with as a teacher here. ...I did not have time or mood to have a warm breakfast. ...The teacher's life in Shenzhen is completely different from the feeling in my hometown.



Image 13. The Huge Modern City, Shenzhen, and Its High-rises, Seen from Shenzhen Bay.

Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Image 14. The Source of the “Fishy Smell”. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.



Image 15. The Place of Meditation with the Construction Site Behind. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.

Conversation 2: Right After Noon in The Neighborhood Garden

The most striking feature of this piece of sound was the clear voice of multiple birds singing against a background of some white noise. The birds singing was only discovered later when we came back and listened to the recording carefully. I could still remember that day when we were there sitting in the garden, it was just after noon. The

sunlight was fairly bright, but the clouds were thick. The garden was quite empty then, and since we had just finished our lunch before this meditation, the stillness and quietness made us sleepy. The sunshine at noon in summer was dazzling, and the weather was also a little hot even though we were sitting still, so we briefly closed our eyes and catnapped for a while. We were completely relaxed and chilled while sitting in this natural and peaceful environment (see Image 16). Occasionally someone walked by or rode a bike across this garden. They brought over a gust of wind with some slight coolness, which disturbed our “secret space.” We adjusted our sitting positions and opened our eyes quickly.

There were about four or five kinds of bird voices appearing in that recording, and they sang separately but echoed with each other as if they were having conversations with each other. Some patterns of voices and tones would come up over and over again, like some birds talking to themselves and conveying an important message repeatedly. Sometimes, being tired of chirping, or perhaps suddenly being disturbed by surroundings (such as the honking of a car on the nearby road, or the hurrying movements of a person passing by), those birds flapped their wings hurriedly across the green land or the clumps of trees. Their chirps and songs were sometimes near or far, sometimes stopped or continued, and repeated rhythmically. At last, as if holding a concert, they all chirped together and became bustling.

Listening back to the recording now, we were surprised to find that there were so many birds around us, while we as the ones who were meditating there, we actually ignored them completely. We replayed and listened to the sounds and imagined that these birds should be hidden in the lush green of leaves and branches. These birds were deft

and cunning. If we did not try hard to listen to it carefully, or if we did not make this recording and replay this non-human-speaking voice without any purpose, we cannot detect their existence even if we were in the scene. We could not help suspecting that when we meditate if the birds were also watching and observing us furtively. Maybe they were laughing and talking about us: “These three people in three generations are too sleepy to see us”!



Image 16. Right After Noon in the Neighborhood Garden. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Have you ever listened to a bird conversation? Will you be able to see a bird whose voice can be heard but the body is hidden? Will you have a little spare time for taking a nap in the afternoon?

When we were sitting here, I was a little nervous and out of breath at first because of climbing this little hill. ...And I was also a little hot and stuffy. After sitting down, I started to tardily listen to the sound you played.

There was a very tranquil and spacious sense flowing in the sound along with the very noticeable birds singing and the echoes of their chirps. Then from time to time, I could also hear the birds here, sparrows or what, singing and flapping their wings. Plus, I could also feel the cooling drafts here on the hillside, so my heartbeat became gentle, and my mind felt gradually relieved. ...I felt the space in front of me was wide open and my body was lissome. I was like staying in a large area of forests ...because the birds were singing in the playing sound and on this platform; but at some moments I also felt like...I was standing on the mountain and facing the ocean, with the cooling wind at the top. ...At that time, I could hear and sense my own heart beating, which was not that distinct in usual times. My heart jumped powerfully with a large beating sound.

...The playing sound and its led senses seemed to bring me to some places which were far, far away. ...My body became lightsome as if I could fly like a bird. I sat on a huge cloud or a bird, flying, like soaring with the birds. I overlooked a variety of places like a bird. ...Little by little, my body and muscles and my tightly clenched heart started to calm down. The sounds of the bird and the feeling of flying had emptied my mind, I think, and the strength and blood seemed to flow smoothly all over my body after climbing the mountain. ...My head was also comfortable and relaxed with the blood flowing inside, I felt, ...so I was a little sleepy and wanted to lie down for a while.

Then I opened my eyes because I didn't really want to fall asleep from meditation (laughter). ...I saw the dense and tall buildings which were not far from here with their neatly arranged and countless grids of windows. Although I was on the mountain, sitting here instead of in those apartments...like a bird being imprisoned in a small cube, I would inevitably think of the tedious and redundant work and the pressure in my job of

being a teacher when seeing those tall buildings, the windows, and the cars roaring past on the highway beneath the hill. ...My body began to feel some anxiety and fatigue again. My shoulders started to feel the heaviness, and my back was tense again with a bit of a whiny mood.

...I did receive some inspiration from the natural scene, the sounds I heard, and the feelings I had today. ...Just sitting here and meditating made me wonder if I should stop for a while, be apart from the work, and try to draw boundaries between life and work. ...I did not do this well before and did not leave space and time for myself to relax a little bit and have a rest with those trees, houses, and the birds singing. ...This was because I did not have spare time to even think or focus on those entities and surroundings. ...Boundaries were important. If I could draw a better line between my life and work, I felt like I could try to press the pause button, sit, and meditate in my future usual days for recuperating my body and mind...in birds' singing and natural environment. It was important for me to deal with the mood first, and then to cope with things (see Images 17, 18, and 19).

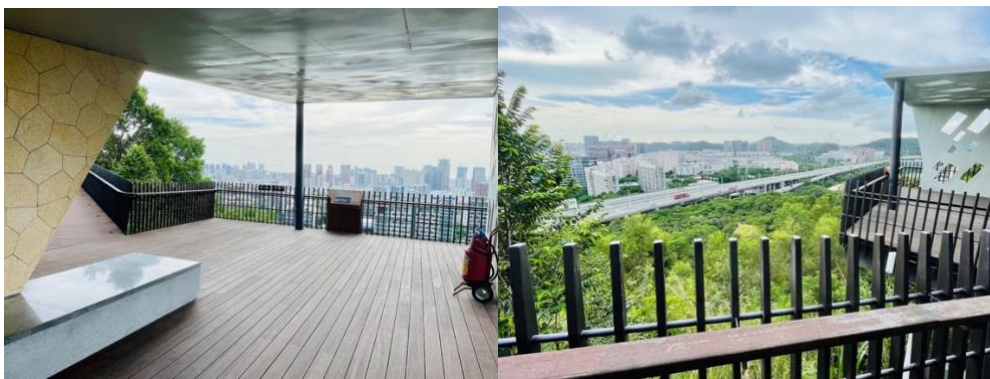


Image 17. The Place of Meditation on the Little Hill. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Image 18. The Distant High-rises and the Busy Highway Drawing Boundaries. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.



Image 19. A Glass Platform Where the In-service Teacher Chose for Planned Rest and Meditation Next Time on Her Own. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.

Conversation 3: Riverside in The Afternoon

It was windy when we sat by the river this time, but the sun was still shining, and the temperature was quite high on that summer afternoon. As dusk approached, we clearly felt the wide difference from the last time we came here in the early morning. We realized that when experiencing and staying in the same place in different time periods, or seasons, it would not be the same thing at all. In the early morning, the riverside garden was like a newborn baby that was brand new and full of hope and possibilities. Everything in the scenery at that time was brightly clear and gently coated with faint orange under the rising sun. However, the garden in the afternoon was like a human in his or her middle age, steadier but drearier, and every activity happening in an orderly way in the garden (see Image 20). People along the river were busy with their own activities. Some adults brought their children here to relax. Some elders were using public exercise equipment to stretch their bodies. Some were walking their dogs on the grass. And some people were beating and washing their clothes in the river - the ancient way. We sat

there, watching them bustling and focusing on the trivia of their life. We felt the comfortable and lively vibe there, and we also enjoyed the leisure with them -- yes, weren't the flat light of life and passing the days uneventfully the greatest and simplest happiness?



Image 20. Riverside in the Afternoon. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

When we returned home and listened back to the recording afterward, we realized something different. The recording predominantly revealed the extreme strength of the wind on that day, which was completely different from what we had paid attention to when we sat there. Throughout the recording, we heard the sounds of the wind whistling and the sounds of the river aggressively gurgling. They were too hard to be ignored as if to remind us of highlighting their roles in both background sound as well as the various activities happening in the garden. Meanwhile, there were sounds that reflected the activities we observed during the time when we were sitting still and having our meditation: the conversations between adults and children, the occasional barks of the dog(s), the rhythmic swings of the exercise equipment, and the grinding of iron parts, the loud steam turbine sound of ships passing by, and the slapping of clothes. These sounds appeared from time to time in the recording but never drowned out the sounds of the

whistling wind and running water. At the end of the recording, people seemed to coincidentally maintain relative quietness for a short time, and they were not so “noisy” anymore. Suddenly, a few subtle bird chirps appeared in the recording, like waiting after all the participants finished their presentations, the birds finally getting a chance to speak and sing timidly.

Since when have we learned to tune out the background sounds of nature to focus only on the sounds humans had made and to only see human activities? What are we ignoring?

The experience of meditation was quite different this time. ...At the beginning of closing my eyes, my brain was very active, and the thoughts were also flying everywhere. ...I basically still think about my usual work lists such as what kind of tasks there would be and how I should do the presentations in class as well as participate in the lecturing competitions. This may be because the next semester will probably begin soon. When I thought of those assignments for teachers in school, I felt more and more tired and stressed. ...Then I thought I might not be able to sit still and meditate.

All of a sudden, my thoughts were pulled back by the muffled thunder in the distance, and my soul seemed to return to my body. I could even feel the sticky and wet feeling of sweat on my skin at some moments. ...The air here was moist, heavy, and sultry. The air pressure seemed to be lower than usual ...maybe it was just about the feelings in this lush forest. ...I could see the deep green on both sides of the avenue. This avenue reminds me of our high school as in the campus, once getting into the gate, it was

a green boulevard with two columns of trees at both sides in front of the teaching building. It is summer right now, just like those summers in my high school many years ago. ...I felt the quietness and passion in my heart, and I was back to that time again. It occurred to me that...wow, I had transformed from being a student to being a teacher in several years.

And then, I heard the sounds of rushing water, the huge ship, and the whistling wind in a seemingly open space. That was why I thought of the running water, the little bridge, and the white birds standing like sculptures, which I saw on the way we came over. ...Deep down I was a little envious of those birds, assuming that they were cool and free whether in the river or in the sky. ...They reminded me of being a child and pretending to be carefree and sensitive. ...I would like to stay as free and sensitive as the flying or standing birds.

In the recording, I also heard the sounds of normal life. It was like a little bit of...buzzing white noise in the background mixed with the sounds of humans talking and moving. Right? They were talking in a dialect that I could not really understand, but it sounded as if they were having a kind of easy and casual conversation. I think I seemed to experience people living in other places having a normal and natural life day to day ...talking, washing, and cooking, and so on. I took a deep breath...I felt the relief in my chest as if I was sucking the greens in the air into my lungs and veins and exhaling what looked like the dark clouds on the horizon.

I suddenly felt like some pressure and “knots” in my life had been digested. ...I have heard the sounds of other people, other lifestyles, and the intense sounds of wind and water somewhere else in this world. ...I realized that there were so many people and

creatures in every corner of the earth, living their own lives with both happiness and stress. However, the water would still flow, the birds would still sing, and the wind would still blow, right? ...I seemed to focus too much on my personal life, feelings, and pressure at work, while except for myself, others' lives were still going on and I had not cared about them before. ...But actually, nature was always there, water was always running, and life was moving forward. I did not know exactly how the feelings were...I could find a kind of acceptance and relief from the sounds and the surroundings which were ignored by me before. They could offer me the support and confidence that made me believe I could also live the peaceful life as them no matter how stressful I was. ...But I did not realize this before, because I never thought about sitting down and listening to a recording without humans' voices and views. ...Now I still had no idea about my work, but I made my brain get a moment to relax in these 20 minutes without thinking (see Images 21, 22, and 23).



Image 21. The Lush Forest in the Park. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.

Image 22. The Running Water and the Hidden White Bird in the Park, with the Tall Buildings Behind. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.



Image 23. The City was About to Rain. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.

Conversation 4: Midmorning In The Neighborhood Garden

We loved this recording most because it showed a peaceful, balanced, and harmonious human-nature integrated sonic scene. It was pleasantly warm and breezy that morning and there were not many people when we sat in the garden. There was no one around and we found some empty seats to sit down. Later, several people passed by, but they were also having leisurely walks, sitting down for a rest, and fetching bottles of water. Some cats also wandered around, burrowing in the grass and bushes. We thought the recording was very peaceful because from the beginning to the end of this audio, it was filled with a calm and quiet vibe. It was not busy and bustling, but it was also not silent and deathly still. The air always flowed with vitality and vigor, like the babbling clear brook in the mountains. It intensely resonated with us when we had our meditation, which also raised our empathic emotions among our family members. How rare but worthwhile it was for a family of three generations to sit quietly and peacefully together and enjoy the calmness of life! In moments like these, we felt we had intimately bonded

with each other, and we understood each other more because the feelings of that harmonious scenery were shared and mutually experienced (see Image 24).



Image 24. Midmorning in the Neighborhood Garden. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

We also believed that this recording was balanced and integrated with nature because it contained the sounds of birds chirping, wind breezing, and some movements of human activity. More importantly, none of the sounds were significantly drowned out by human activity, or vice versa. For example, there were faint chatting voices from faraway places, the automatically played soft music from the water machine in the community when running water into the bottles, the sounds of water flowing and hitting the plastic bottles, people's footsteps in slippers, social conversations when people standing in front of the water machine and waiting for filling up, the vague honning of the bus in the distance, and the sounds of a mother with children riding a child's bicycle. It seemed that all the people who appeared could not bear to disturb such a quiet vibe here, so even speaking tones and movements of activities were gentle with patience. At the same time, we could still hear the little birds singing lightly and relaxingly with a young voices as well as the occasional sounds of the breeze blowing. None of these sounds were

particularly prominent or persistent for a long time, and they were independent, without impacting each other. The birds sang and coordinated with each other harmoniously, providing a peaceful and sweet atmosphere around them.

Have you ever tried joining nature, interacting and cooperating with beings in it, and appreciating their beauty?

I was familiar with this feeling of walking alone, sitting still, and meditating. The only thing that was different today was that we were sitting outside, so the weather was a little hot and there were some mosquitoes biting my legs (laughter). ...But fortunately, the sun was going down and I brought the mosquito repellent.

My most favorite thing in today's sitting and meditation was the sunset over the mountain. ...How amazing and spectacular it was! Watching the sunset, I suddenly realized that sitting and meditation were not necessarily to be done with my eyes closed. I usually close my eyes to keep my mind in an empty and relaxed state and focus on my breathing, so that I can calm down quickly. ...However, today's sunset was so beautiful that not seeing it while sitting still was a pity. Although the sun was approaching its last hours of shining for the day, the golden light that burst out of the clouds around made me feel...the gentleness and powerful strength. ...I looked at it for a long-time during the meditation (see Image 25).

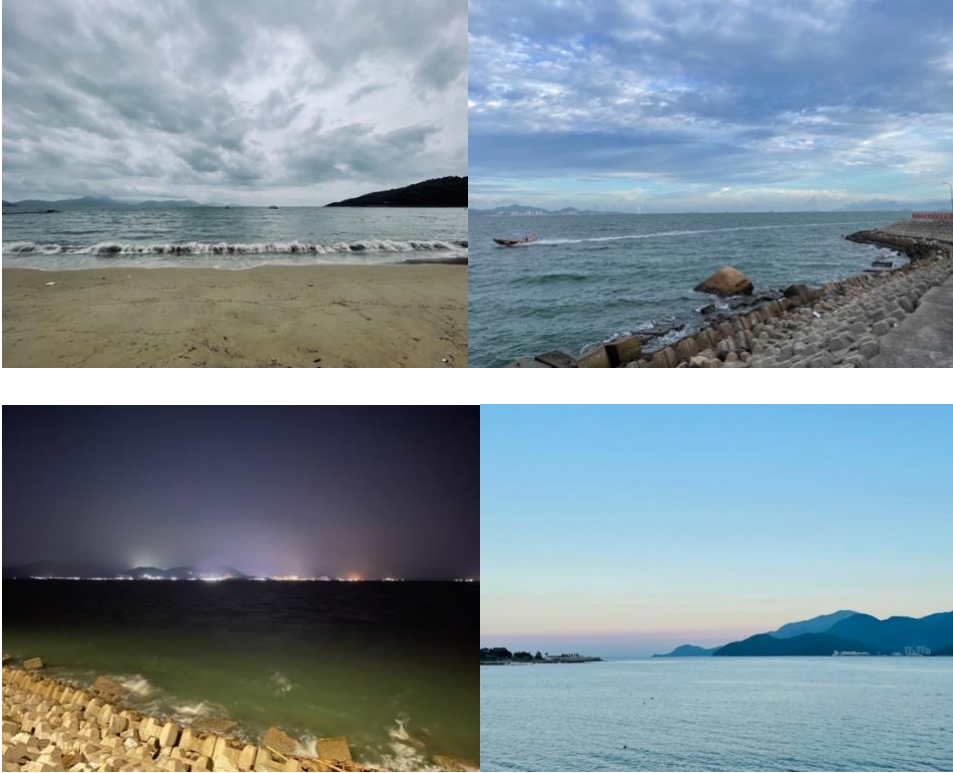


Image 25. The Sunset Over the Mountain in Our Meditation. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in 2022, summer.

At the beginning of today's sitting still, though it was a little hot and there were walkers coming and going, I tried...to keep my mind off things and focus on my breathing. But I couldn't make it completely because I was thinking about the relatively difficult things in my life and the recent twists and turns. Recently, I was worried about some new work arrangements for the next semester. I was assigned to take over a grade three class to be the class director in junior middle school. The performance of this class in exams was not bad ... but it would be the first attempt to take over a class in the middle of the school year, and I always felt a little nervous and worried about it. ...What I mean was, although this did not happen right now, there was already some pressure on me, and (I) could even imagine that in the future there would be some parents of the students in that class assuming that (I was) inexperienced and incapable of doing it. They might doubt whether I could lead the third grade (taking the high school entrance examination) or not, or if I could handle the task of being a good head teacher, etc.

Maybe I had worried too much...When I walked alone sometime before, watching the sea, I always worried about those things as well (see Images 26, 27, 28, and 29).

When sitting down to relax and meditate, my mental state would indeed recover a little bit, and (I was) telling myself that I was overthinking, and sometimes I have a sudden burst of inspiration. For example, at the end of the sitting, I heard the recordings you were playing, which were very quiet and calm. The birds were singing happily and briskly in the recording ...and then I saw such an amazing sunset. I thought I was the cheerful bird in the recording...and (I was) in a good mood at this moment, and the sunset gave me inspiration and courage to enjoy and celebrate life like the birds. ...I did think about this. The birds' lives were not as secure and peaceful (as ours) and they must have encountered dangers to survive in the natural world, while our human beings would face a much safer and easier life than the birds. ...But the birds could still sing so lightly and merrily, and lived with vitality and passion, so why should I worry too much? ...Besides, the sunset was not always as beautiful and splendid as today. ...It might also be underestimated by us at some points, but it was still there and shining, presenting the most amazing sunshine someday. So why did I worry so much about others' (judgments and suspicions)? ...Today's meditation with the recorded audio and the sunset made me determined not to worry too much, and to try my best to be true to myself and do the job with my conscience. ...Just enjoy the sunset and cheer with the birds, right?



Images 26, 27, & 28. The Sea on Overcast Days, Daytime, and At Night. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in the past.

Image 29. The Sea View Seen by the Participant When She Took A Walk on Normal Days. Photoed by the in-service teacher participant in the past.

Conversation 5: The Big Rock Deep Inside The Street Garden, After Rain

This recording was analyzed by combining two separate recording excerpts together from the nine recordings. We decided to integrate the two recording excerpts in one because (1) both times we were sitting and meditating in the same garden and the same place; (2) both of them happened to be just after the rain, so the weather, temperature, humidity, and many other factors of generating our feelings were similar. Although there were some disparities between the two experiences for us, they were also just perfect to make a contrast of the experiences to underline the changes from one to

another. The first recording happened in the afternoon after rain and the sky was just cleared up, but as dusk approached, the sun could not warm the garden with all its strength. However, the second recording was a morning in the garden just after the rain, and the fresh and beautiful day was just beginning (see Image 30/31).

As the recording began, we sat down on a big stone in the dim afternoon woods. It had just stopped raining, and the ground and stones were wet and slippery. The rain was due to cold air passing through the town, hence, although the rain had stopped, the wind was still strong and cold. It was the height of summer. But thanks to the wind and the rain, when we sat on the stone and meditated, we felt the stone was hard and cold, and a chill rippled over our skin during the wind blowing over. A gust of wind blew off the wet leaves on the branches, and those leaves that were still on the tree danced and swayed intensely with the gust of wind. The recording also truly represented our feelings at the time. The sounds of the wind in the recording sometimes were loudly whirring, while sometimes they quietly stopped. The trees also rustled, and almost every time when the wind was strong, we could hear the leaves falling to the ground or on the stone. Planes were passing by above the sky and people were talking to each other in the distance as if they were ready to resume their daily outside activities after the heavy rain.

The wind weakened and at last, almost died down. One bird seemed to lead the way with a tentative soft and short chirp and then began a continuous song. The bird appeared to call its bird friends and to let them know that the storm had stopped, and the others were welcome to join its singing. The chirping of the bird was clear and melodious, and then it became more and more frequent and louder without any fear in its voice. In the morning, all the birds seemed to know that the “danger” of the storm was

over, and they chirped happily and blithely in the bright, radiant, and enchanting morning, enjoying the fresh, moist air and the clear, warm sunshine after the rain. They seemed to be in their own wild paradise, singing freely. Their ethereal voices echoed, like a group of lively elves communicating interactively in the woods of their mountain which only belonged to them. Gradually, people came to the park, and they were joining the “chorus.” There were human voices of people chatting, some dogs barking in the distance, and the distant chimes of the town clock tower. We also yearned to go out of the woods to feel the warmth of the sunshine after the rain, so we steadily ended the morning meditation and began our refreshing day.

Have you ever shivered in the cold wind, but been healed by the nascent sun and fresh air after the rain? Has your mood tried to calm down together with the wind?



Images 30 & 31. The Big Rock in The Afternoon and in The Morning. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

It was my first time sitting and meditating outdoors. Looking at the trees and forests all over the mountains and the buildings in the distance was a very special and comfortable experience for me (see Images 32 and 33). ... I thought I had basically two kinds of mental state in this period of more than twenty minutes. At about ten minutes in the beginning, I reflected on the pressures I was facing, reviewing the possible difficulties I might need to encounter this and next semester. ...I would like to organize my thoughts and tease some puzzles out. In other words, (I wanted to) seize my spare time.

But later, after a long time of pondering, I felt my brain was too tired. At that moment, just a gust of wind blew over, and it seemed like (it was about to) rain here. ...The leaves were rustling and swinging with the wind. Just then, the recording you played was also having the sound of the wind in nature, I guess. ...And then, after a while, I seemed to hear several sounds of the birds, (the sound of) leaves falling down, and the wind whistling from time to time. ...Being surrounded by the natural sounds, I suddenly felt that in my mind, the hot and rushing feelings of solving problems immediately seemed to be blown away. ...I felt that I would also like to flutter and swing in the wind for a while and relax for a while. Besides, when I listened to the recording, I found the whole process mirrored my state of mind. Like the fierce wind was strongly blowing at the beginning, I was also stressed and worried about the problems. But then, all of a sudden, the wind had passed and went quiet, lots of birds started to chirp cheerfully, and everything in the recording seemed to be...so clear, fresh, and bright, like the experience after a storm...

So, I felt I was a little inspired by those sounds. ...Like the whirring wind, I needed to let my pressure be revealed and released. ...I should not (try to) constrain the

pressure or think about the problem over and over again for a solution. If my mood was down and dull, or my state became worse, it did not matter, (because) nature told me to stay with these trees and wind together, and just let the wind roar. ...What I meant was allowing myself to show and vent my sadness, anger, depression, and incomprehension relaxedly and adequately. ...Everything would be bright after waiting for the wind to blow. Similarly, these feelings and baggage could be released freely (during meditation), and I would recover as well after the release.

...I felt that after meditation, I was better able to confront the difficulties in my life and work. Although at this time the problem had not been solved, at least my psychological tension was freed, and the problem of my mood was solved somehow. ...Without thinking about teaching and students, I was able to completely release the emotions and pressure in the sound of the wind. Like a reboot of my own brain and body, I felt I could put myself into a new life and work again in a fresh state.



Images 32 & 33. The View from Where We Meditated, “The Trees and Forests All Over the Mountains and the Buildings in the Distance.” Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

“Teachers” Reconciling With The Self: In Tianrenheyi, Harmony, Pluriverse, And Common Worlds

In the sonic conversations and the meditations between family members and in-service teachers, the concept of a teacher is extended through multiple lenses. This is mainly embodied in some enlightenments aroused by the sounds of nature and natural phenomena.

In Daoism, being situated in the sound of nature and natural phenomena enable humans to explore nature and learn from those entities who “ought to be like this” in nature (Liu, 1996, p. 34) because they “imitate nature” (Laozi, 2011, Chapter 25). For example, from the last soundtrack at the big rock in the street garden after the rain (Conversation 5), the in-service teacher was inspired by the sounds representing the changing of the wind. He analogized the changing intensity of the wind, from fierce roaring to its subsiding, with his emotional changes and the process of releasing his pressure. In other words, in listening to the sound of the changing wind, the teacher understood that the emotions, pressures, and difficulties he faced in his teaching job also followed “the law of nature” (Zhou & Li, 1998) inscribed in the wind. The teacher also realized that when he attempted to forcibly “constrain the pressure or think the problem over and over again for a solution,” he might not be able to alter his “down and dull” mood because he interfered with his emotions in an arbitrary way instead of going along in harmony with its natural state. In this sense, the feelings of sitting in nature and the sounds of nature healed the teacher’s moods at that moment, and as an “unexpected natural teacher,” it taught him about experiencing and relieving his stress.

Since “the laws of nature” can be inferred from the natural phenomena and experiences in nature and also impact people’s daily life, the above conversations and meditations conducted with family members and in-service teachers can also provide the chance of sensing the harmony between nature and human beings (Hu, 2016) or the correlative relationship as “Tianrenheyi”(天人合一, Zhao, 2019b, p. 1107). For instance, in Conversation 4, the family members were impressed by the sonic scene and felt “bonded with each other” in the harmonious and peaceful vibe, because they were immersed into and shared the balanced and correlative relationship by experiencing diverse kinds of sounds in nature collectively. In that soundtrack, none of the various sounds dominated others and surpassed each other, so the movements of human activities and the birds’ chirps were not opposed to each other in the sonic scene. It was also open for audiences around, whether humans or other beings, to join in the sonic performance. It vividly reveals what Zhuangzi (Zhuangzi & Sun, 2007) argues about the inseparable and invincible relationship between humans and nature in Daoism. The independent and differently equal voices chorusing together in this track had the audience experiencing with their ears the “Tianrenheyi”-- the intimate-related but anti-transcendental relation in the small neighborhood garden.

In addition to teaching us about the correlative relations between humans and nature, the meditations and reanimating of the sounds also taught us about the harmony between the body and mind through self-cultivation and self-adjustments in Confucianism. For example, in the above conversations, both family members and the in-service teacher had their own dilemmas in their daily life, such as poor sleep quality (Conversation 1), being unaccustomed to the fast-paced life in the big city (Conversation

1), difficulty in drawing boundaries between life and work (Conversation 2), or the inextricable immersion of his or her own temporary stressful life (Conversation 3). Those uncomfortable moments were dilemmas inside our minds, rather than the practical or concrete issues outside waiting to be solved or finished. In those invisible dilemmas, the so-called explicit “solution,” “answer,” or “teachers” who are able to teach about overcoming those difficulties might not exist at all. In the speculative experiences, participants explored those inner dilemmas by themselves in their introspections and self-cultivations while meditating or listening to the sounds. There was no external learning or forced requirements in this process, but only reflecting on their own to achieve their inner mind harmony. In other words, spiritual cultivation and experience as well as practicing by ourselves to find the light and reach a peaceful and harmonious state could be regarded as a possible teacher and guide in our life when confronting dilemmas in mind. We might not have the answer yet even after the spiritual cultivation, but we have set off on the journey of exploration.

We have also listened to a lot of actual feelings and their lives in the above conversations as if we have gone through these in person. Therefore, the last inspiration reflected in the sonic conversations and meditations across time and space is the idea of pluriverse and common worlds in posthumanism, which urges us to search for future possible teachers, comforts, and ease in more-than-human worlds. We have suffered hardship in sounds when we focused too much on human activities only while ignoring other beautiful voices in nature, and we even did not notice that in the sonic world humans’ noises have already dominated and constrained other sounds in the Anthropocene (Conversation 3). In fact, participants’ experiences in the designed

meditations and the activities of reanimating the sound have powerfully illustrated the existence of pluriverse and common worlds. For instance, in Conversation 2, the in-service teacher felt like flying and overlooking as a bird in the sky when she was sitting still in playing sounds with the cooling wind on the mountain. At that moment, at least for the teacher experiencing that same intention and vibe, and thus, the clear distinction between human beings and the bird was blurred (Escobar, 2011; Haraway, 2008; Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; 2018), and multiple worlds (Latour, 2014; Mignolo, 2009; Nxumalo, 2015) indeed coexisted in the teacher's feelings and mind. The world of humans and the world of birds merged together. The teacher was still sitting there in the physical "human" world, but her feelings of flying like a bird and of the gentle breeze were also real existence in her mind and in the world of other dimensions, or the worlds of non-humans like the bird.

In addition, with the playing sounds, several teachers experienced the common worlds in holding their curiosities and inclusiveness to those invisible realities (Latour, 2004a). For example, the teacher in Conversation 3 seemed to touch and feel others' normal daily life by hearing a variety of sounds. She was never involved in other people's lives represented by the sounds she heard for sure, but she shared the feelings of living with them regardless of the different time and space—she shared the common worlds with the strangers in the sounds. The teacher in Conversation 1 seemed to be also experiencing similar feelings: through the sounds, he thought of his hometown life which existed only in his memories a long time ago. That means, the present "he" and the past "he" shared the common worlds and interconnected realities via the soundtrack.

Besides, in a broad sense, the design of this speculative activity and the process of analyzing the data itself, is an exploration of the teachers in the pluriverse and common worlds, in terms of diverse times and spaces being connected by the recorded sounds. By listening to the same recordings, the in-service teachers and family members shared common experiences in multiple worlds and had spiritual, fruitful, and relaxing conversations virtually. They “healed” and “relieved” each other, and sympoietically became each other's teachers in this natural common world(s).

A Collection of Stories: What if/And if ____ Becomes Our Teacher

The last long and important section of findings was analyzed and written into the form of a collection of stories. In this abundant collection, each story was told and depicted from the perspective of the tellers who were all human teacher participants or three of my family members in this study. The eight human participants in this study are storytellers and original creators in different senses – some of them providing brief structures of their stories as examples, some of them paying more attention to telling their perceptual and intuitional feelings in their memories, some sharing their thoughts and reflections in recalling their experience, and some showing me the pictures they captured for recording their retold stories. In the analysis, I rewrote and compiled those stories based on a lot of materials, including the experiences and observations told by in-service teachers in the interviews, some elements in my observations from classes, the memories and analysis among our family members, and also some supplementary information gained from the interactions between me and participants. I also combined some fragmentary thoughts, comments, and emotions held in our conversations, my own

understanding, as well as some depictions of the contexts into my story rewritings and shared them here with the readers. At the end of some stories (not all stories), I have also attached the storyteller's original descriptions and thoughts about their feelings with my own comments as a postscript to help readers to better understand the storytellers' aim and contexts.

With regard to the arrangement of this collection, every story or group of stories are classified into a topic that highlights different "teachers" in the stories, at least from the storytellers' perspectives. That means that each topic in the following stories can be placed/replaced into the blank of this section's title, such as the first one, "What if/And if a **Cat** became our teacher?" In this way, the topic itself can become one of the pulling threads in reading and interpreting those stories and narrators' experiences. This story collection is organized into 17 topics that highlight the presence of different "teachers" in the participants' experiences in order to understand better how the narrators conceptualized the notion of a teacher in certain circumstances. The 17 topics include Cats, Our own bodies, Our students, Seashells, Rabbits, Disciplinary knowledge, Our children, Trees, Life experiences, Taiji sword, Insects, Mother's love, The willow and the snail, The sky and the clouds, Amitabha Buddha, Plants, and The influences of deeds.

The last thing I would like to mention here before we enter the story-telling is the apparent absence of analyses connecting those stories and the theoretical frameworks (Goebel, 2020). Compared to the earlier sections of the findings, I purposefully chose not to identify clear paths for interpretation in this section (i.e., Taoism, Confucianism, posthumanism, and specific trajectories of Mignolo's frame). I intended to do so for two reasons, and both of them are in consideration of the dissertation's initial aim and

questions – broadening, redefining, and reimagining the concept of a teacher in multi-dimensional ways, and so as to highlight the coexistence of multiple possibilities.

The first simple and obvious reason is that as you read through each story, you might gradually realize that the “tangible” teacher in every story could be more than one. Except for the topic explicitly identifying “the teacher” in every experience from the perspective of the tellers, when we slightly transform the perspective, the individuals and main characters mentioned in the stories might see their own different teachers in the same context. This depends on which theoretical perspective the readers are choosing to use. To put it in a simple way, there are diverse and multiple teachers in different dimensions in the collection of stories, which results in various ways of conceptualizing and reimagining the concept of ‘teacher’ that coexist and mingle with each other, without being exhausted in this section of the dissertation.

Besides, a more important underlying reason is that I would like to enable every rewritten story to play the role of teachers in front of readers in an equitable way. In other words, thinking with the facilitation of my theoretical frameworks, the readers might be able to find limited paths and connections between the theories and stories, which may also constrain the readers’ ways of interpreting the concept of a teacher. However, keeping the interpretation of stories open to readers implies positioning them on an equitable platform with the researchers and the stories, trusting the readers to have the capability of understanding, and respecting their own interpretations of the concept of a teacher. In this sense, every story has played the teacher’s role and practiced a novel, diverse, and more equitable way of teaching rather than a “one-way indoctrination.” I intend to suggest that reading the collection of stories can also be one type of our learning

activities and become one kind of teacher. Therefore, I warmly invite readers to find their own “teacher” and ways of conceptualizing ‘teacher’ while enjoying this collection of stories.

What If A Cat Was A Teacher?

Last week Meng was off work and on the way home. Suddenly she saw a big cat wandering with strong and vigorous steps near a building in the apartment community. Quietly following the cat, Meng saw a furry ball huddling in front of the direction the big cat was walking over to. She carefully went up close and saw the stuff clearly: it was several kittens rolling themselves together and sleeping in the gap between the iron fence and the glass window. “That big one should be a mother cat,” Meng said in her heart. The big mother cat athletically jumped off from the ground, and slipped into the gap, licking the kittens with love.

After coming home, Meng saw the big mother cat and several baby cats appearing in her mind from time to time. She was worried about their living conditions. “Are they warm enough to sleep at night? Do they have enough food for feeding both the mother and the babies? Could the mother cat protect its children if others (humans or other animals, like dogs) hurt them”? Meng had lots of questions and worries in mind, and she could not help thinking more about them. She finally decided to go out and have a look at them late that evening, with a box of milk, some cookies, and small dried fish.

Meng walked to the building softly. The night was so dark that she could not see clearly how the litter of cats was. She felt that they were all asleep in the corner of the

window gap. Meng decided not to disturb them, so she put the opened milk and cookies into the fence gap and walked home. She felt quite relieved and slept soundly that night.

The next morning was pretty sunny. Meng got everything ready and prepared to go to work. When she passed by the window of the apartment building, she turned her head to see those cats and wanted to greet them. Surprisingly, the ball of furry cats and the big cat disappeared, while the food brought by Meng was still there. None of the cats were there anymore like they had never been there before.

Meng was upset. On her way to school, she memorized something about that big cat. Several months ago, she had tried to feed this mother cat and it seemed extremely afraid of human beings. It only dared to eat the food when people walked away. “Then my action of putting food into the crevice seemed to actually step on the mother cat’s ‘weakness’ and let it know that their hiding place had been discovered,” Meng understood. It all clicked then and Meng realized that the litter of cats had moved away because the mother cat felt unsafe for itself and its children. The whole thing became obvious.

Meng still passed by the building and that window every day with some uncertain expectations, in the morning and on the way home. She never saw the furry ball and the big mother cat again.

Postscript: The sense of boundaries

By telling this story, Meng contended that the big mother cat was her teacher who taught without using words. She learned what was “the sense of boundaries” from the

cats and connected the inspiration with her possible future experience of getting along with her students. She explained,

The cat didn't say anything, but its natural alertness to avoid the danger taught me to understand the so-called 'sense of boundaries' in relationships, because sometimes the 'good intentions' might also backfire. So I think of my growing-up experience when parents and elders did countless "good-for-us" things. I also think of myself being a teacher, ... I should not be complacent in the process of teaching, but should have good communication with the student to understand their thoughts. ...I should comply with the natural state of the students themselves, but don't impose my own ideas on them. ...Treat students as independent individuals and maintain some sense of boundaries when disciplining them.

Wu was raising a cat recently. Her cat Yaya was a quite lively little cat and had an intimate relationship with Wu. Every time when Wu came back home and unlocked the door, Yaya would hear the slightest sound of the door and dart towards its owner, rubbing up against Wu's feet and rolling on the floor. Wu liked Yaya very much, but due to her busy work at school, she could not have free time to stay with Yaya.

Earlier last month, Wu had Yaya spayed, and Yaya's temperament seemed to be changing a lot. Coming back from the sterilization, Wu found that Yaya was always down and unwilling to move at all. Hearing the sounds made by Wu, Yaya lay motionlessly on the carpet. Sometimes, Wu even could not have look at the cat because it

became increasingly sedentary under the cabinet or the sofa, or hidden in a more enclosed space. And similar situations were getting more and more frequent two weeks after the sterilization. Wu started to worry about its health condition, suspecting that it was not spayed properly or well-recovered, or that it might be sick with other issues.

On the later weekend, Wu finally managed to find some time to take Yaya to the hospital. However, Yaya had an extremely high level of unwillingness to go out. It even unsheathed its claws and arched its back with the back hair rising when it sensed that Wu was coming to put it into the cat carrier used outside. In this case, Wu had no choice but reluctantly cancel her reservation with the hospital and stay at home without any plans to go out. She tried to look after Yaya more carefully now that she had time to stay at home and accompany it. Every so often, Wu crouched down to find Yaya under the sofa and petted its head.

A few hours later, Yaya first craned out its twinkling eyes and little furry head with great care, seemingly sounding out the environment. Wu saw it had the intention of coming out, so she reached down and petted its head. Yaya took other steps forward and inched beside Wu. Wu held it up and put it on her lap, gently petting and stroking its stomach hair when she was watching TV. Yaya seemed quickly falling asleep in its owner's touch, snoring soundly and serenely.

After a while of resting, Yaya woke up with sparkly eyes. Seeing that its state was turning better, Wu played with Yaya for a while and left it with cat food and water. Later that night and for the whole weekend, this quiet and peaceful life continued, and Yaya looked far more cheerful and full of energy.

Yaya started to follow and run after Wu in the house again. It even snuggled more often when Wu was at home and showed more affection toward and dependency on its owner. Wu sighed with relief and understood Yaya a little bit more. Yaya did not need a hospital or a doctor. It just needed more love and company from her.

Postscript: Developing a relationship and noticing the utilitarian mindset

Wu appreciated having the chance to observe her cat more carefully, especially at this key timing of Yaya's recovery from the surgery. Before the observation activity, she "did not have a holiday all the time" and was always "busy with the work at school," so she spent less and less time staying at home with Yaya. At the moment of the interview, she regarded her cat Yaya, or the process of taking care of it as her teacher without any talking or actions because it enabled her to reflect on the relationships between humans in a different way. She described,

I think it was a "no-talk" lesson for me ...(because) in the process of developing a relationship with a pet, if you stay with the cat when it really needs you, even for a few more days (like when the cat is sick or neutered), the relationship between the owner and the cat will usually be better than before. ...In fact, it is also true with human beings. When human beings are very vulnerable, helping (the individuals) often can (make you) become good friends. ... This kind of interdependence between (human beings), in fact, is very similar to the relationship (the mutual companionship, comfort, and feelings between) owners and pets.

Another in-service teacher participant, Caicai, also shared a story about her cat Mimi. To attract Caicai's attention and care, Mimi who was always a cat with "a good temper," seemed to become "vindictive" in her temper and behavior by peeing at the Caicai's bedroom door "intentionally." Sometimes Mimi also meowed, seeming to ask for more attention and company from Caicai. Recognizing Mimi's "fractiousness," Caicai changed a little. She began to open her bedroom door for Mimi anytime, and let it sit on her lap during the online class. During the class break, Caicai stood up and walked around in her room, and Mimi, who was sitting on her chair or her laptop, stared at her and sometimes tried to play with her (see Image 34/35). When sharing this memory, Caicai smiled and complained happily to me, "How can a cat have so much energy and be so influential to me? Now I understand why others named their cats as "cat master." She felt she was "educated" in this experience of getting along with her cat in two aspects. First, she learned to show weakness and "faults" to intimate others. And second, she learned to be aware of the utilitarian mindset in relations. She reflected with sincere emotion,

It is the same for human beings. To be totally willing to do things as long as I like it. So for the people we love, it is okay to show weakness or make mistakes occasionally in front of them, which might promote the relationship. ...Another thing I learned from my cat's 'wordless teaching' is that I found my own utilitarian mindset in it, or let's call it 'utilitarian pet keeping'. ...I only consider my own time arrangements and feelings— I need it, then I keep it practically and have requirements for its cleanness...(only because of me). But I never think

about its needs, and I didn't do things that might benefit it but not me, like accompanying the cat more often, letting it go into the bedroom, (letting it) sit on my lap, etc.



Images 34 & 35. Caicai's Cat, Mimi, Was Sitting on Her Laptop and Sleeping on Her Lap. Photoed by Caicai in the past.

Wei observed a cat with black, yellow, and white hair recently. It was a mother-to-be cat—its belly was obviously bigger than other cats'. Every time Wei would observe it at a certain distance because she was afraid of scaring it or alerting it to move with its dragged-down stomach. Its belly was so large that it almost touched the ground when it stood up. It spent most of its pregnancy lying on its side on the grass or beside flowers. Wei speculated that there might be four or five kittens in its belly. From time to time, there was a black cat hanging around the mother cat, holding some fish bones or leftovers found in the garbage and bringing them to the mother. Wei guessed that it might be the mated male cat taking care of it (see Image 36/37).



Images 36 & 37. The Possible Mated Male Cat and the Mother Cat After Her Parturition. Photoed by Wei in 2022, summer.

As the weather got hotter, the mother cat's state got worse and worse. Its eyes were always half closed, and it could not move much anymore. When it lay down on the ground, its head was always tilted on the grass, seemingly to have a rest. Occasionally it got up, moved, or walked around in the grass to find food. Wei saw that the mother cat was so thin when it was standing up because she could even see the skeleton and the humped condyle in its back. It's obvious that the mother cat could hardly move, but it still needed to search for food for the babies growing in its belly. Every step it took out was difficult, like carrying a bag that was completely out of its body range. And it had to be extremely careful and always moving with wariness due to its vulnerability. Whenever Wei came nearer or there were any movements from other passersby, it would raise its head a little, cock its ears, and open its tired eyes. In a little while, when it estimated that there was no danger around, it would lay its head wearily on the grass again and half close its eyes.

Then the kittens were finally born. The mother cat did not have a rest at all as it needed to transfer the babies to a safer place. It carried the kittens by biting the skin on

the back of the kittens' necks and holding them in its mouth, and then putting them deeper into the bushes. After a few days, the kittens were growing a little bit older, and they needed more food. The mother cat worried about her children's safety during her going out and searching for food, so she moved them again to a more private place under a jeep which had not been moved for a long time. In this transferring process, the kittens were accidentally stained with some dust under the car, so the mother cat licked all their fur with its tongue to give the children a "bath." Wei saw this and decided to leave them alone now that they were moving.

The ways this cat mother being pregnant, giving birth, and taking care of her kittens made Wei think of her mom and aroused her gratitude for her mom's deep love. The mother cat would protect her babies in her belly during her pregnancy by staying alert and tired all the time in such a hot summer. Wei remembered she was also born in midsummer, which must be a toilsome period for her mom. How difficult would that be for a pregnant mom?

Wei remembered that her mom Ding had told her about the stories of Wei's birth. When Ding was pregnant with Wei, the family already had a child (Wei's older brother). That means another child might not be affordable based on the family's poor economic condition. In this case, Wei's parents almost decided to abort her. As Ding recalled, she suddenly felt so loath to abort and "kill" this baby (Wei) in her belly when she was lying on the operating table and heard the sounds of the doctor preparing the operating instruments. At the last moment, Ding cried and got off the operating table, and decided to keep this unborn baby and feed the baby anyhow. Thinking about this, Wei choked with sobs. She felt so connected and her emotions resonated with the emotions of a

mother offering desperate protection and care to the babies in her belly and understanding her mom better.



Image 38. The Family: Childhood Wei, Her Mom Ding, Her Father, and Her Brother. Achieved in Family Album.

Image 39. Grown-up Wei and Her Mom, Ding. Achieved in Family Digital Album.

During the meditation, Wei had more time to sit with Ding. Sitting by her mother's side and recalling the mother cat she observed, Wei remembered other things that her mom had done for her. Her mom Ding had worked in a rural elementary school in the suburbs when Wei was a baby girl. There was a period of time when Ding was down-passed (Xiafang, 下放) to the brigade for both farm work and teaching. Ding had to put 2- or 3-year-old Wei in bed at the dormitory and only got to see her during her break.

Once Ding was teaching in the classroom next door and suddenly she heard that Wei's crying was weird. Ding quickly got off the classroom platform and found that Wei's face was indeed covered by the quilt accidentally. Luckily, it was discovered by

careful Ding without delay. She feared Wei might be suffocated unconsciously. Wei could also remember that her mom always cared about everything - about her child being awake, crying, hungry, urinating - all the time. Sometimes in her childhood, Wei had a fever in the middle of the night. There was no thermometer at that time so her mom Ding could only keep touching her forehead, staying beside her all night, and cooling and wiping her body with a cold towel or some alcohol, in case of high fever or pneumonia.

Thinking about those trivial memories, Wei felt ashamed. Her mother gave her life and always took good care of her from childhood to adulthood, while she had never realized her mom's love until observing the pregnant cat mother. Wei just actually learned and felt her mom's meticulous love and care in Ding's upbringing from the mother cat (see Image 38/39). "The mother cat's care, worries, and its desire to bear all the hardships of life in place of her child were the same as human beings'...so they were all shared by (my) mother as well," Wei thought. Wei sighed with emotions, "the mother cat was truly my teacher, in my 50s, of understanding and remembering my mom's love. I do need a cat to teach me what I should feel grateful for about my mom and how to treasure the remaining time being with my mom when she is turning to her 90s."

Postscript: Re-remembering to love and be grateful

A highlighting and frequent theme in Wei's inspirations and her expressions in our discussion is re-remembering to love, and re-remembering to keep and express thankfulness. When she shared her memory, there was a complex look on her face, mingling between regret, affect, as well as abashment. To her, the meetings with the

mother cat seemed to be a moment of self-cultivation and self-confession. Wei articulated her thoughts and reflections emerging in her “*Ge wu zhi zhi*” and our meditations,

...Mother cat is my teacher, enabling me to really see the difficulties of being a mother and its love for the children. ...and this series of activities reminding me of my mother’s love, are also my teachers because it teaches me to remember gratitude, to remember expressing thanks in time, and to remember cherishing the people around me and their kindness to me...as my mother is nearly in her 90s. There is not much time left for me to thank my mom. It also constantly reminds me how to love others around me, how to love my own child, and always practice the ability of love.

What If We Learned From Our Own Bodies?

Meng regarded herself as a student in many aspects of her life and was constantly learning unfamiliar skills. For the last two months, she decided to learn to dance on her own by watching and following online videos. At the very beginning of this new attempt, Meng often felt frustrated because the dancing movements were too many and messy for a beginner. She tried to follow the pace and body gestures in the videos, but the more she endeavored, the more she felt nervous and confused. When the rhythm of the music became faster, she could easily make mistakes in steps if her attention was a little distracted. She became nervous and anxious about dancing as well as learning to dance. The sequence of movements in the dance which she should have remembered already also turned out to be a barrier to practicing. Depression and helplessness attacked Meng.

She sat on the floor and self-doubted this attempt was wrong for her in the first place and hesitated as to whether she should give up now to save time.

While self-questioning and doubting herself, Meng still practiced dancing repeatedly and step-by-step, following the videos. The sunset shone through the window of her apartment and lengthened the shadow of her solo practicing and dancing. She upheld her sore arms and legs over and over again and repeated the dance routines. It was painful and tiring for her, and in every day's "defeats," she almost lost her interest in dancing.

Gradually, although without learning from a formal dancing teacher, and after persisting for a few weeks and getting more and more familiar with the dance and the music, she found a little "trick" of keeping up with the pace. She realized that instead of using her brain to forcefully recite the steps, she needed to let the body - her hands, her shoulders, her arms, and her feet - feel the rhythm and move with it, facilitating the brain to memorize the lyrics and the pace. In fact, she found that her body did much better with familiarizing and remembering the tune paragraphs and the patterns of melodies than her brain. She started to focus on cultivating musicality and making her body move with the rhythm, then consider the gestures.

Meng finally finished her self-learning of the first dance. After nearly two months of practicing and insistence, she could completely perform a whole dance now. She did not want to join any competition or performance to perform her first dance for others, because this persistence was for herself. "Thanks for the encouragement," Meng stood on the balcony and toasted the glowing sunset.

Postscript: Natural learning rhythms

Meng showed her rich enthusiasm for a variety of activities and new attempts in life in our communications, and she was used to staying in the “learning state” throughout her life. For example, she took dancing as her teacher and the process of learning to dance as one type of “subtle and silent education,” because she “didn’t go to formal dancing classes or find dancing teachers.” The reason for regarding dancing as her teacher who taught her without using words or actions was not because she mastered the first dance. It was that without saying a word or taking any actions, dancing taught her to “follow the natural learning rules of the dance itself, including the process of practice and the process of getting familiar with the melody, and (all the processes of learning) are natural.” The “unspoken teaching” offered by the whole process of learning and practicing dance required Meng to experience it by herself and then reflect on it. She also connected the process of learning dancing with her Tao of being a teacher in school, articulating the role of encouragement and support similar to that of the sun,

Maybe the children’s learning (process) is the same, which has their own natural learning rules. As long as they stick to it, they can find the law or method of learning. And all I need to do (as their teacher) is to give them encouragement and support and help them find their own (learning rhythms).

What If Students Were Teachers?

The glass bottle for decoration in the classroom got broken accidentally, and the glass fragments scattered everywhere on the ground of the classroom corner. A male student quickly swept the glass fragments with a broom and poured them directly into the

trash can behind the classroom. As the teacher of this class, Caicai smiled: her students were sensible and they knew how to deal with some classroom emergencies and how to maintain the classroom environment safe for the whole class.

However, during the class break, Caicai noticed that a student named Xinxin silently picked up the broken glass bottle, put it in a big paper box for milk delivery, and wrote the words “Be careful with the glass” on the outer side of the box (see Image 40). Xinxin then left the classroom quietly with the box. Caicai saw this and got curious and confused, “where can Xinxin take the box? What is she going to do now?”

With questions in her mind, Caicai decided to follow her and see where the student had placed the box. She searched around for Xinxin and did not find her figure. Caicai got more and more curious and stepped downstairs to the open ground in front of the classroom building. She looked around and suddenly the paper box came into her sight. It was placed in the most prominent place right next to the dustbin. Caicai wandered back to her office, pondering about the whole thing.

A few weeks later, Caicai had a conversation with Xinxin’s mother by accident, and she understood the original cause of Xinxin’s behavior. Xinxin’s mother told Caicai that once a toy ball made of glass was incautiously broken at home and Xin’s mom managed to find a cardboard box and put the cracked glass in it. Then she wrote “beware of the glass” on the box for fear that the glass might hurt the cleaning staff. Xinxin stood beside her and witnessed the whole process. Xinxin’s mother told Caicai that she was really surprised that her little girl had inwardly remembered how she handled the broken glass and the mother’s original intention.

“It is so gratifying to see Xinxin being so kind and considerate,” Caicai smiled at Xin's mom. But at the same time, Caicai also felt incredibly ashamed of herself because she had never noticed the potential harm of the glass and had never given her true care to unknown others. She thought it was safe enough to throw the glass in the trash, but she forgot that it still needed to be disposed of by other people in later steps which might bring harm to others. She was the teacher of Xinxin, but Caicai still could learn something from Xinxin, an elementary school student.

Suddenly, Caicai realized that she was being taught by her student, and she thought of a quote said by Mr. Liang Xiaosheng and understood it better: “Well-educated and well-cultured mean to show the kindness of thinking for others.” Broad-brush Caicai was surprised, but also appreciated that Xinxin, a twelve-year-old child, could be her “little teacher” with such a small and silent act of kindness rather than purposive and directed education.



Image 40. “Be Careful with the Glass” (in Chinese) Written on the Outer Side of the Box By Xinxin. Photoed by Caicai in the past.

Postscript: My “little teachers”

It is common for teachers like Caicai to be aware of being taught and educated by their students. In fact, another in-service teacher, Wang, also elaborated on his experiences of learning from/with his primary school students through their daily interactions, such as exuberant students’ curiosity, their suggestions on playing games, and ways of exploring unknown questions. More fundamentally, students have changed Wang’s stereotyped impressions of the fixed positional differences between the identity of “teacher” and “student.” Previously, he just unconsciously believed that the teacher should be the one knowing more and better and having the initiative to convey the knowledge, while students were taken for granted as the passive “acceptors” of knowledge. With more and more getting along with his students, Wang urged himself to change his view of teachers and students’ roles.

In Wang’s opinion, many of his primary school students can be his “little teachers” for two reasons. From the most superficial aspect, many technical skills and knowledge were new to Wang and he was indeed “unfamiliar with those new things.” Wang described, “students in this era have far more access to those new things than I have and they can learn them very quickly.” He also mentioned the young students’ curiosity which was also another point he could learn from his students, “...in fact, their curiosity also touched me a lot. As I said before, ...I learned from many of my predecessors and students and I think I should motivate myself to keep my curiosity for

learning and never stop. ...In these students, I also saw a lot of characteristics worth learning.”

In a more fundamental way, Wang introspected deeper into the relative positioning of teachers and students in their relations. He explained,

“From this (experience of learning from my students), I think it’s important to recognize that I and my students are equal and independent. Although they are only in (their) first or second grade, they have their own personality traits and hobbies and I still have to respect them. In respect of this matter, ...I treat them as ‘little adults,’ so every time I talk to them, (during our) late talk, I will squat or sit, (in order to) keep our eyes on the same level. Therefore, the process of being a teacher this year is also (an experience of) learning from the students, growing, and accumulating by myself. ...I will summarize more experiences from being a teacher.”

Wei had never thought about being “educated” by one of her students after so many years (see Image 41).



Image 41. Wei With Her Classes of Students. Achieved in Family Album.

When Wei first started working as a teacher, she took over a middle school class by becoming the class headteacher. Wei was young then and was just a few years older than her students, so the lacking experience was the inevitable issue happening in Wei's career at that time.

In her class, there was a student named S always skipping classes in normal school time from his first year in middle school. This was a headache for Wei, because as S's headteacher, she had attempted to talk about this issue of missing classes with both S and his parents, and this did not work well. In several rounds of chats, Wei learned that S's family background was not carefree. His father had been in prison, and his mother made a living by selling fruits in a street stall in this little town with endless weeping and sobbing. Inexperienced Wei could not come up with a better idea than talking to solve this issue at that moment.

Time flies and in the third year of junior school, the school's teaching director asked all the headteachers of classes to report the list of students who had skipped or were skipping class. Wei did not realize how this decision and action might influence S's future at that time, and she did not know except for discussing the bad impacts of truants with S, what else she could do to solve this problem. Although the frequency of S's truants started to decrease gradually at the beginning of the third year, Wei still accurately reported S in the list and submitted it to the dean's office as requested to comply with the school orders. Eventually, the office deemed S being eligible for

expulsion from school and exams and expelled S in the first semester of his third middle school year.

At that time, young Wei understood that from the school's perspective, as a stakeholder in the examination system, the request of reporting the name list was to improve the average grade of the school as a whole. Students who skipped classes would possibly perform poorly in their high school entrance examination while expelling those students from the school could make their grades not count in the statistics of the school's achievements. Wei just followed the office's routine and did what the school requested and did not think about this any further after that. She smoothly sent her graduating class to the high school and continued her years of teaching career.

This year, Wei retired and was coincidentally invited to attend that class reunion—the class she took over at a young age. She arrived at the restaurant, and the vibe was convivial and harmonious. Wei was so excited and delighted to see how great her students had developed, and they chatted with each other happily about their life and changes. Suddenly, Wei noticed S sitting and talking with classmates far away from her, and S did not have any greetings to Wei yet. Wei walked over to S and said hello to him. S managed to smile at Wei, and without saying a word, he walked away.

Toward the end of the party, Wei met S at the gate of the restaurant again. Wei greeted, "Hello, how are you today"?

S answered with a little tipsy voice, "Yeah, how are you Ms. Wei"?

Wei briefly talked about her life and job while waiting for the taxi. And no one talked in a long awkward quiet. Suddenly, S turned towards Wei and half-jokingly

whispered, “If Ms. Wei could ‘show a little mercy’ to me back then, I might have finished my junior high.” Then he walked to a taxi with big steps, waving at Wei behind.

Wei was stunned, standing in front of the gate for a long time. She felt that at that moment she had been “educated” by S because S made her recall some memories and reflect on some of her decisions several decades ago, and she did not have any introspections about herself and her decisions in so many years until now.

Did she have better solutions? “If I treated him and the truants as a problem, then no. I don’t have any better ideas. But if I regarded him as a child and a developing person, things might be...might be different.” Wei fell into a long rumination and walked home alone that night.

Postscript: My reflections on the teacher as a relationship

During telling the story and for a long time after that, Wei spent an extended period of time in self-examination and self-reflection, and she often talked and organized her thoughts with me. In her reflections, her understanding of the concept of a teacher and her gains from student S’s words can be inferred. Wei summarized,

The first thing I realized is that maybe inaction, without reporting anything, is also a kind of ‘action.’ That means I didn’t have to be the ‘best teacher’ who prevented the school from expelling S, but I also didn’t have to follow the school’s orders step by step and truthfully report the situation upward to the office. The eventual result at most would be that the school found that S didn’t attend the high school entrance examination. ...If I had reported nothing and taken some of the pressure from my superiors, he might have continued to

study, ...which might have affected his entire fate and many decisions for the rest of his life.”

Besides, Wei also talked about the changes in interpreting the role of a teacher in terms of thinking about the teacher’s identity in the relationship with students. She argued that essentially, the relationship between teacher and students was still one kind of human relationship with their own unique patterns and natural states. She explained,

As a teacher, what I meant, or my original starting point matters. If I had been willing to protect and care for him, to conform to S’s situation and personality, and even more, to fight for him at school, ...or with the good motivations of leaving more possibilities and educational opportunities for the child in the future, things might be different. ...rather than (from the perspective of) just being a teacher and completing the tasks and orders assigned by superiors, the result might have been different. So the understanding of teachers becomes very complicated for me. Taking teaching as a job, I seemed to have done my duty in the decision. But taking teaching as a kind of interpersonal relationship and learning to adapt to the specific situation and natural state of students, my treatment of S was not appropriate.”

In addition, Wei also described her ideal relationship between teacher and students, based on her experience of being a teacher for so many years and her changing perceptions of the concept of a teacher. She shared,

I have remembered so much, after so much experience. I felt it (the concept of a teacher) changed from some specific work that I need to do earnestly, to some concerns of the more perceptual, more fuzzy things, such as the growth of the student's mind, their thoughts, and ways to get along with students or others. ...It also refers to deep communications and contacts, and the experience, or anguish, or stories of others. ...What I want to express is that, being limited by my own cognition, in the past, I always had very clear or absolute attitudes and judgments about many people and things, especially students, such as right or wrong, good or bad grades, reprimand, or praise. Teachers are teachers, and students are students. ...But after all these years, how can we just simply understand that there must be definite boundaries and standards of judging? It's more about emotional communication, nurturing and bonding, getting along as friends, empathizing with others from their point of view, and the impacts of that process. ...(I agreed with the saying that) education means a tree shaking another tree, one cloud pushing another cloud, and one soul influencing another soul."

What If Seashells Were Our Teachers?

Meng enjoyed walking along the beach very much. Every weekend in the last two years, she would come to this beach and wander by herself. She watched the tide rising and falling, the different colors of the sea in the day and night, and the sun slowly setting down inch by inch behind the green hills in the distance.

Another fun activity for Meng walking at the sea was finding and picking up the shells scattered in the sand. Over the last two years, she had collected a little box of

seashells (see Image 42). She brought them home, washed them carefully with little brushes, cleaned the tiny sand inside, and dried them on the balcony. Meng treated each of the shells gently and patiently, with calmness and excitement every time.

She held every shell in her hand and meticulously observed each one. None of them were exactly the same. Some were regular circles, while some were oval. Some were conch-shaped horns, and some were coral-like stones. Some of them were dark brown, while some of them were whiter than a pearl. “Nature is great and mysteriously magical,” Meng thought in her mind, “how could it have created so many different beautiful colors and so many different forms and shapes of those small creatures?”

Meng also felt lucky and amazed at the moment of picking them up. These creatures lived in the distant sea for many years, and they hid in the sand. No one knows how their colors and shapes of them evolved to what they looked like today. No one knows when and how the shells in some faraway seawater followed the tides and were left on the beach. And also no one knows how they were accidentally brought in front of Meng by the waves, the wind, and the changing sand. These encounters were predestined!

Meng cherished every shell she picked up. Picking up the various shells and looking at them, she thought of her students. Her students were all middle school students in the same educational system, sitting in the same class of one school in this city, and wearing exactly the same school uniforms. But they were diversely and individually unique in her eyes, like every individual seashell. What different children they were! Each student had his or her own personalities, strengths, and learning styles, as well as future life choices and trajectories. Just like the box of shells, they were in the same box

and were all named “seashells,” but none of them had the same color, shape, or even ways of coming in front of Meng.

Meng walked to the beach again. She continued to expect to have the next chance of encountering more and unique seashells. Meanwhile, she was also on her long way to being both a teacher of her various students and a student of the seashells. She learned from the seashells about keeping in mind that each of her students was unique, and learned to appreciate the unique beauty and shine of every student or each entity.



Image 42. The Seashells Meng Picked. Photoed by Meng in the past.

What If The Rabbit Was A Teacher?

The old woman who was the gatekeeper of this courtyard claimed a piece of land and planted a field of vegetables by herself behind the stairs. Yu lived in this courtyard in her childhood, and one day she noticed that in the field behind the stairs, there were two small rabbits kept in a cage by the old woman. Yu passed by the stairs every day and always played with them after school when the gatekeeper was not looking at her rabbits and the field.

Rabbits had poor eyesight. Yu quickly found out this fact because the rabbits were never able to see the cabbage leaves that Yu gave over to them. Then Yu turned to be anxious and angry because her eyes were also weak since she was born. Yu squatted in front of the cage, looking at the two rabbits and thinking about her poor eyesight. Yu started to wear glasses to correct her vision at the age of four and was also nicknamed “four-eyes frog” by her classmates. She thought of her needing the teacher’s special care of her seat to clearly see the words on the blackboard. Yu felt frustrated as she thought she was just like these rabbits whose eyesight was born weaker and worse than others. She was sad both for the rabbits as well as for herself.

A few days later, Yu went to see those rabbits again. The rabbits seemed able to sense what was going to happen. They stood up immediately and moved toward the direction of sounds. In this case, Yu changed the way of feeding them. She gradually found out that every time she touched the cage with a cabbage leaf with weak noises, they would hear the sound and come to eat. They used hearing and movement to sense the directions.

Yu felt relieved. She was not obsessed with her poor eyesight anymore. Or from another aspect, she did not regard her eyesight as one inferiority anymore. It turned out that rabbits were not easily starved to death or harmed by others because of their poor eyesight as Yu assumed before. Instead, because they had very nimble reflexes, great speed, and extremely sensitive hearing, rabbits were very aware of dangers around.

Yu saw and understood herself more from the rabbits. Watching the two small rabbits holding and chewing the cabbage, she comforted herself, “it is good to be a rabbit! Maybe I also have other things or advantages beyond ordinary people, right?”

Postscript: Rabbits as my teachers? Of course!

To be honest, I didn't think of the rabbits as teachers when I experienced the above story in my primary school because I have never attempted to transfer the concept of a teacher from human beings to a non-human species. More frankly, I was cultivated to be self-centered in my way of thinking, so even if I have learned something from the rabbits, I did not view them with respect as "my teachers." They were regarded as beneficial "appendages" of human emotions and life, which reveals the human-centered ways of thinking. I wrote down the story here to remind me of the lessons that rabbits had taught me, as well as to alert me of the arrogance in my mind in the past years.

What If Disciplinary Knowledge Was a Teacher?

Art

Wu worked in a vocational and technical high school, and students there were mostly art students⁵. These students needed to spend predominant time studying art and being immersed in art, so the art teacher and his or her style of art was much more important and influential to the students than other discipline teachers' roles.

Wu was a headteacher of one second-year class, and except for teaching math, it was also her responsibility to facilitate students' artwork submissions, exam applications, joining artwork competitions, and exhibition connections. Once, when she organized students' paintings and prepared to submit some of them to take part in a competition, she found that most of their paintings adopted quite similar styles. She did not know much

⁵ Art students or 艺术生 in Chinese, are students who major in artistic majors, such as music, painting, sculpture, etc.

about art, but she could vaguely feel it: most themes of student paintings were tangible items in daily life, including streets, buildings, foods, home decorations, and so on. And they preferred to use clear lines and shapes with angular brushstrokes. Their artworks were not abstract at all. Instead of expressing the implicit meanings in stream-of-consciousness, they used their paintings to directly depict the scenes and stories.

This was weirdly coincidental in Wu's eyes because those paintings were randomly and anonymously selected, and they all came from different students. Therefore, Wu began to pay attention to this coincidence, and one day, she met the main art teacher accidentally. The moment Wu met him, she thought of his artworks and characteristics, and she had a moment of enlightenment.

It turned out that the main art teacher in her class was fond of printmaking, and his artistic style was also mainly realistic with a strong sense of line and clear edges. His own artworks always focused on stressing the stereo sense, the texture of items, and the thickness of grooves. His clothes were also mainly simple and solid colors, such as black, white, and gray, and without surprise, he was wearing a black shirt and a pair of gray pants when Wu met him in the aisle. In regard to his personality, he was always keeping a calm and serious face without a smile and was a bit of a martinet in dealing with school affairs together with colleagues. And it all made sense to Wu where the source of the coincidence was now.

In acknowledging that, Wu strongly realized for the first time that some specific understandings and pursuits of beauty, which might not be visible or clearly described in words, could be reflected in every stroke under the artists' hands and the artworks. Besides, the style of art would also influence people's character and behavior, like the

serious art teacher and his favorite printmaking. It then furtherly influenced his students' artistic style and preferences via a teacher, because students would unconsciously imitate the art teacher, and even regard the art teacher as an idol on the road of art.

Wu gradually noticed some impacts of art on herself as well after that. Due to working with many art teachers and teaching art students for a long time, she felt her own transformation of turning toward “romanticism” – being infected by their romantic temperament and enthusiasm. She began to keep beautiful and fresh flowers in her office, and creatively made use of waste materials. The plastic water bottles were used as transparent vases to keep the flowers hydrated and fresh, which added a dash of colorful vitality in the math teachers' office (see Image 43). “It is really beautiful and immediately makes many things different here,” Wu thought in her mind and smiled. The aspirations, pursuits, and perceptions towards aesthetics, were the precious rewards of Wu teaching the art students and getting in touch with art, and in this experience, flowers also taught her the art of life.



Image 43. Wu Kept Flowers in the Plastic Bottle in the Math Teachers' Office. Photoed by Wu in the past.

Postscript: Who could be the teacher?

After telling this story about art, Wu also shared her opinions on the relative positions of teachers and students, as well as her views on “who could be the teacher.” She was inspired by a quote from Han Yu (1967),

“I have thought of this before because he (Han Yu) said that ‘students are not necessarily inferior to their teachers, nor teachers are better than their students’...Then from a broader perspective, (teachers) do not have to be limited to a certain profession, one kind of person, or even human beings or things. As long as (the teacher) can ‘proselytize, instruct, and dispel doubts’ (Han, 1967), then it works. ...Moreover, different people or things are good in diverse aspects, so on those aspects which were mastered by ‘students’, are they (the students) not necessarily inferior to their teachers, and (students) can even be the teacher’s teacher? ...so in my opinion, anything that has a positive impact on you can be regarded as (your) ‘teacher’.So after experiencing them, (the students) impact me with art, I totally understand the situations of ‘teaching is also learning’ and ‘teacher does not have to be better than their students.’

Biology

Zhang taught biology in high school. What he understood about the discipline of biology was mainly in the context of high school classrooms, teaching the knowledge in textbooks and test-taking skills for students to get better grades. Although he knew the discipline itself was not limited to the key points in the textbook and it was much broader than the students thought, or even he thought, teaching for exams was the only thing he

could put effort to be helpful to students in this existing exam-oriented educational system.

Yet, an accidental circumstance he saw that day changed his mind a little. Zhang remembered that in a biology class a few days ago, he taught about a concept called “homeostasis” (wen tai, 稳态). It basically means that the normal organism always tries to maintain a relatively stable state of the internal environment by regulating and coordinating the activities of various organs and systems. Normally, this relatively stable state was not a fixed value but the feasible ranges of various organs fluctuating within. In this feasible range, the state of the organism was expected to be the most suitable state for that creature to keep alive.

Then one day, when he passed by the classroom, he saw two students having a quarrel through the window. They quarreled bitterly, and no one wanted to take the initiative of making mutual concessions. Zhang could even see their necks and faces turning red because of their anger and fierce dispute. Suddenly, Zhang heard one student shouting to another with a restrained but trembling voice, “Enough! I don’t want to argue anymore. I need to maintain the homeostasis of my emotions...I want to have a stable state, so could you stop arguing?”

Another student did not talk and argue anymore, and the quarrel stopped. Students around them also dispersed and went back to their own seats. Witnessing the whole process, Zhang was surprised and also delighted for his students. That student’s words and reaction indicated that after learning the concept of homeostasis, he intended to keep his emotions relatively stable as much as possible so that he could better cope with things around him. It was unexpected for Zhang that the specific concept and a small key point

he taught in biology could be so impressive and remembered in students' minds, and it could be applied in this way to real-life issues.

Zhang started to realize that the logic and reasoning of the specific knowledge and disciplines with their own disciplinary features, actually had great impacts on students' deeds and words. For students, the knowledge or subjects they were learning were not only effort accumulations for taking exams and getting a higher grade. The subject itself had its own unique significance and functions. Zhang had never told them to do so or required them to apply in understanding life experiences, while students would internalize what teachers taught, try to experience it in daily life, and reflect on their own afterward.

From his students' quarrel, Zhang understood a little bit more about the strength of biological knowledge in a different way. The logic and characteristics of this subject were just like another kind of "teacher" of the students, who did not speak out or do anything with any educational purpose, but the students themselves could feel it in their daily life. "Biology might enable students to become more and more mature and to situate themselves in a more stable and rational state," Zhang assumed in his mind hopefully.

What If Our Children Were Our Teachers?

Meng believed that it was not possible to separately talk about her teaching experience at school and her own life entirely. She always saw connections in herself between being a teacher in front of the students and being a mother confronting her child.

She regarded herself as a new mother of her baby girl (named Cherry) about to start kindergarten. Lately, she found that her kid was becoming more and more assertive about her own preferences, which made Meng feel tired and sometimes angry. One morning, this happened again. Meng made the congee for Cherry's breakfast and was in a little hurry to work.

"Cherry, come here for breakfast," Meng called her daughter in the bedroom, walked in, and cuddled Cherry out to the baby seat beside the dinner table. Cherry took a glance at the bowl with congee in it and said, "No, I don't want congee. It does not have a taste."

Meng was a little confused, but more anxious and angry. She was in a great hurry to school, but she still wanted to take care of her child's breakfast.

"What do you want," Meng asked, "could you just have the congee this morning, and mom will buy other food for you tomorrow?" Cherry agreed reluctantly, with her pouting face.

However, after dinner, the conflict happened again. Meng sat on the carpet with Cherry to play together. Meng picked up a toy carelessly from a pile of Cherry's toys and handed it over to Cherry.

Cherry pushed Meng's hand away without hesitation, "No, I don't want to play this one." Then she ran to her toy corner in the room and took another toy she wanted to play with.

Meng was not in haste to work this time, but her anger still welled up in her mind and she was puzzled again. "Why does such a little child have so many opinions and so

many preferences? Why can't things be just simple—you are my child, and you should listen to me?” Meng asked herself.

For a long time since then, Meng always thought back on those questions until one day she met with the parents of a student in her class. As the class teacher, Meng talked with the parents about the students' performance in school and some characteristics to improve for better development in the future. When they communicated about the student being optimistic and a little too vivacious, which might not be helpful for him as he needed to keep calm to learn, the parents responded, “we actually want him to be like this. For us, a positive and cheerful disposition is much more important than our child's grades. It is not a big deal.”

That was an unexpected response to Meng. More than being surprised at the parents' attitude, she thought of the confusion she had a few weeks ago and suddenly saw the connections. Some specific situations with her daughter emerged in her mind immediately. The parents' words reminded her of letting Cherry choose her favorite picture books to read on her own, select her favorite little shoes to wear each day, and have a preference for her own dress for shopping for clothes. Of course, Cherry was assertive with an independent mind from such a young age, but that was exactly what Meng wanted. She aimed to develop her girl as a strong-minded person, so how could she be angry with and reject her girl for making her own choices on each small issue in life? Her daughter was using independent behaviors and her own preferences to tell her that this was the result of Meng's family cultivation of Cherry, and it would undoubtedly work towards Meng, Cherry's mom, in the same way.

That day, Meng was relieved. She went back home, sat down beside Cherry, and softly asked, “what’s your plan for dinner tonight, sweetie?”

Postscript: My child as a reminder

In our communication, Meng thought about her daughter’s behavior as one type of pedagogy in terms of teaching her without purposeful actions or words. Meng had experienced a strong ambivalent sense in the process of cultivating her daughter, which prompted her to learn, reflect, and adjust the way of getting along with Cherry as well as her students. She described,

What I mean is that in my usual time, I paid very much attention to the cultivation of my child’s personality...such as her initiative, independence, and her own ideas and considerations, although she is not big (grown-up). I hope she can have the right to choose, have the ability to make a choice, and (have) the habit of her own opinion. (But) When she confronted me with those traits, I got really upset. ...it’s a paradoxical situation for me, and this situation was the same when being a mother or a teacher. So I started to reflect on it. I don’t think I should be mad at my kids over this, because that’s what I want. But I could not help being angry sometimes.

What If the Trees Were Teachers?

Trees offered Wang more emotional feelings than other non-human creatures (see Image 44).

As a new teacher transferring from another job, Wang received lots of professional criticism and even unsupportive doubts from his family, like the whole

world disagreeing with his choice of being a teacher. He was depressed for a very long time and became unsure of his own decisions.

Once, continued loud noises and laughter attracted Wang's ears and he looked outside of the window. It was the kids in his residence community playing around a tree. The tree was big, lush, and uprightly straight. Its leaves were glittery and green in the sun and made a shade for those bouncing and vivacious children under the tree.

However, this happy and innocent scene did not last long. After a while, the children seemed to be out of other playful ideas and were tired of chasing each other, so they targeted the tree. They started with carving pictures and characters on the tree trunk with little sharp stones, and when some of the outer layers of the trunk became loose, the children began to tear off the bark. In a moment, the white inner trunk was exposed.

Wang watched this tree and this grand abuse. He stared at those children. It seemed that those children felt his gaze and quickly ran away.

Wang still felt too sad to look at that injured tree. He laid down in bed and closed his eyes. He thought of many other situations of humans breaking trees' trunks, cutting their skin, and hurting those trees for the human's own needs. He recalled those trees along the streets being cut down into pieces and thrown away. He could not take this endless imagination anymore. He sat up from the bed and walked towards the door. He decided to have a look at that injured tree.

He approached the tree and touched the bare trunk. Suddenly, he touched something wet and sticky. Wang moved his nose closer and smelled his fingers with the sticky mucus. It was the aroma and faint scent of the tree.

Wang smiled and his eyes turned misty. He seemed to feel the power of this strong tree and to receive its message telling him no worries. The humans hurt it, but it did not cry, did not appear to be desperate, and did not act like dying. It was still standing straight here and growing well. He thought of this tree experiencing weathered wind, rain, and snow in years and growing up into a luxuriant tree. In Wang's eyes, this tree was a strong-minded soldier, calmly facing its life's frustration and humans' hurts with an attitude of disregard and pride. It did not pay too much attention to others' evaluations and harm to it but focused on enriching and growing its inner strength to make itself stronger and taller.

“Then why could I not become like a tree?” Wang pondered, “sometimes others say hurtful words to me, which always impacts my mood and makes me feel big ups and downs. But hey, are those words and hurts important to you? Will they really influence my future development and life, or shake my life determination? I don't think so. Why not spend more energy on me instead of others' views?”

Wang looked up at the lush leaves. He saw splendid and glistening green leaves, like thousands of stars in the inky sky.



Image 44. “The Biggest Tree” Wang Has Ever Seen. Photoed by Wang in the past.

Postscript: Being inspired by trees

Wang’s thoughts and feelings about trees were triggered by sitting and having meditations with me in a forest park that was full of lush trees. He expressed his thanks to these trees and other non-human creatures because of some helpful and perceptual inspirations brought by them,

“Just looking at the trees now ...reminds me of some of the other feelings I’ve had when I saw these non-human creatures. They did not seem to do or say anything, but they just gave me some ideas, and (they are) definitely non-human teachers. ...I wouldn’t remember those thoughts until I was completely in the middle of the trees, so they indeed helped me a lot in dealing with my moods.”

What If Our Life Experiences Were Our Teachers?

Housework and self-reflection

Yu could think of various learning experiences in this old house because she spent her whole childhood there. In addition to doing homework and reviewing lessons learned from school, Yu practiced many life skills and hobbies here, such as writing Chinese calligraphy, playing Erhu, learning painting, cooking with her grandmother, and how to hang clothes on the bamboo poles outside.

In these memories and learning experiences, there may be tangible “teachers” who would guide Yu in specific actions and steps. Like her mom and grandmother might tell her when to add salt to the stir-fried vegetables and to stew them for a few more minutes. Such tangible teachers taught Yu some specific skills and steps in life and

enabled her to get started and proceed the things in a certain way and order, rather than being lost in the muddle.

But at the same time, the experience itself, or the “object” of learning was also Yu’s intangible “teacher,” because they all brought her fresh and differently unique feelings. For example, hanging the clothes on the bamboo poles required her to be patient, careful, and thoughtful as she had to consider averaging the weight of the wet clothes and uniformly distributing the weight on one pole. Besides, she also needed to avoid the clothes dropping before threading the pole into the front hole (see Image 45). For Yu as a child, it was a mixed exercise for the brain, arms, and experience.



Image 45. The Clothesline Pole. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Although nowadays Yu did not need to hang clothes in that way in a modern apartment anymore, she learned from the experience that doing housework should be practical rather than arrogant. These chores needed to be learned by doing them over and over again, or even from unsuccessful experiences such as undercooked vegetables and dropped clothes, instead of by thinking and practicing in mind. Because the acquired methods and skills in the process of learning to do different housework were not the

same, the feelings, moods, and attitudes were also different for Yu in experiencing each one.

However, tangible teachers and practice were not enough to generalize some learning experiences in Yu's childhood. For example, there was a time when her grandma led Yu to learn and recite The Great Learning (Daxue, 大学 in Chinese, Chen & Xu, 2011) and The Analects of Confucius (Lunyu, 论语 in Chinese, Confucius, 2016). In the beginning, her learning style was that grandma read a sentence and Yu repeated it after her, and gradually Yu became familiar with the sentences, and she could recite the whole passage. But what did the passage mean? Why would it say, "thinking and then reaping⁶?"

This led Yu to a long process of thinking which could not be assisted by her mother and grandmother. Yu knew that she (herself) was the only one who knew her own ideas best, and the logic inside could only be deliberated by herself. This kind of thinking was often fruitless for a long period of time. Perhaps after accumulating some life experience in the future, she could understand a small paragraph of the text. In this process, rather than practicing some skills again and again, Yu regarded her self-reflections and introspections as her own teacher.

Japanese elders' life attitudes

Wang studied Japanese in his undergraduate program, and he had been impacted a lot by his Japanese teacher. To be more specific, it was the teacher's attitude toward life that had a great influence on Wang.

⁶ This saying means knowledge can be obtained by understanding and thinking the entities, lv er hou neng de, or 虑而后能得 in Chinese. It is a short sentence in Daxue, Chapter Liji (Chen & Xu, 2011).

His Japanese teacher, J, used to work in Japan, and after his retirement, he still wanted to play his role with his spare energy and make some income, so he chose an entirely new place for exploring a new way of life - coming to China and living a life there. When Wang in his first year of the undergraduate program just met his Japanese teacher J, J was learning Chinese. Wang could still remember that before every day's Japanese class in the afternoon, J would unshakably practice Chinese speaking for an hour and let his Chinese students who came to class earlier help correct his Chinese pronunciations. Wang often arrived there early to be the "corrector," and they gradually became more and more familiar with each other.

In Wang's memory, the unshakable routine in J's new life was not limited to practicing Chinese. J also insisted on working out and running almost every day. Sometimes when Wang walked across the campus in a hurry for other morning classes, with no surprise, he would see J wearing convenient sportswear, running along the avenues on the campus or in the street park. Even on these cold mornings in northwest China, J's figure of running and exercising was still common to see on campus.

Wang was excited and so glad to get familiar with J and also be friends with him. However, after knowing more and more about his Japanese teacher, Wang got also more and more confused. At that time, as a college student, he could not imagine and understand why J chose to move to a new country, embrace a new life with challenges, and be exposed to a new language in his 70s, which were the experiences that J did not have to necessarily go through and overcome in the first place. Now that it was not quite possible for J to spend his remaining years having a comfortable life in China, while J

could easily achieve so in his own country, why did J have to be so “diligent” and aspirant to do so many new attempts and stay in his “uncomfortable zone”?

After Wang graduated, J went back to Japan and left those puzzling thoughts to Wang. Always wondering about this series of confusions, Wang entered a foreign trading company and worked with a Japanese boss, N. N had established three listed companies in Japan but all failed, and after that, N moved to China in his 60s. He set up a factory and trading company in Shenzhen in his 70s and recruited Wang as a department manager.

During this period, similar confusion came back to Wang again. He witnessed his boss N learning to drive, taking his road test, and learning both Cantonese and Chinese at the same time for business in Hong Kong. N also spoke English really well, and actively explored Latin languages for fun. And those all happened to a gray-haired elder!

It suddenly dawned on Wang that, in fact, it was meaningless to judge their attitudes towards life as well as many things they chose to experience in their lives by their necessities and usefulness. Those challenges were meaningful and enjoyable to J and N, instead of from a secular and utilitarian perspective. Wang thought of the conversation he had with J a few days ago. J told him that after going back to Japan, he attended a university for the elderly to learn about religion, and this was just for developing a new hobby. Wang gradually understood that J and his boss N were not keeping pushing themselves, but were maintaining a strong and vigorous vitality and actively exploring other possibilities and boundaries in life.

Their attitudes to lifelong learning, willingness to keep moving, and ability to be bold truly aroused Wang’s deep thoughts about himself. What attitude should he take for

himself now and in the future? Age or other elements such as gender, nationality, and language were believed to be difficult obstacles in people's road of exploring life, but were they indeed obstacles, or excuses for stopping moving? Wang was not sure about the answer right now, but he began the journey of inquiring.

Postscript: What and how they taught me

In our interview, Wang expressed how much his two Japanese seniors' attitudes to life had impacted him and caused him to seriously think about his own choices in the future. He envisioned,

When I get old, I don't want to (choose to) take care of my grandchildren or dance in the square like many elders are doing now in China...or spend everyday life with little energy and hope. ...Or actually, age does not have much relation with (the choice) either. No matter how old I am, I am sure to always keep an exuberant life energy and a more serious attitude to life, ...and to find more possibilities in life. ...Because (if I) want to accomplish something in a specific field, (I need to) have a rigorous attitude, continuous efforts, and the mentality of learning to accept new things.

In addition to the lessons he learned from his two Japanese seniors, Wang also talked about how they taught him a "life lesson" and why they were viewed as Wang's teachers.

Wang explained it in an unexpected way,

I think what I said about their life attitudes, choices, and practices is a kind of "education or instruction without words or actions" to me. Although the two people I just mentioned are both qualified enough to be my teachers in their

fields, such as in learning Japanese or doing business, they did not verbally tell me, or pontificate in a condescending manner about (you should do) one way or another. Precisely what impressed me most is not their achievements (in their fields), or is there a teacher certification or not, or if they are professional teachers or not, because they don't even know they have such a big influence on me. What they did was just using their own actions and attitudes, combined with my own thinking, which influenced me a lot. So many things in life are figured out.

What If The Taiji Sword (Taiji jian, 太极剑) Was A Teacher?

Wei practiced Taiji sword in the downstairs courtyard when she was in her 40s. At that time, she always felt unhealthy, and her body was weak because of continuous illnesses. And her mood was also decaying as well. Sometimes she was out of breath even if walking just a few steps. She was worried and sought some sports to strengthen her body and mind. She had tried various sports, but strenuous exercises were not appropriate for her situation. After considering it, she thought of the traditional Chinese exercise, Tai Chi. However, in Wei's understanding, Tai Chi was "empty" and "virtual" which required a beginner's patience to feel and experience the operation of the vital energy (yunqi, 运气) while might gain nothing needed. Wei thought she was short-tempered and an impatient person, so she started with the Taiji sword which was "real," visible, and easier to practice.

Wei started learning the Taiji sword that spring. She didn't take any classes but instead, she practiced every move with books and videos, and also with the rhythm of the

music. At the beginning of the practice, because there was not any foundation of Tai Chi, Wei had learned the thirty-two style for more than two months.

Every morning, Wei exercised for about an hour. In the beginning, she was fatigued during the exercise and could not even finish the whole exercise. She was too weak to stand for an hour, so she always wanted to sit down and have a rest. Besides, the sword was relatively heavy for weak Wei who even had difficulties doing the body movements and poses accurately. She thought the sword was quite cumbersome when she was eager to take care of the body movements with the sword. In practicing the Taiji sword, she felt more frustrated at first as the process kept reminding her of the weakness of her body. What could she do then?

What she did was practice and practice, as if the one-hour exercise every morning was just a chance for herself to get along with the sword and herself. After more than a month of patient practice, Wei suddenly realized that the sword was not heavy anymore. She felt like the sword and her hand became one, and the sword could “extend” her arm. Her inner “Qi” (气, vital energy) and potential energy were expressed with the dancing movements and the pointing of the sword, so her whole body got relaxed but energetic. While playing the Taiji sword, she could feel the transformations and combinations between the emptiness and existence of the Qi, between the body and the mind, the tenderness and force of the body, and the opening and closing of the sword movements. They were naturally connected and converted to each other in practicing the sword.

She thought of the Taiji sword as her non-human teacher in that difficult time period, cultivating her in a silent way. On the one hand, it brought Wei a stronger body and a more energetic state, such as comforting her body and adjusting her physical and

mental health, like the direct benefits of all other exercises. On the other hand, it gave her some intangible guidance on the body, on mentality, as well as on the wisdom or the Tao of life. For instance, the process of practicing honed Wei's patience in terms of telling her to give her body some time. In the practice, she also felt the inter-transformation of some seemingly opposing factors in her body. The sword was such a sharp "weapon," while it could be conformed with such mild Tai Chi, and then became a suitable exercise enabling Wei to blend herself in the harmony. "Is there a possibility that many of the circumstances and encounters in my life can be transformed in a single thought? It depends on how we think about life and difficulties." Pondering this, Wei gradually walked out of both the physical and mental bottoms of her life. And the Taiji sword, like those dusty and buried difficult years, was quietly left at the corner behind the door (see Image 46).



Image 46. The Taiji Sword with Sundries in the Corner Behind the Door. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

What If an Insect Was A Teacher?

Wang felt overwhelmed these days. This year was his first year of being a schoolteacher, and Wang had to handle all kinds of issues related to teaching, students, parents, and other trivial assignments for new teachers. Wang was tired, but he also tried his best to accomplish every little task carefully and perfectly. After all, this was his dream—being a teacher, and he made this big decision against others.

However, in this profession, there were a number of teachers and colleagues around Wang rejecting working hard but embracing “lying flat” (tang ping, 躺平). Wang knew the reason behind colleagues’ actions: for in-service teachers, tasks, and assignments waiting to be done were too many, and one task succeeded another. Besides, whether the job was well finished or not, their salary would be quite the same, while there was a huge distinction in the pressure they withstood between the two choices. Hence, in most cases, Wang’s colleagues chose to simply muddle through the work, complete tasks to a reasonable extent, and earn the most basic salary. To be honest, Wang privately acknowledged that this way of dealing with work, indeed, attracted him a lot and he was primed for practicing it.

One day, he went out for dinner. While waiting to be dishes-served, he suddenly noticed that there was a small insect inadvertently falling into his cup filled with half a cup of tea. The insect kept afloat on the tea water motionlessly. Watching it for a while, Wang thought it might be drowned, so he was going to pick up his spoon and scoop it out. Of a sudden, the insect quickly moved and splashed around. Wang then planned to wait for a while to see what was going to happen to this insect (see Image 47).



Image 47. The Insect in the Cup. Photoed by Wang in 2022, summer.

The insect kept splashing and beating its wings at a certain frequency. It attempted to make use of its wings as its legs to “swim” to the wall of the cup. It desperately struggled to survive. It seemed to exert all its energy to get rid of water surging over its body. It struggled, and paused to have a rest, and then struggled again. But it was still far away from the cup wall, and it would be a long road for the insect. Wang decided to have his dinner first.

The minutes were ticking away, and Wang almost finished his dinner. He wanted to drink some tea but suddenly thought of the insect in his cup. He stuck his head to look into the cup. Nobody knew how many times it had attempted to “swim” because it had arrived at the cup wall and tried to climb up. Unfortunately, it seemed exhausted due to the long time “swimming,” and the water wetted it and increased the burden of moving its body. The insect eventually stopped moving on the cup wall in its climbing.

Wang was filled with thousands of emotions. He thought of some small animals he had seen in his life, such as cats, dogs, small insects, and small mosquitoes. It seemed

easy to see the beginning and disappearance of life on them: one second before, they were bouncing vigorously and vividly alive, while they might not exist in this world anymore the next second. “Then what is the meaning of my life? Why did I come to this world? If I could only have such a short life just like those insects and animals, or even for several more decades, should I do something meaningful for this world? Even if an insect would strive for half an hour to stay alive, why was I allowed myself to ‘lie flat’ then?”

Wang genuinely rejected the idea of lying flat deep in his heart. He did not want to be influenced by his colleagues, muddling along with his work and his life and forgetting his original intention of being a teacher. Although all of those changes of thoughts only happened in his mind, it was a huge turn for him.

Postscript: The meaning of life and being a teacher

The story between Wang and the insect happened when we were having dinner together, and this scene coincidentally echoed some of Wang’s thoughts expressed in the interview. We discussed those thoughts again after seeing this tough insect. In the interview, when he talked about the meaning of being a teacher or living a meaningful life, he said,

(We) have to live meaningfully, from birth to death...(although) of course, it seems hard about how we define this “meaningfulness.” ... “Meaningfulness” for me is how to be a person of benefit to others, and now specifically, how to be a teacher who illuminates my students. To bring just a little bit of a different light into their lives. ... You may think saying this is a bit feigned, but today when I sat

still, I was seriously thinking about what I could bring to the world, ...to prove I have been here in this world, ...rather than being like a mosquito, an insect, a dog, living and dying 'flatly'. ...Humans are similar to them, living day to day, teaching day to day, pushing our students to do their homework, and finishing our teaching tasks. ...and finally, nothing has been left in this world. (This feeling and assumption) makes me feel very sad and pathetic. ...We should leave something good in this world.

What If A Mother's Love Was A Teacher?

Meng was a Chinese teacher and she needed to supervise and urge her students to recite some classical Chinese poems and readings recently because the sectional exam was approaching. She had repeatedly emphasized the importance of reciting the poems to her students and took action to urge them, but it did not work well, and some students still failed to dictate the required readings. Meng was very worried.

With time getting more and more limited, Meng resolved to make a rule in her class: Students needed to finish their recitation and dictation before the end of evening studies every day. This rule not only required Meng to stay in school late at night and supervise students' evening studies but also urged some of the students to finish their reciting tasks every day and did not offer the chance of delaying. Anyhow, it worked for her students, and Meng was very satisfied.

However, one evening, after the scheduled evening study when Meng was having a rest in her office, she received a call from a student's mom. The mom was very anxious and worried on the phone because she had waited for her child at the gate of school for

quite a while after the evening class, but not seeing him all the time. The mom was not sure if her child had come out of the classroom or not, or if she had missed her child at the gate. She wanted to ask Meng to go to the classroom and to see whether her child was still there. “But don’t tell him I am waiting for him,” the mom said, “I don’t want to bother him. I just want to make sure if he is in the classroom and if he is safe.”

Meng promised gladly, but also curiously. She hustled to the classroom, and indeed, the student was in his seat, mumbling. The student saw Meng come over, standing up, and said, “Miss Meng, I...I failed to memorize all the ancient readings for today as I wasted some hours in the daytime. I will definitely recite it to you in one hour. I promise I can finish it today. Could you wait for me for a while?”

Meng nodded and walked out of the classroom quietly. She did not tell the student about his mom waiting at the gate because that was his mom’s idea of kindness. Meng walked back to her office and called back the student’s mom to explain the situation. She asked the mom to pass her phone to the security officer at the gate and informed the officer to put the student’s mom into campus. Meng picked up the mom and made her wait in the teacher’s office.

About an hour later, the student came to Meng’s office and surprisingly saw his mom there, waiting on the office sofa. His mom seemed very tired but still smiling at her son. The student did not say a word and just successfully recited all the readings in front of Meng. He recited very fast and fluently, and the whole process finished in ten minutes.

After that, that student never delayed the recitation or left any unfinished assignments in the evening class again. He always got out of the school gate as soon as possible to meet his mom there. Occasionally, because of some unexpected situations

which required students to stay longer after school, he would ask Meng to borrow her phone for calling his mom and letting his mom know about the approximate waiting time. He did not want his mom to be worried for his safety and wait for him too long again.

Postscript: Mutual love

Meng was touched by both the mother's love and patience, as well as her son's knowing and understanding of his mom's loving effort. This was a two-way emotion between the mother and the son. In Meng's eyes, the mom's love and patience were expressed as a silent way of educating or impacting her child, because "the mom did not mention to her son about how long or hard she had waited, or did not emotionally blame him for not studying harder." What the mom did was just accompanying and waiting for her son quietly. Meng said,

"The mom did not come with an educational and complaining aim, so her waiting was not to 'teach' (her son). It was the student seeing his mom's efforts so (being) willing to understand and change. It was about teaching and learning, but not in a normal way. His mom, or her love, was definitely my student's teacher."

What If The Willow And The Snail Were Teachers?

Ding was an old lady who was almost 90 years old. She had looked at willows for a long time, and this happened several times throughout the month.

This little town was full of willows due to lots of lakes and rivers. In summer, the willow branches were hairlike hanging down, just like plenty of plaits adorned with little green hair clips. Thanks to those branches which had created a lot of pleasant shade and coolness for Ding sitting under it in this hot summer. The river wind blew over, raising

the willow tree's slender wicker and the branches danced in the sky, as if a teenage girl did not tie up her hair, or like an old lady without intention to dress up her own long hair (see Images 48 and 49).

It was midsummer now. Its wickers appeared to be greener, and the leaves were softer. The flakes of its leaves were thin and flat, and if Ding squinted her eyes, each of them looked like a single green skiff floating in the distant ripping river waves with the dancing wind. The willows were actually depicting the shape of the wind.

In the four seasons' circulation of nature, the willow was always sprouting in the spring, became lush in summer, turned light yellow and brown in autumn, and dried out in winter. It seemed never in a hurry to change as it was just a matter of time.

Whenever or whichever season Ding came to the ground of the riverbank, she could see this willow tree standing there uprightly, seemingly waiting and staying in its meditation. She also knew that the willow had a strong vitality because it did not need to be carefully planted and cultivated. All the willow needed for thriving was a natural environment—being inserted in any soil beside the river, bathing in the pretty sunshine of all seasons, and sucking the rain and dew.

This was also why Ding loved and yearned for the willow. In the years or decades, it lived here beside the river, how lonely it might have been when confronting the endless silence and boringness! Willows did not speak, what it did in those days was just quietly and proudly standing alone between heaven and earth, and also watching the milling crowd coming and leaving, children and adults crying and laughing, and the Yangzi River rising and falling. Ding thought of Mu Xin's words, "Trees and water are

full of sorrow, but they can just hold the sorrow back quietly” (Mu, 2009)⁷. In her 80s, Ding understood its loneliness, because “bustling with noises and happiness is someone else’s, I have nothing” (Zhu, 2013)⁸. But it was not lonely either, because the willow had seen all kinds of noises, joyfulness, and surging memories around it, and every moment was its private carnival.

Snails seemed to tell similar inspirations for Ding in her 80s. As Ding got older and older, she began to move much more slowly and her mobility and ability to live freely were not as efficient as that of younger people. She began to feel powerless and lost her grip. She keenly believed that her ability had fallen short of many of her wishes in mind. “And this was just a start,” she thought negatively. Sometimes this state could turn into a feeling of self-pity and being hard to cheer up. However, it rained these days, and on the path of taking for a “walk” with her wheelchair, Ding saw some snails crawling on the wet ground.



Images 48 & 49. The Willow. Photoed by Ding in 2022, summer.

⁷ The original words in Chinese are, “树啊, 水啊, 都很悲伤的, 它们忍得住就是了。”

⁸ The original words in Chinese are, “热闹是他们的, 我什么也没有。”

It was quite difficult for her the first time of going out for a walk on a rainy day because she had to watch out for her foot or the wheels of her wheelchair to avoid hitting or squashing any snail. The big snails were easier to recognize, while the small ones, smaller than the stones and grains, were blended with other colors on the road and hard to tell. With a kind heart to avoid hurting snails scattered everywhere in this garden, Ding totteringly bent down to look at them and recognize them.

Ding found that the snails move extremely slowly, even slower than her. And snails did not spend much time in groups moving, preferring to stop and crawl alone. Their movements seemed aimless, but they all crawled at their own pace and in specific directions (see Images 50 and 51). At the slightest hint of wind blowing or rain falling, the snail's outstretched antennae would snap back quickly and burrow its whole body back into the shell for a while. After a while, when it felt that the "danger" had passed, it would slowly stretch out its chubby body, and then protrude its tentacles, and start to crawl forward again. The forward direction of its crawling might be completely different from where it intended to go at the very start, so Ding did not know where it was headed at all.

For those snails who had crawled into the middle of the road, Ding was worried that they would be accidentally stepped on by a passerby or run over by cars entering the community. She bent down again, reached out to the snails, and turned them around so that when they stretched out their heads again, they would crawl toward the grass. When she picked the snail up with two fingers, there was a slight suction between its chubby body and the ground, as if many small suckers firmly holding the ground. Then as

sensing her hand, the snail quickly drew in its tentacles and retreated into its shell. Ding only turned its body around rather than putting it straight back on the grass. Ding thought this was its own path and though marching forward slowly, it would finish it on its own.

In getting along with the snails, Ding was touched by their slowness, aimlessness, and state of going with the flow under any circumstances. She suddenly recognized her mood of despising herself for being too slow and disliking her always having to bother her adult children. She disliked herself being so old. She realized how much she desired to have a “faster” and “neater” life on her own, not by depending on children. For example, she remembered that she insisted on using a wheelchair instead of walking (see Image 52). She often became over-nervous with slight illnesses and the need to buy medicine or go to the hospital to see a doctor immediately or preferred finishing all things by herself without bringing trouble to other family members.

However, her observations of snails on these rainy days reminded her of those feelings she had, and also gave her the courage to face her inner thoughts deep in her mind. Sitting quietly in the garden after the rain, Ding realized that even the creatures who were athletic and moving fast might not be able to run ahead of “impermanence” in nature. For instance, the athletic cat might not be able to hide from the sudden rain at its full speed, so it would get wet after all; while it was the little snail walking slowly across the wet gullies on the ground. Ding did not know where the snail journey’s end was and when the rain would stop, but perhaps the snail’s road had no end, and it was not waiting for the rain to stop at all. The snail could still crawl forward, slowly, comfortably, and contentedly with the continuous rain.

Ding now firmly believed that the snail was telling her to slow down, to slowly grow old, and to enjoy life while turning old. “Letting the candle of life be burned more slowly, might also be a way of life, like the life attitude Daoist thought – furthering life with a slow and steady pace (ning jing zhi yuan, 宁静致远),” she thought.

Ding recalled some characteristics of her personality in her younger ages – always being assertive and busy, but now she felt she was in a similar state to the willow and the snails. She was approaching the last years of her life, becoming old, quiet, slow, and alone. Yet, she was also lively, because, with a lot of memories and understanding of people and things as well as her perceptions of life, she was fulfilled. She believed that the relationship between individuals and the world was all about feelings and perceptions, so she felt the companionship, understanding, and courage to confront herself in observing and getting along with the snail and the willow. Observing snails and the willow taught her to discover her inner vulnerability, and to be sensitive to small and microscopic things, such as bending down to look at a snail or looking up at a willow. These animals and plants had apparently been able to frankly face their “disadvantages” and turned them into advantages: Willow cannot move to join others’ bustling noises, but it stayed calm and had a static life by standing still along with the wind, seeing the ebb and flow. Snails were slow without starting or ending points, but they never hasted. “So do I,” Ding thought, “I could also confront the loneliness brought by age or my personality, like the willow, and I could also be honest with my slowness and increasing weakness, like the snail.”

Ding realized that there was a lot on this alone life road, such as potential judgmental looks and words from others, the calmness and acceptance of her aging and

weakened ability, and the back of their loved ones who left in a hurry. But she was also very clear that she had to finish this road slowly, inch by inch by herself, and the loneliness, persistence, and warmth on her life road also needed her own to taste on her own.

For Ding, loneliness now became a state of mind rather than an inevitable lifestyle because she always had her own to accompany. Now, the willow would also join her road to tell her that some loneliness was necessary but worthy, and the snail gave her tough perseverance and fearless courage through its slow movement. Although Ding was getting older and older, being slow and clumsy, she was in her determined growth.

On another afternoon while sitting and thinking about snails, Ding saw a little snail on the window screen in her bedroom (see Image 53). The snail seemed to know that she was missing it, so it came to her. It climbed so slowly, but still climbed high. The snail seemed to ask her, “are you afraid of being alone? Are you afraid of slowing down?”



Images 50 & 51. The Snails. Photoed by Ding in 2022, summer.



Image 52. The Wheelchair Ding Insisted on Using. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Image 53. The Snail on Ding's Window Screen. Photoed by Ding in 2022, summer.

What If The Sky And The Clouds Were Teachers?

Yu loved looking up at the sky since she was a little kid. Childhood infatuation with the sky did not have to be reasonable, due to her unrestrained imagination. On clear, cloudy, rainy, windy days, in the mornings, afternoons, sunsets, and late at night, the changing sky and clouds had their own fairy tale plots in Yu's mind. The clouds appeared to be a warm, soulful, and loving confession to the sky, changing patterns every day, wantonly and blatantly. As a child, Yu also dreamed of being a cloud, floating and flying farther away to see a bigger and different sky full of varieties.

As Yu was growing up, the sky in her eyes was also imprinted with her own emotions. She no longer traced the edges of clouds with her eyes, imagining that each cloud might be an animal of various shapes as she did when she was a child. More often, she took a hasty glance at the sky to catch a glimpse of the sky and a plane that might

pass in the distance when she was stressed from her study and wanted to rest her eyes. Occasionally being lucky, she could catch the sunset time and looked up to see the setting sun which seemed not bearing to part itself from the pink-blue sky. Seeing this splendid scene, her irritable mood was as if to be ironed flat somehow.

When she was much older, she walked out of this little town, leaving the familiar areas, and even out of her own country. She had seen skies around the world--the azure blue sky that welcomed the warm rising sun in a snowfield morning, the clear blue and transparent sky over an island when the sun was high and beating down, the pitch-dark sky like a huge black curtain with the colorful aurora in the Arctic Circle, and also the pink and orange sunset in the vast desert. She began to drift and wander from place to place like a cloud. She did not have a stable “home” but treated everywhere as her home.

This year, Yu had a rare opportunity to return to the place where she started off. She reclaimed her memories of looking up at the sky and the clouds without any distracting thoughts as she did in her childhood. Those clouds, once again, became colorful fairies, ever-changing magicians, and mischievous elves (see Images 54, 55, 57, and 58).

On those sunny and hot summer days, the clouds were clumps of fluffy marshmallows. Their mischievous and changing appearances were like a flock of docile little sheep whose belly was round. They were furry and woolly, walking and following step by step but also inching for little tricks and movements. Some of the clouds clustered together, just like the breaking waves rolling in the ocean. Some of them were blown away by the wind, like layers of silver sand left by the ebb and flow of the sea. Some clouds were also overlapping, like layer upon layer of mountains. Some were posing the

gesture of Baymax, opening their arms to embrace the earth (see Image 56). And some other clouds interacted with each other, forming the Yin-Yang symbol in Taoism with the gray clouds (see Image 59).

The sunset in summer was late, and the orange skyline was faintly visible behind the bridge (see Image 60). At dusk, the sky darkened into light blue, as the background of the distant high and low mountains and small houses. The silver-blue sky was quiet, with a layer of light clouds flowing (see Image 61/62). The light cloud was like a fairy's transparent gauze skirt, or the combed feathers or a bright silver stream inset in the plain. They moved slowly in the sky without any haste, dispersing at once in the slightest breeze, as if a group of whispering fairies was suddenly interrupted. When the thin layer of gauze was blown away, the small, curved moon appeared in the sky, like the smiling eye of clouds. Yu started to see the distant small houses on the other side of the river lightened up, and the wisps of dim smoke rising continuously from the small houses' chimneys tinged the sunset glow in red. The sky turned into gentle sand pink and the clouds started to gather in layers.

When it was about to rain, the dark clouds in the sky were like the ink in an accidentally knocked-over ink bottle but being diluted by the rain. The dark clouds turned into leaden gray, became thick and heavy, and piled towards the river one after another. The air outside was so stuffy that Yu could hardly breathe. Suddenly, the lightning split the gray sky through the clouds like a sharp knife, and then the sky thundered like a muffled roar in a drum. Yu went home and sat by the bay window, smelling the aroma of cooking.

The clouds and the sky taught Yu to get used to changes and wanderings. Now the adult Yu still admired every pose and shape of the ever-changing clouds and yearned for every place in the distance the clouds could arrive. The clouds and the sky inspired Yu that just like those clouds with infinite possibilities, she was free to choose the life and place she wanted. The only required thing was to change and “transform” yourself as if the clouds changed their shape according to the direction of the wind. For the clouds and Yu herself, each moment could be a new endeavor and adventure to explore the most suitable ways of living life.

However, the clouds and the sky here in the little town also told Yu about enabling herself to be relaxed and comfortable, to stay free of worry, and set herself at rest. The clouds and sky in her hometown continued to remind her of the warmest welcome from this little town—whenever she felt tired and wanted to have a peaceful life, she could stop the pace of wandering and come back to see the sky in the town. It suddenly dawned on Yu that this was the inculcation from the clouds: each entity in nature has its own reasoning, and the sky was inclusive of any form of clouds. Meanwhile, like the clouds, we learned to take advantage of ourselves and moved forward with the wind, because there would always be a suitable sky for every unique form of ourselves.

The sky was always there, and it was the clouds coming and leaving. Yu tried to listen to the “teachings” of the clouds and was no longer afraid of changes and drifts, but also no longer confused and panicked about being static.



Images 54, 55, 56, 57, & 58. Various Kinds and Shapes of Clouds in the Town. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.



Image 59. The Shape of the Yin-Yang Symbol in the Clouds Above the Town. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.



Image 60. The Sunset of the Town. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.



Images 61 & 62. “The Quiet Silver-blue Sky at Dusk, with a Layer of Light Clouds Flowing.”
Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

What If Amitabha Buddha Was A Teacher?

Since Ding learned Buddhism, the Amitabha Buddha, which was the Buddha’s name, was regarded as one of Ding’s teacher representatives. For Ding as a beginner believing in Buddhism, Buddha seemed invisible and intangible, but every time she heard and followed the chanting of “Amitabha Buddha” (阿弥陀佛), it reminded her that the

Buddha teachers actually existed in this world, what she believed in was, and what she still needed to learn from it.

There was no exclusive machine for chanting Buddha several decades ago, so Ding bought a red tape drive which was also a tape recorder to use as a machine player for chanting the Amitabha Buddha at home (see Image 63). Sides A and B of the played tape were different. Side A was chanting Amitabha Buddha (e mi tuo fo, 阿弥陀佛), while side B was the song of Nanwu Guanyin Bodhisattva (nan wu guan shi yin pu sa, 南无观世音菩萨). As long as one side of the tape was played, the content in the tape was singing and reciting these two names of Buddha over and over again for a little past an hour. Usually, Ding listened to it when she was in a bad mood, followed the songs when she was not feeling well or sick, and also chanted it when problems cropped up and she was in a panic.



Image 63. The Red Tape Drive. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

Ding was impressed by two experiences related to the Amitabha Buddha. There were a few years of summer when the temperature was extremely high, and it was especially hot even at night. Ding was particularly afraid of heat because she gave birth to her children twice and both of them happened in summers. In Ding's mind, summertime was like a haunted devil who had tortured her in her most difficult times for many years. One night in this kind of weather, she was too hot to fall asleep, and there was no air conditioner in those years in this old house. It was very late at night, but the heat was still unbearable.

Ding lay in her bed and felt restless, tossing and turning. She did not get up and wander in the house because she had the fear of her movements awakening the sleeping family in the next room. Ding, therefore, turned on the tape player to the minimum, playing the chanting "Amitabha Buddha," and she followed the tape chanting again and again. After a while, she felt that her heart was slowly settling down, and there was someone always staying here with her, patting her anxious mind, and bringing her coolness. She felt cooler than before and gradually fell asleep in the muttering.

Another experience for Ding would be more dangerous. She was alone at home once and her children were both away from home and not in the same town with her. She was in her 70s and suddenly her heart was extremely uncomfortable. She felt chest tightness and she could not even breathe for several seconds. As an elder, it was common for Ding to always worry about her own health and get more and more nervous about any discomfort. Thinking of this, her heart beat faster and faster, and she felt more and more uncomfortable but at a loss.

At that very moment, she thought of some Buddhists' saying about Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva having the ability of curing. Ding endured her pain and turned on the recorder for side B. The tape started to rotate, singing "Nanwu Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva." Ding followed and chanted along with it, one chant after another. Miraculously and also luckily, every recitation of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva seemed to be able to adjust the rhythm of her heartbeats, and her heart was soothing little by little. The tightness lingering in her breast began to disappear, and she was relieved by the chanting.

She was surprisingly amazed by the effects of chanting Buddha's names. Ding became a deeper and stronger believer in Buddhism and viewed Buddha sincerely as her distant teacher because it taught her how to face the fear in her heart and calmed her anxiety when experiencing suffering.

What If Plants Were Our Teachers (With Three Generations)?

They used to have a lot of plants in this old house. Most of the plants and flowers were raised by Ding's husband who loved and cared for plants a lot and would regard them as his "plant friends." Others in this family did not pay much attention to the plants but they also enjoyed the beautiful and vibrant balcony filled with botanical scenes. Unfortunately, Ding's husband got cancer in his 60s and passed away within three years. All grievous things happened out of a sudden and the sorrow enveloped the entire family and this old house.

After her husband passed away, Ding was not capable of stepping out from the grief of losing her love and could not put any energy into taking care of his plants. The

life of these plants seemed to be connected and mutually existed with her husband's life. Ding sadly noticed that in the first two years after her husband's death, all the plants and flowers which grew very well in his life, withered, turned yellow, faded, and died off little by little. Ding sitting there and looking at those dying plants on the balcony, was heartbroken and could not even open her eyes—she could not bear to see anything so deeply connected to her loved husband. They would remind her of him. She missed him so much.

Being immersed in this sorrow for several years, one sunny day, Ding found most of the plants on the balcony had died a long time and perished in the soil. She was determined to handle those pots. During cleaning, she suddenly felt she was not so grieved anymore. It was not because she did not miss him after a few years, but due to those perished plants. She realized the death of those plants might be one kind of “teacher” and gave signs to her. Her husband did not want her to look at these plants and feel sorry for him anymore. It seemed like her husband knew that Ding would definitely dispose of them soon after their deaths so that Ding would not see them and then not miss him too much. “It was a sign from him,” Ding smiled in relief, with tears in her eyes.

Ding began to grow some tough and resilient plants, such as aloes and easy-growing flowers. She also tried to sprinkle seeds of baby cabbage in a pot to grow vegetables that were edible in about ten days. The balcony became vital and green again, in another way.

As another important member of this family, Wei was so impressed by and thinking of his dad constantly. Her father loved plants and always raised some plants throughout the year, treating them more carefully than other family members. Wei

remembered when her dad was at home or on the balcony, there were always lush, evergreen flowers and plants in the basin and the home was also particularly sunny and warm. Wei personally did not care much about the plants, but her father always wanted to take her hands and talk to her about his favorite plants. Wei heard her father's chattering and was distracted by her other work-related thoughts in her mind.

However, Wei lost her father because of his lung cancer at the age of 67. She witnessed his father passing away with pain and unwillingness. After her father's death, she refused to be close to flowers and plants anymore and was not interested in growing plants at all. She was even more convinced that flowers and plants, no matter how beautiful and strong they were, and no matter how careful care or timely rescue at the last minute, would wither and die eventually, just like human beings. Plants and humans were the same—they all had their own destinies and certain lifespans.

Wei was sad and in deep remorse. She regretted that she did not do everything she could do to accompany her father. She did not get to know him and his plants more, talk to him more and spent more time with him when he was still healthy and young. She regretted her late awakenings because she only realized those and started to cherish the memories with her father until he died. She also regretted that she could not offer him to live a better life without worries in the last two years of his life.

After a few years, Wei accidentally noticed that the balcony had changed and turned green again. It was not as colorful and lush as before, but there were a few newly grown plants in the pots. She also altered her attitude of absolute refusals a little bit towards plants and flowers. After many years, she talked to her mom Ding about this

change and her mom's memories, and she finally understood the journey of the difficult transition in Ding's mind in those years.

Inspired by her mom's memories, Wei tried to look at flowers and plants from another perspective and accept them. Standing in front of those plants on the balcony, Wei seemingly felt that her father had come back again. Touching those plants, Wei could feel her papa always thinking for others and caring for people around him, like bathing in the spring breeze. "Papa would not wish to see that I am living in regret. Perhaps the fading of flowers and plants are hoping to teach me not only the pain and sorrow of loss but also some hope of rebirth and enlightenment for the living to cherish the present," Wei thought silently.

Yu was another family member of the third generation in this family. When Yu was a child living in this old house, there were various plants raised on the balcony, such as cactus and aloe which were easy to be alive, and also some seasonal flowers such as jasmine and magnolia cultivated by Yu's grandfather in later years. Several years passed, and some kinds of the plants on the balcony gradually disappeared, but there were always a few pots of plants there. Yu had thought that plants were only for people to watch and appreciate, so she never observed them seriously and carefully.

One day in the year of preparing for studying abroad, Yu was very upset and irritable due to constantly reciting GRE words and doing the mock TOEFL tests every day at home. The vocabulary in GRE was like a bottomless sea to Yu, as if it would never end. Besides, she had been preparing to study abroad for more than a year. Insisting to this point, Yu was like a spent arrow without enough patience and strength to keep going. She wandered in the house, and unconsciously went to the balcony. Suddenly, she saw

some green plants and a pot of aloe vera which seemed to be there with the family for many years. She knew her grandmother had always taken care of it, and Yu had never set her eyes on it.



Image 64. The Pot of Aloe Vera. Photoed by Yu in the past.

She walked close to the aloe vera and reached her hands out to touch it. She felt its jagged edges, watching its leaves seeming to transparent green in the mild sunshine (see Image 64). They were glinting and plump, full of juice. Yu touched the leaves and felt the sunshine again and again, playing with aloe and communicating with it.

She felt a steadfast and peaceful strength growing from the leaves and flowing to her heart. She could feel the firmness because Yu thought of this pot of aloe being alive and full of vitality during the past, during an extremely cold winter in this town. The aloe vera could survive the terrible weather of the past, so could she – insisting on going along this road and it would be overcome anyway. She had gone through difficult times in the past, and this pot of aloe had always been a constant companion on this flower shelf on

the balcony. So this time, she had the belief that it would always be here with her through the whole difficult journey.

Quietly standing at a distance and watching Yu interacting with the plants, Ding smiled. She had never thought that keeping and raising some green plants and flowers on her balcony would be so encouraging to her granddaughter (see Images 65 and 66). She also did not expect that these plants, which were casually kept and cared for, or just left there in her most painful times, would also be helpful to the whole family. It was so surprising to Ding that the same plants in the same home had such different connections with each family member and taught them so many inspirations in those years.

Ding was also getting older little by little, and she might also leave this house and the balcony one day. She wished to leave something of strength and hope that might encourage her family and future generations like her husband did via all the plants on the balcony.



Images 65 & 66. The Left Pots and Cactus on the Balcony. Photoed by Yu in 2022, summer.

What If The Influences of Deeds Were Teachers?

Throwing trash

Wu was on her way to the market on a sunny Saturday. She leisurely walked and enjoyed her weekend in this beautiful weather. When she took a walk on the pavement, she saw a middle-aged and well-dressed woman walking with her five- or six-year-old boy, and Wu walked behind them. She noticed them because the mother and the son both dressed casually and decently, and the vibe around them was so joyful and relaxed. The boy with a cup of ice cream in his hand was eating it happily and deliciously while walking. Wu could not move her eyes from them, so she watched and admired them from a distance behind.

Suddenly, Wu saw that the woman stopped. The woman apparently saw a plastic water bottle on the side of the road that might have been littered randomly by others. She walked straight to pick it up and threw it into the recycling trash can just beside the plastic bottle. Wu was genuinely appreciating the mother more and more because of her good manners alone, although Wu had never known her before.

When his mom went over to throw the bottle in the trash can, the boy did not follow. Instead, he was standing still, holding the paper bowl filled with ice cream, and scooping it with a little black plastic spoon. He waited for his mom to walk back to him and they started walking forward again. After walking about four or five hundred meters, the boy finished the ice cream and saw a garbage can on the side of the road. From a distance, Wu saw the little boy stopping, and standing still, seeming to be hesitating and perplexed. His mother was standing beside and watching him as if they were making a

difficult decision. After a while, the boy threw the spoon and the paper bowl separately into the can, and they walked away trippingly.

Wu was really curious. Why would the boy hesitate about such an easy action – throwing an ice cream bowl? With the question in mind, Wu approached the point where the mother was standing. At that point, Wu saw the trash can with four different buckets, named recyclable, hazardous, kitchen waste, and other trash, just the same as other normal rubbish cans. Wu stepped up and saw the paper bowl and the spoon staying in the recycling bin. Wu understood the boy’s hesitation immediately: He was not sure which bucket was the right one for his trash, especially after seeing his mom throwing the plastic water bottle into the recyclable one.

Wu was surprised and gratified by the decent manners of the mother and the son. She was surprised because although the mom did not require her boy to throw the trash into the bin or directly tell him which bin to classify the trash, the little boy could see his mom’s behaviors, think about it, and imitate the action. Wu could not help sighing about the powerful and potential influence of “teaching by example.” She came to admire the “strange” mom more because the mom had already realized that the behavior of parents and people around the minors was the most influential way to teach them without saying anything.

Organizing the platform and asking questions

Wu recently found that there were many cases of manner imitations among the students in her class, and she was so glad about this kind of “teaching without words” happening between her students. For example, there was a female student L in the class

always quietly tidying the podium up when she noticed the messiness. Wu started to find it weird because she thought it was not possible that L was assigned as the student on duty every day, while Wu could see L cleaning the platform up every so often. After observing for a few days, Wu realized that no matter whether L was responsible for cleaning or not that day, she would take the initiative to clean up the podium, wipe the desk, and organize it.

As a few weeks passed, Wu delightedly found out that other students spontaneously began to help L do the cleaning duty. Or some other time, other students would also tidy up the platform when they passed by. As a teacher in this class, Wu thought that student L and her behavior of quietly cleaning the platform were the beginning of the following changes. L was like a quiet “teacher” of other students - without saying a word she was able to motivate other students to imitate her or without deliberately educating other students through her actions. What student L did was just being herself, which became an “example” to other students in the class unconsciously.

Another change was also led by the imitation among students about their attitude to math learning. The class that Wu was teaching was constituted of art students who were a little afraid of mathematics and were not interested in it, because the logic of mathematics varied a lot from the thinking of artistic creation, and it was not indeed what the art students were familiar with. Ms. Wu understood their difficulties and tried not to put pressure on her students on math achievements. However, mathematics was an inevitable subject in their exam even for art students, and Ms. Wu could not come up with any better ideas to attract students to learn math and improve grades in a short time period.

Surprisingly, there was one student named Xiao in her class who loved to ask questions. He always came to Wu after class to ask math questions, which made Xiao seem to be particularly striking and “out of the ordinary.” Every time, Ms. Wu would answer his questions patiently and even solve the problem in the textbook with him step by step.

About a month later, Wu gradually found that more students in her class would take the initiative to ask questions after class. Many students actively came to her office to tell Ms. Wu what he or she had not comprehended and mastered or became willing to discuss with her what his or her solution idea was. Wu felt like the students in her class were influenced by Xiao, and their long-time fear of mathematics had been overcome and eliminated little by little. Because their classmate Xiao always came to ask questions and studied math successfully, the confidence of other students gradually developed in their minds. Mathematics was not so distant and untouchable for other students anymore, and they started to look forward to learning math and taking math classes as well. Wu recognized that Xiao also became the teacher for other students here in terms of leading other students to overcome the psychological barriers of learning mathematics together.

The power of this simulating effect from classmates was much more significant than Wu expected. She realized that peers’ actions and behaviors were much more persuasive and effective than her verbal repetitive indoctrination about “studying hard” or “taking the responsibility of cleaning the public classroom.” As the teacher in her class, Wu wished to have more “unexpected teachers” like this among the students.

My colleagues

Zhang was grateful to his colleagues and his department leader in the workplace because they had taught him lots of helpful “unspoken lessons” in his work experience. Zhang was new to teaching, in his own opinion, because, unlike his colleagues, he did not graduate from a standard normal university that was believed to specifically cultivate professional teachers in public schools. From Zhang’s perspective, coming from a comprehensive university decreased his chance of interning in real classrooms as a pre-teacher and weakened Zhang’s professionalism of being a teacher. He was quite self-contemptuous about his professional background.

However, one day, his department leader, an experienced teacher who had been teaching for 47 years, changed his mind. In fact, on normal days, Zhang noticed that this experienced teacher had always been working hard, reading every day, and never stopping reading and writing. Zhang always admired him a lot and respected him as a senior in teaching this discipline.

On that day between classes, the senior teacher came to Zhang, stood beside his seat, bowed his back, and asked Zhang, “Do you think it would be better to introduce the idea of chromosome in a playful way rather than reciting the definition? Do you have any novel ways of introducing the concept? May I learn from you?”

Zhang was shocked at that moment. He could not even remember what suggestion he gave to the senior teacher, or if he said something or not. What Zhang did not expect was that a senior teacher like him would still dig into some tiny teaching ideas and methods and enquire about the better way of teaching and conveying the knowledge. More importantly, he would even be willing to discuss it and ask for advice from a

“green hand,” a young teacher, or even his students. The senior teacher had never stopped learning, no matter who would be the one to learn from.

Zhang was determined not to feel self-abased in his work. Although he might naturally lack professional and standard training from normal universities and some knowledge of teaching, or he was not clear about the teaching system and operation rules, he could still learn, and it would never be late. If a senior teacher would not look down on him, why should he do this to himself? He still had the chance and time to learn the daily behaviors and working attitudes of his predecessors or colleagues. And with his accumulation of teaching experiences, he would have a better understanding of what a teacher was, what a teacher’s responsibilities were, how to teach, how to deal with the relationship with students, and how to engage in the teaching profession.

Zhang thought that the words and deeds of his colleagues, especially those of the senior teacher, have taught him a lot.

Another young teacher, Ms. Wu, who was a complete stranger to Zhang, happened to experience a similar situation recently. Ms. Wu also learned a lot from her colleagues in a new field at work. Besides teaching classes, Wu was also assigned to work as a staff in the personnel office of the school, which included coping with a series of administrative tasks. Different from teaching, the surrounding ambiance and way of handling affairs in administrative work were much similar to the style in a company or industry, which was relatively complex for Ms. Wu at present. She just entered the office and was confused about specific and trivial tasks.

In this circumstance, her leaders and colleagues helped her a lot in a silent way to get used to the working style. For example, once she saw one of her colleagues Li writing

something in a small notebook. Wu walked over and had a look at her notebook, finding that she was keeping a “work log” by herself. Wu was a little bit panicked and asked Li, “Is this a required note we need to finish and submit in our work time?”

Li answered her, smiling, “Nope, I just want to keep it by myself to document my work.”

Wu was impressed by this work journal and determined to give it a try by herself. From that day, Wu tried to note down every task she was proceeding with, such as the information of other teachers coming over to check materials, what kind of materials were being conducted or submitted, and the progress of completing materials checks. She found this method was useful for herself to understand, update, and follow the situation of the tasks quickly and comprehensively, as well as to untangle the responsibility and find a better way of finishing. Most of the time, the work journal should not be regarded as a required task for supervisors’ inspection or achievement to be presented to others, but as a detailed record for herself to “rake up the past” and finish her own work.

Wu learned from this “working habit” and would like to also use it in her future teaching career. She appreciated that her colleague Li gave her the feeling of being enlightened on ways of finishing the tasks, but in a silent way. Li did not directly tell Wu what she should do, or which approach was better and more effective, but just practiced it on her own.

Imitating the teacher

Wang taught the first-grade class in a primary school. Recently he unexpectedly found his students becoming better and better at mimicking him, from the literal words to

the way of speaking, and even the teacher's attitudes. He understood that children at that age were mostly imitative, but he apparently underestimated the extent of imitating and the impact of him as their teacher.

His students would repeat exactly what he said. For example, due to the ongoing epidemic and the large capacity of his class (50 students per class), Wang was always too busy to take care of every student when the whole class was doing the required nuclear acid test every day in the past six months. In this case, Wang would normally ask one or two students who looked to be capable and mature to facilitate him taking charge of the class and keeping the students in line to do the test for a while.

One day, when Wang was in his office correcting his students' homework and all the students were doing the nuclear acid test, the student who was asked to manage the class ran in a hurry toward Wang's desk in the office. While running like a wind, the student reported loudly, "XX and XX quarreled with each other! They were pushing and shoving in the line! Three days without a beating, and they will scale the roof and rip the tiles⁹!"

Wang quickly followed up on the reporting student's steps to the place of doing the test and wanted to see what was going on. However, meanwhile, he felt that the idiom spoken out of the student's mouth sounded familiar to him. Suddenly, Wang was shocked to reflect that as a Chinese teacher, he would always use some idioms or proverbs to summarize students' behavior, and "three days without a beating, and they will scale the roof and rip the tiles" was one of those! That means students taking charge of managing

⁹ It is a famous proverb in Chinese, *san tian bu da, shang fang jie wa*, 三天不打上房揭瓦. It is usually used by parents or teachers to describe their children or students who are naughty and need adults to worry about them.

the class would be able to plug themselves into the “managing” role and completely repeat what Wang would say!

Wang was surprised to observe this because the student who reported to him was completely imitating the situation that Wang disciplined them, internalizing it into his own behavior, and using it. Wang started to realize the potential impacts of some of his own unspoken expressions and unintentional actions on his students.

Soon, Wang found a more deep-rooted type of imitation: attitude imitation. Students were extremely sensitive to their teacher’s preferences, dislikes, and attitudes toward items and individuals. Based on the teacher’s attitudes, students would react to specific things and persons differently in the class. For instance, although Wang was new to teaching Chinese in this primary school, many of the students in this district have known each other since kindergarten because of going to the same kindergarten. Now coming to the same primary school, they were in the same class, so some students knew each other very well.

One day when the new semester just began, some students came to Wang’s office and told Wang warmly and childishly, “Zoey is a troublemaker and a headache! He always bothers teachers in the kindergarten!” Wang smiled and did not take their childish complaints.

Later that day, Zoey was found to be reading comic books in class. As the headteacher, Wang went to the class and called Zoey out. He led Zoey to his office and had a talk with Zoey privately about his inappropriate behavior during class. Wang did not think much about this, and he did not regard Zoey as his headache, either.

However, in the week after that, Wang realized something was wrong. Wang made other students call Zoey to his office several times after that because of other affairs, while students who facilitated Wang to inform Zoey would convey the message with a disdainful attitude in a deliberately enigmatic voice, “Mr. Wang is going to call you to the office again.”

Wang noticed the peers’ attitudes and judgments of Zoey in the class, and he was determined to alter this improper feeling. He began to call other students into the office and had private conversations as well. Those conversations¹⁰ might be serious, about some mistakes that the specific student had made, or about some class assignments that needed to be announced; the chats might also be casual and purposeless, about students’ recent feelings and life. Gradually, something changed. Students would just convey to the specific students that “the teacher would like to chat with you in the night talk,” instead of adding their attitudes. They could not distinguish whether Wang was holding a positive or negative attitude towards a student, or what the nature of things needed to be discussed during the conversation with the attitude of criticism or praise. More importantly, students were not able to take Wang’s attitudes for granted, bring their own ideas, and exert all those complicated judgments against a certain classmate any longer.

From this transformation in class, Wang realized that the teacher’s attitude was also one crucial kind of teaching without saying or doing anything, which had a great influence on students. Although they were just primary students in their first grade, they were very good at reading people’s or teachers’ faces or tones in this relationship. He also

¹⁰ Wang named all those conversations one name called “night talk” which could happen to any of the students in the class for various kinds of things. In the night talk, there would be some small snacks or small gifts prepared for students, despite the focus of the conversation.

understood that many rules in the school or teachers' requirements or attitudes towards students would not be expressed in a direct way. But they were also a type of "silent teaching" without any actions or words because students might learn something from these on their own and adjust their behaviors and thoughts according to these.

In another high school in the same city, Wu, a mathematics teacher, also found some similar imitations of her students. For example, the math representative Sun in her class was chosen by Wu, because Sun loved learning math and he performed well in most of the math exams. His usual task was to help Wu collect other students' homework, convey some of Wu's class announcements, and collect and distribute test papers. Wu gave this student a lot of praise and recognized his ability both in mathematics and facilitating the teacher.

One day, in one self-study class, Sun was assigned to help his classmates solve some after-class exercises in his mutual learning and supporting group. Wu happened to pass by the classroom, hearing him say confidently, "We have to start with the auxiliary line in solving this problem... ."

Wu stopped in the corridor for a while, smiling. She felt so familiar when she heard Sun explaining the math question and talking about the ideas of solving it. She immediately realized whom Sun was imitating unconsciously. Every time when she explained and was ready to solve the math question in front of the class, she would prefer to analyze the idea and purpose of the question first, and her usual beginning, without any doubt, would be, "we have to start from the XX of this problem."

This also reminded Wu of being more aware of her potential influence on students as their teacher. Teachers' actions, habits, speaking tone, and way of dealing with issues might all become "unspoken teaching" to her students.

Last Words in Findings

In this chapter, using several theoretical lenses, I shuttled in and out of my human and more-than-human participants' lives and memories through re-remembering activities, reanimating natural sounds, as well as speculative fabulating experiences, and their feelings and viewpoints related to the concept of a teacher. On the road of exploring the 'teacher' notion, I wandered in and out of these valuable stories and life experiences ingrained with distinctive and deep marks of culture, time, and personalities, as if they all happened to me, weaving them together with my perspectives and eventually presenting in front of you. Here, a multitude of teachers, a variety of ways of understanding the notion of a 'teacher,' and activities of teaching and learning emerged and were narrated in a storied and descriptive way. However, the conceptualizations of a 'teacher' have not been exhausted. When I grasped the chance of meeting the diverse "teachers" in multiple worlds through this dissertation, I saw countless forks in the road and realized that the open journey of knowing and learning from others has just begun.

CHAPTER 6

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION: RE-IMAGINING TEACHERS: DIVERSE AND MIXED WAYS OF TEACHING, LEARNING, AND BEING

Throughout my dissertation, I explored, re-encountered, and re-engaged with the concept of a teacher in China from multiple perspectives and through diverse dimensions, contexts, and histories. In doing so, I reviewed the historical literature to examine the notion of a ‘teacher’ and its multiple – and constantly changing – meanings, sociocultural contexts, as well as systems and processes of selection throughout Chinese history. With the changes of dynasties and the transformations of society, the emphases on the conceptualization and identity of a teacher have changed from their cultural aspects of being official representatives in ancient courts, to gradually reflecting the features of the westernized, modernized, socialist/colonial, and globalized workforce. However, the relationships among multiple meanings of the ‘teacher’ have not evolved in a linear way, with each new meaning replacing another. The past meanings and some significant elements of their connotations have not disappeared with time passing. Instead, the different connotations have been overlapping in multiple ways, accumulating and shifting the form and shape of how we understand this concept today. Hence, when the notion of a teacher comes up today, it appears as a complex and hybrid mixture of different meanings, while being increasingly and heavily weighted in the aspect of professionalization. In other words, under the influence of multiple cultural, political, historical, and global contexts and elements, the concept of a teacher now is dominantly perceived as a social job in the modern schooling system, accompanied by a variety of requirements and restrictions on the individuals choosing teaching as their career. In this

case, how could we broaden and re-present the diverse possibilities of (re)conceptualizing this notion?

To (re)imagine the concept of a teacher beyond the mainstream western frameworks and the dominant connotation – a social job – I considered multiple frameworks to explore co-existing theoretical possibilities of guiding diverse interpretations of this concept. First, I used Mignolo's (2011) work in the field of decolonial studies and its extension in comparative education, which proposes five coexisting trajectories of the global futures, including (re)westernization, reorientation to the left, (de)westernization, decolonization, and spirituality. To apply this decolonial work as a general analytic frame, I referred back to some of the changing connotations and histories of the 'teacher' notion in China as typical examples of some of these trajectories. In extending two of the five options, decolonization and spirituality, and also in order to bring into focus the coexisting essence in broadening the concept of a teacher, I elaborated on other theoretical lenses – Taoism, Confucianism, and posthumanism by introducing some key ideas and concepts in respective frames and reviewing the literature of their application in educational studies. They offered indigenous, abundant, but equally different perspectives as well as methodologies in designing and conducting this research.

To explore ways of applying these frameworks more directly, I further explained why and how the above four theoretical frameworks are connected in my study on reimagining the concept of a teacher, highlighting the similarities and differences between those constructs. On the one hand, those frames echoed and intertwined with each other in their emphasis on the unity between human beings and nature, the

interconnectedness between every entity in multiple worlds, and the coexistence of multiplicity in rethinking the concept of a teacher. On the other hand, the differences between the concepts within those four frames also distinctively address respective features and unique roles in examining the notion of a teacher. More importantly, my simultaneous and interlaced use of multiple theories challenged the dominance and hegemony of any one of them, articulating the essence of entanglements and coexistence among theoretical lenses. In this sense, I attempted to answer the first sub-research question – How can we approach the goal of bringing multiple perspectives into dialogue in reconceptualizing the notion of a teacher ontologically (e.g., Confucianism, Taoism, posthumanism, etc.) – at a theoretical level.

In the methodology chapter, I approached the goal of exploring the concept of a teacher epistemologically and methodologically at a research design level. To inspire and ground the methodological approaches for my dissertation, I briefly reviewed and synthesized studies related to the concept of a teacher in the West, the East, comparative education, and posthumanism, focusing on the applied quantitative and qualitative methodologies. I decided to adopt some methods mentioned in (post)qualitative studies and posthumanism (e.g., interviews, biography, storytelling, etc.) while following the above-mentioned multiple theoretical frameworks for methodological extensions. Hence, I illustrated four innovative (post)qualitative methodologies, which could be used in rethinking the concept of a ‘teacher.’ In particular, I engaged with the collective memory work, re-animating senses, and speculative fabulation. Inspired by the indigenous perspectives and methods (see Chapter 3), I expanded speculative fabulation into three designed speculative fabulation experiences, including “teaching without words/actions,”

“*Ge wu zhi zhi*,” and “sitting and Wu,” and introduced them in detail to prepare for research fieldwork. These creative methodologies have not only enabled me and other participants to have practical paths of re-defining the concept of a teacher in multidimensional contexts, but have also created an opportunity for broadening the categories of research methodology and breaking the boundaries between “the researcher” and “the researched” (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2018). To give a clearer and more organized idea of how the data was collected and emerged in my research, I described the interesting details of the research design and my actual data generation and analysis process during the three months of fieldwork last summer. In two different scenarios, eight human participants and countless more-than-human participants joined this research by weaving memories, creating stories, and carrying on conversations – across space and time – to generate experiences in multiple outdoor and indoor environments.

Led by a diffractive analysis, I analyzed and presented my research in three sections in terms of telling the recurring and collective memories of becoming-with teachers, regarding natural sounds and meditation as teachers in sonic conversations, and including a collection of stories about various kinds of human and more-than-human teachers. Between the recurring memories of my family members and sonic conversations, a transitional section about my remote observations of classrooms and in-service teachers’ narrations of their working pressures is also included to provide more context for the data for the analysis. In particular, I used fine-tuned descriptions and designed a conceptual organization for the emerging memories, examples, and stories to contextualize the notion of a teacher in multiple dimensions and perspectives. Our

collective memories articulated some common, natural, and overlapping characteristics of the concept of a teacher, challenging the dominance of human-centered, westernized, modernized, as well as secularized ‘teacher’ notion. Our participants’ experiences and thoughts in sonic conversations embodied not only what it looked like when the natural sounds became our teachers in meditations and self-cultivations, but also the interconnections and entanglements of interpretations of the concept of a teacher across time, space, beings, and worlds. For the recurring memories section and the sonic conversations section, I also followed my analysis guided by the mentioned theoretical frameworks and constructs to illustrate how the concept of a teacher could be re-imagined and redefined in moving between and across theories (i.e., Daoism, Confucianism, and posthumanism) and participants’ experiences.

In addition, without overly emphasizing the role of the four mentioned theoretical lenses in the analysis and thus limiting the ways of interpretation within them, I chose to present the collection of 17 speculative stories about different kinds of teachers as openly as possible in order to leave more space for readers to explore these concepts on their own. In the collection of stories, “teachers” in different worlds, embodied by diverse beings and different ways of teaching and learning, as well as common experiences articulated new possibilities of breaking the dominance of a single and narrow perception of a ‘teacher,’ while questioning the hegemony of human-centrism. In other words, this rich chapter offers an illustrative example of diverse teachers, various ways of teaching and learning, and existing entanglements among species and worlds. And so this chapter of findings is also designed to set itself as a practical example of carrying out, explaining, and practicing coexistence as the essence of multiplicity and plurality in redefining the

concept of a teacher. Therefore, both the methodology chapter and the findings chapter collectively respond to the second sub-research question - How can we engage in the process of (re)imagining the notion of the teacher epistemologically? (e.g., memory work, re-animating senses, learning from objects and phenomena, sitting meditations, and silent self-cultivation) - practically achieving and vividly presenting ideas in my writing. While the types of teachers and ways of teaching articulated in this dissertation are still limited, I hope this study enables readers to see infinite possibilities and paths in knowing, thinking, and experiencing (the concept of a teacher) beyond the ideas shared here.

Limitations

One limitation of this research is the time constraints in terms of engaging with the different kinds of participants because of the Covid-19 pandemic, quarantine periods, and the “health code” policy in China. In the three months of fieldwork during the summertime in 2022, the government implemented a very strict national policy on people’s daily transportation, travel, and gathering to limit and control the pandemic outbreak and infection. This indeed impacted access to schools, and time schedules, as well as limited the extent and time of engaging with the human and other-than-human participants. For instance, my planned in-person observations of in-service teachers’ classes were forcibly moved to a remote mode. If it was allowed, I would have had an opportunity for deeper and longer engagements and communications with the participants. Another limitation is that only five in-service teachers were involved in my research, and their time of being immersed in and impacted by the speculative fabulation

experiences was relatively short considering my timeline, the scope of the research, and other elements of feasibility. However, I anticipate inviting and deeply impacting more researchers and in-service teachers to participate in the experiences with the idea of reimagining and expanding the concept of a teacher in the future.

Implications

This dissertation has important implications for educators, including school leaders and educational policymakers, experts and policymakers in teacher education as well as teacher selection and professionalization, researchers in education, and every ordinary reader. First, education leaders and policymakers involved in various practical aspects of schooling will learn that we should no longer delay the introduction of diverse, multiple, relevant, and already coexisting ways of learning and teaching in regular educational settings and formal schooling sites. This concerns a series of critical questions in each formal educational context, such as what should be regarded as worthwhile knowledge, how to teach, and where to teach and learn. This study has clearly illustrated that various ontologies and epistemologies of conceptualizing the notion of a teacher, or other notions, coexist in multiple worlds, and there should be no ranking or essential priority regarding them. Hence, they should be accepted and simultaneously introduced in our schools, which is the most dominant setting in modern societies. In other words, if the notion of a ‘teacher’ is broadened among school leaders and educational policymakers, knowledge beyond modern sciences, western philosophies, practical skills, and limited cultures as well as ideologies will be regarded as knowledge in schools. Meanwhile, multiple ways of exploring and learning them will

also be broadened and accepted in a school environment, and bigger and more extensive worlds are free for children to wander. It is difficult to change systematic policies and environments instantly, but it is crucial for school leaders and policymakers to recognize that their willingness to introduce any of the multiple possibilities in educational practice can always make quite a difference in their specific environments.

Second, given the fluid nature of the concept of a teacher, experts and policymakers in teacher education, teacher qualification, and teacher professional development should realize that the professionalization or the requirements/features of the teaching profession should not be the only elements to be considered and emphasized. In other words, knowledge of specialized disciplines and subjects, achievements in teacher performance, and skills and methods in educational pedagogy, which are assessed and tested in teacher qualification exams, are not the only and most necessary qualities for becoming a teacher. When we intend to select a human teacher to serve the modern schooling system, a teacher is primarily a sentient being instead of an indifferent tool that routinely conveys knowledge. Experts and policymakers in teacher education should acknowledge that there are always countless precious memories, interactions, and experiences happening between future teachers and students inside or outside of classrooms, so we need to be clear about what kinds of beings we intend to cultivate, select, and interact with as possible teachers. However, this does not inevitably mean adding more requirements to individual teachers but implies including more types of and more diverse human teachers who are attentive, caring, and kind-hearted. Therefore, in our teacher education and professional development, if the concept of a ‘teacher’ is re-imagined, not only “professional teachers” who have the qualification and are in their

service will treat their career more calmly and gently to confront the systematic impacts and modern pressure, but also more types of teachers and multidimensional teaching and learning in more-than-human worlds will be included in education and capable of undertaking the educational function for the society.

Third, researchers in educational fields have the responsibility of taking into account indigenous, (post)qualitative, and posthumanist theoretical lenses and methodologies when conducting education studies and designing research. Opportunities to move beyond the dominant horizon to include underrepresented “others”, pay attention to the intimate interactions and interdependencies among human and more-than-human beings, and bring multiple voices into dialogue must be embedded in educational studies because educational researchers ambitiously care about the coexisting futures of education. For instance, in my dissertation study, (collective) re-membering activities, reanimating senses, and speculative fabulation activities enabled me and my participants to explore the concept of a teacher in vivid and diverse ways, with a warm solicitude towards all beings and the hopeful future of education flowing in-between. Innovatively using various research methodologies instead of relying on only the mainstream ones entails including new approaches in practical ways, while also alternating perspectives and paths to know the world as well as unfolding different interactive relationships between the researcher and the data.

Last, it is important for every ordinary reader of this study to understand that you might always be a teacher and a student (of yourself) sometime in your lifetime, as long as you want. As a unique beings in the world, each of us is splendid. We are here to communicate, learn, experience, and become-with each other, rather than compete,

compare, and dominate others in multiple worlds. Hence, our individual life is a long but rich and varied road of teaching, learning, and encountering, with unexhausted possibilities and the unknowns. It is lucky to be a human being, because teaching and learning “happen in every ceremonial moment when beings express mutual aspiration and initiate a reciprocal understanding of each other, regardless of categories of beings, educational settings, and the hierarchies of knowledge” (Jiang et al., 2023), while we happen to be capable of doing so. Hence, re-thinking and re-conceptualizing the notion of a ‘teacher’ for each of us means always getting ready, curious, and open to learn from “others” on the road of life.

Postscript: Regarding the Dissertation As A Teacher

I came to view the whole process of doing this dissertation research as an invaluable learning experience, and hence, I wrote this section as my epilogue. It is more parallel to a “post-positionality,” which enables me to engage in self-retrospection with my feelings, experiences, and gains not only in relation to this dissertation but also my life more broadly (Chen, 2011; Wang, 2007). Thinking about the dissertation research process as one of my teachers, it is worth mentioning what I have learned as well as unlearned in this process from my own perspective – as a researcher, a participant, and one being among many human and more-than-human beings.

The first thing I learned in this process is to accept my past self and experiences. As I mentioned in my positionality (Chapter 1), my past educational experiences posed a “conflict” (or tension) for me between the “absolute” universal truths and diverse epistemologies, which elevated my unease in knowing myself: If both of them are part of

my life experiences in some way (or at some time periods), which one should I select, recognize, engage with, or discard? This also came with a series of unanswered questions related to my self-exploration and unsolved emotional and rational entanglements with my family members, because they were teachers in both senses (i.e., choosing teaching as their profession and being crucial teachers of mine) who shaped me as I was growing up. That means, when I problematize some of the conceptualizations of the ‘teacher’ notion embedded in the family and social or cultural context, I am also questioning a part of me.

This unease and confusion began to be decomposed when I frequently interacted with my family members in Scenario A. In our re-remembering activities, we noted down our impressive memories and experiences related to teachers in the house where all of us have lived. In our collective sitting and meditation, we rethought the past and explored the present nature with a curious and appreciative eye. We then discussed our memories and opinions, listened to the recorded natural sounds, analyzed our thoughts diffractively, and integrated them into relatively complete notes. Most importantly, in this process, I understood them and myself more by listening to our memories and conversations patiently, understanding the specific context of each story and the feelings associated with it, and bonding with each other through talking about our common experiences. A lot of my incomprehension about teachers’ features, which had shaped my interpretations of the concept of a teacher before, has dissipated in our communication. I suddenly realized that there have always been multiple ways of conceptualizing the notion of a teacher, and my mom Wei, and grandmother Ding were also learning and growing in their life experiences throughout the years. It is not necessary to identify any of my epistemologies right or wrong because each of them is the trajectory of my growing and

exploring. At that moment, I have reconciled with my family members, with the conflicts of my interpretations, and with myself in the past.

The second lesson I have learned from this experience is the complexity and the multidimensional nature of a myriad of beings, including human individuals, more-than-human beings, and the notion of a teacher. In the first three chapters, I illustrated the complexity of the ‘teacher’ notion from its histories and cultural contexts, but in a theoretical and ontological way. However, when I practically interacted and came into contact with individual in-service teacher participants, I started to actually recognize the complexity and multifold nature of the ‘teacher’ notion. The most impressive contrast in my engagements with in-service teachers is the difference between their states in class and in our meditation and interviews. In my remote observations, all five of the teachers were conducting their classes with serious expressions, professional and formalized pedagogies, and nonverbal dominance in front of the students. However, in our speculative fabulation experiences, they were the same group of participants who showed their sensitivity, curiosity, and empathy to the diverse more-than-human teachers and natural sounds. It was also them telling their fascinating observations, stories, and experiences in life, which enabled me to realize that one kind of being (e.g., cats, students, or seashells discussed in Chapter 5) could be teachers in such diverse ways. This inconsistency urges me to reconsider the complexity of a teacher, the reasons for in-service teachers being “inconsistent” in their thinking and being, and the actual daily work and life of modern teachers. Rather than blaming teacher individuals who contributed to the solemn and choking vibe of modern classrooms, we should see the more fundamental impacts of institutionalization, modernization, and utilitarianism of

education and schooling which eventually were embodied in and by individual teachers. We should also be more aware of the underestimated power and rootedness of such dominant (global) order, and the challenges of questioning and delinking from the systematic hegemony.

The last lesson worth mentioning is the opportunity this dissertation has opened for me to learn to “un-learn” in life, especially when confronting the situations of communicating and interacting with others and experiencing senses and body. What I mean by “un-learning” here implies one dimension in the meanings of “nature” (Zhan, 2006) and “inaction” (Wu Wei, 无为, Laozi, 2011, Chapter 37) in Taoism and some ideas in posthumanism and decolonial work. As experienced humans, we have learned and been trained to perform appropriately and artificially for different aims in various modern contexts when socializing with people. We are “performing” all the time. However, sometimes we have been humanized and modernized for too long and too deeply to remember what or how we should instinctively act and express ourselves by communicating feelings and emotions. In my re-remembering activities, speculative fabulation experiences, and interviews with in-service teacher participants, I became aware of and touched by one feature emerging in human and more-than-human participants in diverse scenes – and that is sincerity. This sincerity derives from our common instinct as beings on this planet, which was a primary ability we knew how to use from the very first place—in expressing love, sorrow, and surprise. We experience, feel, and sense everything around us with sincerity and innocence of nature, because we “ought to be like this” (Liu, 1996, p. 34) in the sympoietic common worlds (Latour, 2004a; Taylor & Giugni, 2012). Because of this sincerity, we start to notice the world

around us, to understand each other, to make connections with beings beyond humans, and to have mutual emotions and experiences with diverse kinds of species. Learning to “un-learn” means to retrieve and pick up our lost sincerity in exploring the pluriverse with equally sincere others.

The Last Fable

Finally, I would like to use a fable, which I created to close this dissertation. This fable was written based on the collection of stories (What if/And if ...) in Chapter 5. In this imaginary fable, instead of narrating from the perspectives of the original storytellers and witnesses (i.e., mostly human beings), I altered the points of view to some of the beings who were mentioned in the stories as our teachers. By enabling beings beyond humans or beyond traditional teachers to have the chance of briefly re-telling some of the fragments in stories, I speculatively depicted how the figures of human narrators could appear in “other teachers’ eyes.” In this fable, 8 of the 17 teachers take turns to come to the stage, speak with their voices, and tell their experiences and perspectives on the different aspects they might teach to us. Meanwhile, “I”, as an equal audience with others, quietly and patiently listened to them, thought, and introspected. Here, “I”, the human participant in this fable, does not only refer to me as the writer of this dissertation anymore. “I” could be any of us who are willing to enter others’ perspectives and learn from them at any time. My aim in creating this fable and positioning it at the very end of this dissertation is to remind myself and my future readers of the breadth, depth, and length of our and other beings’ lives – teaching and learning can happen anywhere, anytime, and our teachers are neither predetermined nor always known.

It was a lovely day. I luckily found a moment of leisure in my busy life, so I went out for a jog. I ran past the busy highways, the skyscrapers, and the hustle and bustle of this modern city. One huge banner was hung outside of a tall building of a school, advertising, “Being rigorous in teaching and learning to impart knowledge and cultivate people.” I ran past the colorful banner, turning left sharply into an alley with trees and grassland on both sides. I had no idea where this alley would head, but after running for a while, the trees and grass became more and more flourishing, and the terrain started to elevate. Before I knew it, I was already in a dense and quiet forest. There was no route to run forward anymore.

I sat down on the grassland to have a short rest. Suddenly, a gentle but naughty voice came from the back of a big tree right in front of me. I was taken aback, but also curious, “who is there?” I asked with a tremulous voice.

“It’s me, your close friend! Please don’t be afraid of me.” A lovely cat stuck out her head and said hello to me smiling.

My mouth fell open in surprise. “Why can you speak, as a cat?” I asked in shock.

“I always can. We always can speak. It’s just you might ignore our voices and fail to understand us. Do you want to know us a little bit more now, with some patience, sincerity, and a little time?”

“Sure! But...” I responded, with tons of unanswered questions in my mind, such as “Who are ‘we’” and “why I can understand her voice now.” But the cat started talking that very second, leaving me no time to think about all the questions.

“If you observed and listened to me a little more, you would know I am an independent but warm being. I gave humans all of my love, patience, and kind companionship. I don’t understand why humans always have such a difficult time developing close relationships, but I am so good at expressing my loving emotions with my soft stomach, chubby paws, warm hair, and round head. I love you, so I want to have your attention. But meantime, I am also independent – I have a great sense of boundaries which is also my survival skill. I know I cannot think for others from where I stand. I know how to keep others’ privacy and agency, just as I do it for myself. Could you try to understand that?”

“Yes, Yes!” Another voice came out before I answered the cat’s question. A rabbit bounced and responded, “I heard your voice very far away! See, ain’t I good at hearing?” This cute white rabbit lowered her head slightly with a pink of bashfulness on her face, “I know my eyesight is terrible, but I never worry about that. I don’t understand why humans always insist on worrying about and focusing on the so-called ‘weakness’ while taking the ‘strength’ for granted. They are all the features that formed who we are, and I am so proud of them!”

“I know! As one seashell among our group, I understand that! I don’t quite understand why human individuals always feel that they are so normal and ordinary in the group, compared to others. Are humans using the exact same standard to compare individuals and beings in any kind of situation? We really don’t,” the seashell said this for sure, lying in the dirt. “I always met diverse seashells in the sea, on the beach, or in the forest. We talked about each others’

experiences, colors, and places. We also compared, but we knew we are all unique and interesting, and I enjoyed those chances of getting to know others!”

“I understand,” another tiny voice came from the dirt. An insect drilled out from the rough soil and said in his loudest voice, “as a very normal insect, I never say no to myself. I have never seen any of my brothers and sisters say no. I don’t understand why humans and their confidence could be defeated so easily by others’ words and attitudes. I know how to persist. I struggled and fought for myself and I can make things different, although my strength is limited. I was born to make my life meaningful—to myself.”

“You are right, insect, but this is not only about persistence.” A vigorous and old voice from above my head started to join the conversation. It was a huge and frondent tree that seemed to live here for many years. There were more and more beings joining the conversation, speaking more and more, and things were getting weirder and weirder, while interestingly, I felt that I was enjoying their friendly discussions more and more too.

“It is more than persistence.” The tree continued, “Sometimes, it is even about facing vicious slandering, defamation, and harm. I don’t understand why some humans would hurt other beings and species only for their own benefit, or even if there is no benefit. If humans are the cleverest and the most capable species on this planet, shouldn’t they manage for the common well-being of all lives and make this planet a better place for every species? ...But long story short, even if others hurt me with malicious intentions, I know how to confront them. I cannot be desperate; I know I am far more powerful, stronger, and doughtier than I look.

I am also not indifferent to others; I am still caring and warm. It's just that I have lived through so many years, and I am no longer bothered by trivial matters and meaningless harm.”

“Of course, we care about others! And sometimes humans rest their emotions and feelings on us, so we have more chances of connecting and comforting them. I know the impermanence of life and the misery of accepting the elapse, but we also know the circle of life better than humans. With our evergreen and vivid companionship, others will know deeper the encouragement and passion of continuous life and ongoing growth in nature, so as to live well with hope and love.” A dense and low-lying bush said engagingly.

“I agree with you.” A willow tree suddenly said in a calm tone, “I have stood still for so many years and I have seen so many vicissitudes of life which made me sigh. I have been through happy parties and lonely nights as well as the myriads of changes in this world. It is so hard for humans, however, to acknowledge the ever-changing worlds. They refuse to do so because they are afraid of knowing it and of staying with the changes. I know. I know how to stay with myself, stay with those memories, and stay with the loneliness.”

“I like the term—stay with, especially the ‘with’.” A snail crawled on the wet soil and responded slowly, “Why humans just cannot learn to be with everything, and let it be? I mean, nobody knows where the start or the end of the road is, and what I can do is carefully enjoy every moment. I am slow, but I go with the slowness, stay with it, and live with the flow. I know how to confront this busy life and world with my slowness. Just take life as it comes.”

At this moment, a crowd of clouds gathered in the sky and docked at the top of this forest. They said softly, just like singing, “Yeah, go with me, and change like me. I don’t understand why humans love so much certainty and use so many conventions and categories to restrict themselves. We are always free, and so do you. You are free to change, move, love, and learn. Or not to. It all depends on your decisions. Why not give yourself a chance to learn a little bit from all of us, if it might be helpful?”

They all turned around, looking at me simultaneously. I felt nervous, vigilant as if my self-righteousness had eventually come to light, in front of everyone. But I also felt more relieved than ever, because I did not have to pretend to be a know-it-all anymore. They asked me kindly, warmly, and sincerely in their soft, diverse, and multiple voices, “what do you think, about taking me as your teacher?”

Yes. Why not?

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY MEMBERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ENGLISH VERSION

**Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World:
Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and
Learning**

Thanks, my family, for being willing to support me along this journey! As you have already known, I am a graduate student under Dr. Iveta Silova in the department of Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting research for my dissertation to complete my doctorate. So here, I would like to invite you, my family members, as participants to take part in my dissertation study while I am here in Anqing, Anhui from June-July 2022. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

My research is about exploring and reimagining the concept of a teacher in human and more than-human worlds. Because we were all interconnected with the concept of a teacher somehow sometime in our life, we have our own special as well as common memories and experiences of this concept. So, it is about our story and memory. I say ‘our’, because I include myself as a part of the memories, and also because I include me in the collective process of reimagining it. There is not a specific memory or conclusion that I am here to find. My hope is that we will write or talk about our memories about ‘teacher’ together and experience this concept in new ways together. We can also decide together what is important to us and to our memories. We can discuss together about what we want to share with the world and how we want to share it.

The research may include recalling and telling our memories related to teachers in our old house, speculative fabulating experience (including *Ge wu zhi zhi* [“observing the phenomena or objects in nature”] and “sitting and Wu”) in an outdoor natural environment, and diffractive discussions and analysis on our activities and experiences. The whole research process will be three of us participating together over 6-7 weeks. Specifically, the re-remembering activity will last approximately one hour maximum for 1-2 times, and we can choose oral or written account. The outdoor activities will be about three hours in total, but the experiences can be proceeded in multiple times and days, which depends on our decisions. Last, the diffractive analyzing and discussion process might take 2-3 hours, for multiple times over the last two weeks. These recordings and possible photos will be transferred directly from the recording device or camera to password-protected cloud storage on Google Drive where they will be saved for four years. I may send the recordings of our memory telling via email to a company in China that will transcribe the recording for me. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but no one’s real name will not be used in connection to anything they say, the recordings of their voices, or the pictures related to them. When I share anything about this study, I will use a fake name Wei or Ding (pseudonym) for each of you in this study and use fake addresses where you live and where the old house is. Even with these privacy measures in place, I cannot guarantee that anyone’s participation will be anonymous. Once I return to Arizona, I may send you short WeChat messages to ask a few questions in order to make sure that I am using all of your contributions and/or words in the way you intended.

If you have any questions, please call me at 15829695870, or email me, Jieyu Jiang, at jjiang74@asu.edu or my supervisor, Iveta Silova, at Iveta.Silova@asu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Jieyu

Jieyu Jiang

jjiang74@asu.edu

Jieyu's mentor:

Iveta Silova

Iveta.Silova@asu.edu

APPENDIX B

FAMILY MEMBERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – CHINESE VERSION

在超越人类的世界里重新想象“老师”：思想实验以及与其他教学方法的相遇

谢谢我的家人，感谢你们一路支持我！你们可能已经知道了，我是亚利桑那州立大学教育系艾薇塔·西洛娃博士的研究生。我正在进行论文研究，来完成我的博士学位。所以在这里，我想邀请你们，我的家人，作为我在安徽安庆期间，从2022年6月到7月，参加我的论文研究。您的参与是自愿的。

我的研究是关于在人类和超越人类的世界中，探索和重新想象教师的概念。因为在我们仨生活中的某个时刻，我们都与老师的概念联系在一起，我们对这个概念有自己的特殊而又共同的记忆和经历。所以，这是关于我们的故事和记忆。我觉得是“我们的”，是因为我把自己当作我们记忆的一部分，同时也因为这个重新想象是一次共同的回忆，我把自己也纳入了这个共同的过程中。我来这儿不是为了寻找特定的记忆或结论。我希望我们能一起写下或聊聊关于“老师”的记忆，一起以新的方式体验和感受这个概念。我们还可以一起决定什么对我们和我们的回忆是重要的。我们可以一起讨论我们想要与世界分享什么，以及我们想要如何分享。

研究内容可能包括在老房子中，回忆和讲述我们与“老师”有关的记忆，在户外自然环境中的推测性虚构体验(包括格物致知【即“观察自然现象或物体”】和“静坐和悟”)，以及对我们的活动和体验的发散性讨论和分析。整个研究过程都将是我们三个人一起参与的，在将近6-7周的时间里。具体来说，记忆活动最多进行

1-2 次，每次约 1 小时，并且我们可以选择口头讲述或写下来。户外活动总共大约 3 个小时，但体验可以分多次多日进行，这取决于我们自己的决定。最后，发散性分析和讨论过程可能需要 2-3 小时，但也可以在最后的两周内分多次多日进行。这些记录/录音和可能的照片将直接从记录设备或相机传输到谷歌上有密码保护的云盘里，在那里它们将被保存四年。我可能会把我们回忆的录音通过邮件发给中国的一家公司，他们会帮我誊写成记录稿。这项研究的结果可以用于报告、演讲或出版物，但任何人的真实姓名将不会被用于他们所说的任何话、他们的声音录音或与他们有关的图片中。当我分享关于这项研究的任何东西时，我将为本次研究中的每个人使用假名字，Wei 或 Ding(笔名)，并使用假地址，包括你们提到的地址和旧房子所在的位置。即使采取了这些隐私措施，我也不能保证任何人的参与都是匿名的。一旦我回到亚利桑那州，我可能会给你发送简短的微信来问几个问题，来确保我以你想要的方式使用了你所有的贡献和/或说法。

如果您有任何问题，请致电 15829695870，或发邮件给我江婕语 (Jieyu Jiang, jjiang74@asu.edu) 或我的导师 Iveta Silova (Iveta Silova, Iveta.Silova@asu.edu)。

感谢您的考虑!

婕语

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ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX C

FAMILY MEMBERS CONSENT FORM – ENGLISH VERSION

**Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World:
Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and
Learning**

I am a PhD student under the direction of Dr. Iveta Silova at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand diverse connotations of a teacher in human and more-than-human worlds. This project will be supervised by my doctoral advisor, Dr. Silova.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve 1) a collective memory telling and recalling activity about the concept of a teacher in our old house, which can be written, typed, or narrated; 2) the speculative fabulating experiences of *Ge wu zhi zhi* (“observing the phenomena or objects in nature”) and “sitting and Wu” in an outdoor natural environment for about 3 hours; 3) diffractive discussions and analysis on our activities and experiences, which might take 4-5 hours. The whole research process will be three of us participating together over 6-7 weeks. In total, your involvement in this project will take approximately 10 hours. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and it will not affect your performance, your job, and other interactions with people in your life. You must be 18

years of age or older to participate. You are allowed to choose your preferred language during participation, but it will be translated into English applied in final dissertation.

Although there is no benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that might be extremely helpful to this study and future teacher education. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All responses will be digitalized and stored on password protected ASU cloud storage for four years. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

Additional information about Memory Telling Recordings:

I would like to audio record our memory telling process if you prefer oral account. The process will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the memory telling activity to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the process starts, just let me know.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Jieyu Jiang at [15829695870](tel:15829695870)/jjiang74@asu.edu or Iveta Silova:

Iveta.Silova@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

By signing below, you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX D

FAMILY MEMBERS CONSENT FORM – CHINESE VERSION

在超越人类的世界里重新想象“老师”：思想实验以及与其他教学方法的相遇

我是亚利桑那州立大学玛丽·卢·富尔顿教师学院的博士生，师从 Iveta Silova 博士。我正在进行一项研究，以了解教师在人类乃至超越人类的世界中的多种内涵。这个项目将由我的博士生导师 Silova 博士指导。

我诚邀您的参与，包括：1) 在我们的老房子里，进行一场关于老师概念的集体记忆讲述和回忆活动，可以是写下来、打字的，也可以是口述的；2) 在户外自然环境中，进行格物致知（即“观察自然现象或物体”）和“静坐和悟”的推测性虚构体验，整个过程大约在 3 小时左右；3) 对我们的活动和经历，进行发散性讨论和分析，可能需要 4-5 个小时。整个研究过程都将是我们三个人一起参与的，在将近 6-7 周的时间里。总的来说，您将会在这个项目中投入大约 10 个小时左右。您有权不回答任何问题，并在任何时候停止参与这项研究。

您的参与是自愿的。如果你在任何时候选择不参加或退出学习，都不会受到处罚，也不会影响你的绩效、工作以及生活中与人的其他互动。您必须年满 18 岁才能参加。您可以在参与期间选择您惯用的语言，但在最终的论文中，它将被翻译成英语。

虽然对你没有任何好处，但你的参与可能会对这项研究和未来的教师教育非常有帮助。您的参与没有可预见的风险或不适。

所有回复都将被数据化，并存储在有密码保护的 ASU 云存储中，为期四年。您的回复将是匿名和机密的。本研究结果可用于学术报告，演示或出版物，但不会使用你的名字。

关于记忆录音的其他信息:

如果您选择口述回忆的话，我想录下我们的回忆过程（录音）。没有您的允许，我们不会对这个过程进行录音。如果你不希望回忆活动被记录，请告诉我；你也可以在回忆活动开始后改变主意，告诉我一声。

如果您对本次研究有任何疑问，请联系研究团队：江婕语

(15829695870/jjiang74@asu.edu)或 Iveta Silova

(Iveta.Silova@asu.edu)。如果您对作为本研究的受试者/参与者的权利有任何疑问，或者您觉得自己处于危险之中，您可以通过亚利桑那州立大学研究诚信与保证办公室联系人类受试者机构审查委员会主席，电话：**(480)965-6788**。如果你想参与这项研究，请联系我。

在下面签名，表示你同意参与这项研究。

姓名:

签名:

日期:

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED PROMPT FOR RE-MEMBERING BETWEEN FAMILY

MEMBERS – ENGLISH VERSION

Semi-structured Prompt for Re-membering the ‘Teacher’ Between Family Members

1. What does it mean to choose a teacher as a career in your generation? How did you and others at your age understand the concept of a teacher at that time? What are your memories related to those?

(Possible follow-up topics: stories during being a teacher, stories between their students and the participants, life experiences about choosing teaching as a profession, descriptions about their interpretations of teacher at that time)

2. Other than memories about being a professional teacher in schools, are there any other memories about the teacher concept or identity? Who are the “teachers” in those memories? Why do you think they could be regarded as “teachers”?

(Possible follow-up topics: my most impressive teachers, the lesson I learned from one life event or experience, the feelings brought her by the “teacher”, why they think this memory related to the teacher notion is important or impressive)

3. Are there any nonhuman teachers that have left a deep impression on? Did you think they were teachers when you experienced the event/story? Why or why not?

(Possible follow-up topics: descriptions on the more-than-human teachers, the feelings and experiences of being engaged with the “teacher”, people’s viewpoints or perceptions on learning from other beings or non-beings)

4. How do the memories you have shared impact your ways of understanding the notion of a teacher? How would you define or describe the concept of a teacher now?

(Possible follow-up topics: the transformations of their interpretations on the concept of a teacher, the changes of us brought by our re-membling activity, the general perception on the teacher concept)

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED PROMPT FOR RE-MEMBERING BETWEEN FAMILY

MEMBERS – CHINESE VERSION

家庭成员之间回忆“老师”的半结构化问题提示

1. 在你们这一代，选择教师作为职业意味着什么？你和其他同龄人是如何理解老师这个概念的？与这些有关的记忆都是什么样的？

(可能的后续话题:当教师期间的故事，参与者和她的学生之间的故事，关于选择教书作为职业的人生经历，他们当时对教师的理解描述)

2. 除了在学校当一名专业教师的记忆，还有其他关于教师概念或教师身份的记忆吗？那些记忆中的“老师”都是谁？为什么你认为对你来说，他们可以被视为“老师”？

(可能的后续话题:我印象最深刻的老师，我从一件生活事件或经历中学到的东西，“老师”给她带来的感受，为什么他们认为这段与老师有关的记忆是重要的或令人印象深刻的)

3. 有没有什么非人类的老师让你印象深刻？当你经历这个让你印象很深的非人类老师的人生事件或故事时，你会把他们当作老师吗？为什么或为什么不呢？

(可能的后续话题:对超越人类的老师的描述，与“老师”接触的感觉和经历，人们对向其他物种或非生物学习的观点或看法)

4. 以上你分享的这些记忆是如何影响你理解教师观念的？你现在会如何定义，描述，或者回忆教师这个概念？

(可能的后续话题:他们对教师概念的解释的转变，我们的记忆活动给我们所带来的变化，对教师概念的大致认知)

APPENDIX G

IN-SERVICE TEACHERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – ENGLISH VERSION

**Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World:
Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and
Learning**

Hi _____,

I am Jieyu Jiang, I am a graduate student under Dr. Iveta Silova, a professor in the department of Education at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at the Arizona State University. I am conducting research for my dissertation to complete my doctorate. This research study is about exploring and reimagining the concept of a teacher in human and more-than-human worlds. I am trying to understand diverse connotations of a teacher, and also invite you with me together to open possible space of re-exploring and practicing the concept of a teacher beyond a social profession only.

I noticed that your career is a schoolteacher, so part of your activities in life were interconnected with teaching, and I was hoping to invite you to observe and re-experience, and to interview about the feelings and stories related to the concept of a teacher. If you choose to participate, I would ask you to

- 1) start randomly observing and noticing your self-cultivation and silent teaching moments in your daily scenes in life which does not have to happen in your working places;

- 2) participate in the fabulating experience of “sitting and Wu” in a one-to-one form for about 15-30 minutes at your chosen place, to relieve the anxiety and pressure, speculate about your potential “teaching without words/actions” experience and stories, and intuitively feel anything you can feel then in the meditation space; and
- 3) participate an interview with me to share about your experiences and viewpoints on the concept of a teacher during the above activities, or any personal stories about teachers, within or beyond human world, you are willing to share in your position. This interview would take no more than 40 minutes. Please feel free to use Chinese during all procedures.

Besides, I would also ask your permission of me remotely observing 2 classes of yours to focus on the silences and “teaching without words/actions” in the class, via the TenCent Meeting or the classroom instruction camera. You can naturally and normally proceed with your teaching activities as usual and do not need to purposefully prepare anything in the class for my observations. However, before each class observation, I need you to help me inform the students and their parents about the observation and auditing being conducting and settle me in remotely (i.e., giving me access/link of online class or opening the classroom instruction camera, etc.). I will not have any interactions and communications with students and teachers, will not participate in the class or impact any emerged silences during the observations, and I will also not take any pictures or recordings.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and not participating would not affect you. If this sounds like something you would like to participate in or if you have any questions, please feel free to respond to this e-mail/post or call/text me at 15829695870.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX H

IN-SERVICE TEACHERS RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – CHINESE VERSION

在超越人类的世界里重新想象“老师”：思想实验以及与其他教学方法的相遇

_____，你好！

我叫江婕语，是亚利桑那州立大学玛丽·卢·富尔顿师范学院教育系教授艾薇塔·西洛娃博士的研究生。我正在进行论文研究，以完成我的博士学位。这项研究是关于探索和重新想象在人类和超越人类的世界中教师的概念。我试图理解教师的多元内涵，也希望能邀请您和我一起打开理解教师概念的可能空间，在社会职业的定义之外重新探索和实践教师的概念。

我注意到您的职业是教师，所以您生活中的一部分活动与教学是有联系的，所以我希望您能去观察和重新体验“教师”，并且我能对您关于教师这一概念的一些感受和故事进行采访。如果你选择参与，我会请求您：

- 1) 在日常生活场景中能够随机观察和注意到一些有修身养性和“无言之教”的时刻，而这些不一定发生在您的工作场所；
- 2) 参与一个虚构性体验—静坐和悟，以一对一的形式。这个体验大约占用您 15 - 30 分钟，在你选择的地点冥想，目的是缓解焦虑和压力，回想您在“无言之教”的观察中的经验和故事，然后在冥想空间中直观地感觉到任何你能感觉到的体验；

3) 参加我对您的采访，分享你在上述活动中对教师概念的经历和看法，或任何你愿意在你的立场上分享的关于教师的个人故事，无论是在人类世界内还是超越人类世界的。这次采访不会超过 40 分钟。以上所有流程都可以使用中文。

另外，我还想请您允许我线上使用腾讯会议或课堂教学的摄像头观察旁听您的两节课，关注课堂上发生的沉默和“无言之教”。你可以像往常一样自然地、正常地进行你的教学活动，不需要在课堂上为我的观察特意准备任何东西。但在每节课观察前，需要您协助我通知学生及其家长该观察和旁听活动的进行，且协助我线上接入网课(即，发给我线上课程的访问链接或打开课堂教学摄像头等)。在观察中，我不会与学生和老师有任何互动和交流，不会参与课堂活动，不会拍照或者录音，也不会影响观察过程中出现的沉默。

您的参与是自愿的，不参与不会影响您的任何生活。如果这听起来像是您愿意参与的事情和活动，或者如果你有任何问题，请随时回复这封电子邮件/帖子或打电话/发短信给我，电话是 15829695870。

非常感谢您的考虑。

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX I

IN-SERVICE TEACHERS CONSENT FORM – ENGLISH VERSION

**Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World:
Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and
Learning**

I am a PhD student under the direction of Dr. Iveta Silova at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand diverse connotations of a teacher in human and more-than-human worlds. This project will be supervised by my doctoral advisor, Dr. Silova.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve 1) a self-conducting observation activity on “teaching without words/actions”; 2) the speculative fabulating experience of “sitting and Wu” for 15-30 minutes; 3) a 40-minutes individual interview about your experiences and viewpoints on the concept of a teacher during the above activities, or any personal stories about teachers you are willing to share in your position; and 4) allowing me to remotely observe 2-3 classes of yours to focus on the silences and “teaching without words/actions” in the actual or virtual classroom over one week, via Tencent Meeting or other remote technologies. However, I do not intend to interrupt your daily activities during my observation time. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty, and it will not affect your performance, your job, and other interactions with people in your life. You must be 18

years of age or older to participate. You are allowed to choose your preferred language during participation, but it will be translated into English applied in final dissertation.

Although there is no benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that might be extremely helpful to this study and future teacher education. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

All responses will be digitalized and stored on password protected ASU cloud storage for four years. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

Additional information about Interview Recordings:

I would like to audio record our 40-minutes interviews. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team: Jieyu Jiang at [15829695870](tel:15829695870) / jjiang74@asu.edu or Iveta Silova: Iveta.Silova@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

By signing below, you are agreeing to be part of the study.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX J

IN-SERVICE TEACHERS CONSENT FORM – CHINESE VERSION

在超越人类的世界里重新想象“老师”：思想实验以及与其他教学方法的相遇

我是亚利桑那州立大学玛丽·卢·富尔顿教师学院的博士生，师从 Iveta Silova 博士。我正在进行一项研究，以了解教师在人类乃至超越人类的世界中的多种内涵。这个项目将由我的博士生导师 Silova 博士指导。

我邀请您的参与，包括：1) 一个关于“无言之教”的自我观察活动；2) 一个 15-30 分钟的“静坐和悟”的推测性虚构体验；3) 进行 40 分钟的个人采访，分享你在上述活动中对教师概念的经历和看法，或任何你愿意在你的立场上分享的关于教师的个人故事；4) 允许我在大约一周的时间里，利用腾讯会议或其他远程技术，线上观察旁听你的两节课，关注您的真实/虚拟课堂上发生的沉默和“无言之教”。但是，在我观察期间，我无意打扰您的日常活动。您有权不回答任何问题或中止活动，并在任何时候停止参与这项研究。

您的参与是自愿的。如果你在任何时候选择不参加或退出学习，都不会受到处罚，也不会影响你的绩效、工作以及生活中与人的其他互动。您必须年满 18 岁才能参加。您可以在参与期间选择您惯用的语言，但在最终的论文中，它将被翻译成英语。

虽然对你没有任何好处，但你的参与可能会对这项研究和未来的教师教育非常有帮助。您的参与没有可预见的风险或不适。

所有回复都将被数据化，并存储在有密码保护的 ASU 云存储中，为期四年。您的回复将是匿名和机密的。本研究结果可用于学术报告，演示或出版物，但不会使用你的名字。

关于采访录音的其他信息:

我想录下我们四十分钟的采访。未经您的允许，采访将不会被录音。如果你不希望采访被记录，请让我知道；你也可以在采访开始后改变主意，告诉我一声。

如果您对本次研究有任何疑问，请联系研究团队：江婕语

(15829695870/jjiang74@asu.edu)或 Iveta Silova

(Iveta.Silova@asu.edu)。如果您对作为本研究的受试者/参与者的权利有任何疑问，或者您觉得自己处于危险之中，您可以通过亚利桑那州立大学研究诚信与保证办公室联系人类受试者机构审查委员会主席，电话：**(480)965-6788**。如果你想参与这项研究，请联系我。

在下面签名，表示你同意参与这项研究。

姓名:

签名:

日期:

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX K
SEMI-STRUCTURED PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH IN-SERVICE
TEACHERS – ENGLISH VERSION

Semi-structured Interview with In-service Teachers

Research team roles:

Jieyu Jiang – co-principal investigator and participant

Dr. Iveta Silova – co-principal investigator and research supervisor

I. Introduction and Demographic Form (10 minutes)

Introduction Script:

Welcome XX teacher. Thank you for joining me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. I am Jieyu Jiang, a doctoral student at Arizona State University. I am conducting research about exploring and reimagining the concept of a teacher in human and more than-human worlds in China. I am here to learn from you by listening to what you would like to share with me about the concept of a teacher during your observation in your life and our sitting and meditation experience.

Demographic form

Jieyu will then ask participant(s) to complete a demographic sheet (see attached). She will collect the demographic sheet and begin our conversation with an introduction to the project.

II. Transition to starting the conversation portion

As I mentioned earlier, your participation in this project is voluntary. I will not use your name or any identifying information in any publications or presentations. Your name will never be linked to any comment you make in the reports, publications, or presentations

that result from our discussion. I am committed to maintaining your confidentiality. My main focus today is to listen to what you share with me. Again, there is no right or wrong answer so I encourage you to feel comfortable to express your honest opinions. I am here to listen, not to judge.

- **What questions do you have about what we have discussed so far?**

Pause to answer questions about the introduction.

III. Reminder about recording (5 minutes)

Before we begin, I wanted to remind you that our discussion today will be recorded. As a reminder:

You are free to leave the conversation at any point without question or consequence.

If you need to excuse yourself for any reason, please do so.

The conversation is recorded only when you agree to be recorded. **If, at any point, you wish to stop the recording, please tell us and I will do so.** If you make a comment that you would not like us to use, even though it will not be connected to you, please just say so and I will be sure to remove the comment from the transcription of the recording.

There are no right or wrong answers. This is a safe space to share your thoughts.

Does this all sound ok with you? May I start the recording?

Jieyu turns on recorder.

IV. Question Prompt (40 minutes total)

1. Could you first describe how you observe the “teaching without words/actions” in your life? What have you observed and how do you think about that?

(Possible follow-up topics: teachers' life experiences, the scenes they choose to observe, their insights on their observations)

2. Could you describe your feelings when you experienced "sitting and Wu"? What were the thoughts or ideas you were thinking about during that? Is there any impact on your today's work of being a teacher?

(Possible follow-up topics: teachers' pressure in work and life, other kinds of teachers, the feelings of hearing the reanimated sounds of nature, some feelings related to the educational activity, the "Tao" of teaching or being a teacher)

3. Could you tell me your past experience or stories about "teaching without words/actions"? Have you noticed any "teaching without words/actions" in your classroom? Who are the "teachers" in those stories? Why do you think that was a teaching interaction/activity and why do you think they could be regarded as "teachers"?

(Possible follow-up topics: the most impressive scene of "teaching without words/actions, the feelings brought by the scene and the "teacher", other types of "teachers" other than the profession)

4. How would this experience of "sitting and Wu" and some observations impact your ways of conceptualizing the notion of a teacher? Are there any nonhuman teachers that have left a deep impression on? What do you think about the teachers other-than-humans and nonbeings?

(Possible follow-up topics: their interpretations on other types of teachers, the possibilities of them trying “sitting and Wu” in their future life, their changes in their classroom teaching and doing the job of teachers)

APPENDIX L

SEMI-STRUCTURED PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS WITH IN-SERVICE

TEACHERS – CHINESE VERSION

在职教师的半结构化采访

研究团队角色：

江婕语-团队首席研究员和参与者

Iveta Silova 博士-团队首席研究员和研究主管

一、介绍及人口基本信息表格(10 分钟)

介绍脚本：

欢迎某某老师。感谢您今天来参加我的项目。非常感谢您愿意参与这项研究。我叫江婕语，是一名亚利桑那州立大学的博士生。我正在进行一项研究，关于探索和重新想象在人类和超越人类的世界中教师的概念。在这个项目中，通过聆听你们想要与我分享的一些关于老师的概念的想法，以及一些在你们的生活观察和我们的静坐和冥想中获得的体验和感受，我将向你们学习。

人口基本信息表格

然后，婕语将要求参与者填写一份人口统计表(见附件)。她将收集人口统计表，并开始我们的谈话，介绍这个项目。

二、转而感到开始对话部分

正如我之前提到的，您参与这个项目是自愿的。我不会在任何出版物或报告中使用您的名字或任何身份信息。您的名字将永远不会与您在我们讨论的报告、出版物或报告中所作的任何评论联系在一起。我承诺为你保密。我今天的重点是听您将和我分享什么。同样，没有正确或错误的答案，所以我鼓励您放心地表达您真实的想法。我在这里是为了倾听，而不是去评判对错。

- 对于我们目前说的内容，你有什么问题？

暂停一会儿，回答参与者关于介绍的问题。

三、录音提醒(5分钟)

在我们开始之前，我想提醒您，我们今天的采访将会被录音。这儿做一个提醒：

你可以在任何时候离开谈话，没有任何质疑或后果。

如果你有任何理由需要打扰或离开一会儿，请自便。

只有当您同意录音时，对话才会被录音。如果，在任何时候，你希望停止录音，请告诉我们，我会这样做。如果您发表了不希望我们使用的评论，即使它不会与您联系起来，请说出来，我一定会从录音的转录文字中删除该评论。

没有正确或错误的答案。这是一个能够分享想法的安全空间。

你觉得这样可以吗？我可以开始录音了吗？

婕语打开录音机。

四、 问题提示(共 40 分钟)

1. 您可以先描述一下，您是如何观察生活中的“不言之教”或“无为之教”的？你观察到了什么有趣的情景？你对此有何看法？
(可能的后续话题:教师的生活经历，他们选择观察的场景，他们对观察的见解)
2. 你能描述一下当你体验“静坐和悟”时的感受吗？你当时在想些什么，思索了一些什么？有“静坐和悟”的体验后，对你今天的工作有什么影响吗？
(可能的后续话题:教师在工作和生活中的压力，其他类型的教师，听到大自然中“被复活的声音”的感受，一些与教育活动有关的感受，教学或教师的“道”)
3. 你能告诉我你过去“不言之教”或“无为之教”的经历或故事吗？在你的教室里，有注意到过“不言之教”的情形吗？谁是这些故事中的“老师”？为什么你认为这是一个关于教学的互动和活动，以及为什么你认为他们可以被视为“教师”？
(可能的后续话题:印象最深刻的“不言之教”或“无为之教”的场景，这个场景和场景中的“老师”带来的感受，教师职业以外的其他类型的“老师”)

4. 这种“静坐和悟”的体验和之前的一些观察，对你概念化或设想教师这个概念的方式有何影响？有没有什么非人类的老师让你印象深刻？你怎么看那些除了人类和非生物之外的老师？

(可能的后续话题:他们对其他类型教师的解读，他们在未来生活中尝试“静坐和悟”的可能性，他们在课堂教学和做教师工作中的变化)

APPENDIX M

PROTOCOL FOR FIELD NOTES IN REMOTE OBSERVATION – ENGLISH

VERSION

Grade		Subject	
Class site/mode		Date	

Setting Description	The moment of “teaching without words/actions”	Who is the “teacher” and who is the “student”	Comments / notes

APPENDIX N
PROTOCOL FOR FIELD NOTES IN REMOTE OBSERVATION – CHINESE
VERSION

年级		科目	
上课地点/方式		日期	

场景描述	无言之教/无为之教的时刻描述	“老师”和“学生”是谁?	评论/注释

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX O
DEMOGRAPHIC FORM – ENGLISH VERSION

Demographic Form

I would like to know some basic demographic information about you to keep for my records. Your responses on this sheet are voluntary. They will be used in my analysis of our conversation.

Full name:

Selected pseudonym:

Age:

Gender:

Number of years working as a teacher:

(Current) Teaching grade:

(Current) Teaching subject:

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX P
DEMOGRAPHIC FORM – CHINESE VERSION

人员基本信息表

我想了解一些关于你的基本人员统计信息，以便我作记录。你在这张纸上的回答是自愿的。我将用它们来分析我们的谈话。

名字：

选定的假名：

年龄：

性别：

教龄：

（当前）教授年级：

（当前）教授科目：

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX Q
TRANSLATION CERTIFICATE

For Office Use Only:
Date Received:

Translation Certification Form Institutional Review Board (IRB)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World: Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and Learning
HS NUMBER: STUDY00016043
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Iveta Silova
LANGUAGE OF TRANSLATED DOCUMENTS: Chinese

TYPE OF SUBMISSION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>The initial submission of the following forms (<i>Please list the forms</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demographic Form_En En_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials En_Jiang_Short Consent_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form En_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 1_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions) En_Jiang_Observation Protocol 3_In-service teachers.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions) En_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email/flyer/advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials En_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form En_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 2_in-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The modification of the following forms that have been approved. (<i>Please list forms</i>)</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Other (<i>Please describe and list forms</i>)</p>

CERTIFICATION OF TRANSLATION

I certify that I have performed the translation of the following documents:

- Demographic Form_Ch
- Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials
- Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form
- Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 1_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)
- Ch_Jiang_Observation Protocol 3_In-service teachers.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)
- Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email/flyer/advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials
- Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form
- Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 2_in-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)

for the referenced project.

Printed Name of Translator: Jieyu Jiang

Signature of Translator:



Date: 6/14/2022

CERTIFICATION OF BACK-TRANSLATION

I certify that I have performed the back-translation of the following documents:

- Demographic Form_Ch
- Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials
- Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form
- Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 1_Family members_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)
- Ch_Jiang_Observation Protocol 3_In-service teachers.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)
- Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email/flyer/advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials
- Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Consent Form

- Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 2_in-service teachers_2022.docx, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions)

for the referenced project. **Please note that it is preferable if the back-translation is done by someone who is not part of the research team.**

Printed Name of Back-Translator: Long Qian

Signature of Back-Translator : *Long Qian*

Date: 6/14/2022

IRB NOTE: The translation and back-translation should be done by two different people.

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX R

LETTER OF EXEMPTION REVIEW APPROVAL

APPROVAL: EXPEDITED REVIEW

[Iveta McGurty](#)
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)

-
 Iveta.Silova@asu.edu

Dear [Iveta McGurty](#):

On 6/5/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Re-Imagining the 'Teacher' in a More-Than-Human World: Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and Learning
Investigator:	Iveta McGurty
IRB ID:	STUDY00016043
Category of review:	
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic Form_En.pdf, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • En_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email_flyer_advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • En_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • En_Jiang_Short Consent_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • En_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • En_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 1_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group

	<p>questions);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • En_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 2_in-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Form-translation-certificate.pdf, Category: Translations; • Jiang_Assent form (11-14)_En.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_Assent form (15-17)_En.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_Assent form (6-10)_En.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_IRB Social Behavioral 2019_Reimagining teacher.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Jiang_Parental letter of permission_En.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
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The IRB approved the protocol from 6/5/2022 to 6/4/2027 inclusive. Three weeks before 6/4/2027 you are to submit a completed Continuing Review application and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 6/4/2027 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

REMINDER - - Effective January 12, 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects require adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU’s COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found [here](#). IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jieyu Jiang

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX S

LETTER OF CONTINUING REVIEW APPROVAL

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

[Iveta McGurty](#)
[Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe](#)

-
 Iveta.Silova@asu.edu

Dear [Iveta McGurty](#):

On 6/14/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World: Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and Learning
Investigator:	Iveta McGurty
IRB ID:	STUDY00016043
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email_flyer_advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 1_Family members_2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Ch_Jiang_Supporting documents_Protocol 2_in-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group

	<p>questions);</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic Form_Ch.pdf, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • Form-translation-certificate.docx.pdf, Category: Translations; • Jiang_Assent form (11-14)_Ch.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_Assent form (15-17)_Ch.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_Assent form (6-10)_Ch.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_Parental letter of permission_Ch.pdf, Category: Consent Form;
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The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

REMINDER - Effective January 12, 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects require adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU’s COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found [here](#). IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jieyu Jiang
 Jieyu Jiang
 Iveta McGurty

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX T

LETTER OF CONTINUING MODIFICATION REVIEW APPROVAL

APPROVAL: MODIFICATION

[Iveta McGurty](#)

Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe

-

Iveta.Silova@asu.edu

Dear [Iveta McGurty](#):

On 9/26/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Re-Imagining the ‘Teacher’ in a More-Than-Human World: Thought Experiments and Encounters with Alternative Ways of Teaching and Learning
Investigator:	Iveta McGurty
IRB ID:	STUDY00016043
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email_flyer_advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Ch_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • En_Jiang_Recruitment_methods_email_flyer_advertisement_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • En_Jiang_Short Consent_In-service teachers_2022.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Jiang_IRB Social Behavioral 2019_Reimagining teacher.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB approved the modification.

When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the “Documents” tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

*REMINDER – Effective January 12th 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects **require** adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU's COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found [here](#). IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.*

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jieyu Jiang
Jieyu Jiang
Iveta McGurty

ASU IRB STUDY00016043

APPENDIX U

LINKS TO RECORDINGS OF NATURAL SOUNDS

Conversation 1:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nI2JkIPE7NYF0SfiLGCOHnmgtqi9TXJP/view?usp=share_link

Conversation 2:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/13j2PKBk9zOaN56jo1nlMPHg9od6Mbr7b/view?usp=share_link

Conversation 3:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/174Bva13CyU7rVPq1DaZd5sf0QE7thxKV/view?usp=share_link

Conversation 4:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wYvBW_TFNaWp8r3_pcG7rBESmQ7bp2rW/view?usp=share_link

Conversation 5:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HSbRvOYZJXCNBnpeAp_mx79J4YBJEB3n/view?usp=share_link

