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Aesthetic Inquiry into Chinese University Student Fatherly Life Lessons: “Roots” and their Implications for Educational Contexts

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Abstract

Globally, teachers are trained to educate and assess children through matrices based on comparative competition, a practice that thrives on ranking. In an era of glocalization, how might educational systems cultivate classroom connections embracing diverse student gifts? This arts-based narrative inquiry explores fatherly life lessons of 17 undergraduate and six graduate students enrolled in an introductory qualitative research course at a large urban Chinese university. Building on the course instructor’s model, students engaged in arts-based narrative inquiry to develop children’s books on treasured fatherly life lessons that they then shared with second grade students at a local Chinese school. Drawing upon the *Confucian Analects* and Laozi’s *Tao Te Ching*, this study evidences empathy as rooted across cultures and ecologies, and that many fatherly life lessons take place in natural settings. This study encourages teacher education

practice and research to engage arts-based autobiographical inquiry, and to explore empathy conceptualizations and expressions across cultures and ecologies. As *glocalization* brings together diverse groups, this work is important to create shared spaces for international connection and meaningful inter-institutional explorations.

Introduction: A Road, a Root, and a Lesson

I stood next to my trunk and sleeping bag and shielded my eyes while admiring the clear blue, sunlit sky with cottony white clouds. I had my running attire waiting for me in my backpack and listened to the music of the rocky crackle, as my dad's Jeep came rolling down the long camp driveway. It was a magical moment each July to be picked up by my dad after spending two-weeks in an all-girls summer camp nestled in the deep, rich woods in the heart of Indiana, one-hour from our suburbia home. While loading my camp gear in the car, my dad always took time to greet "Fred," the beloved director who began developing the camp in 1943. These moments warmed my heart, as the forester in my dad came to life as they conversed about the campgrounds and activities that took place during the two-week camp. We then set out in my dad's Jeep and looked for the perfect empty road for our annual post-camp run in the hot Indiana summer sun, an event cherished by any long distance runner who values the smooth, rolling treasure of a long, empty road, newly discovered.

Of my childhood memories, these runs with my dad are among my richest.

Upon finishing one of these runs, we walked back and forth next to our car to catch our breath while drinking water in hand. As my lungs soaked in the oxygen and my eyes squinted under the sun's bright rays, I suddenly noticed in the grey pebbled backdrop of the roadside, one small green sprout, reaching with all its might to catch the sunlight in the hidden chlorophylls of its leaves, the site for the photosynthesis producing the oxygen my lungs so depended upon now. Sensing the great value of that green sprout and the oxygen it offered, I asked my dad if we could take it home. He agreed, and we took it home, roots and all. After a brief search of his car for a small shovel, one of the many tools he kept on hand for moments just like this one. He formed a circle around the perimeter of the tree's likely root source, and then carefully dug deep to bring as many roots with the tree as possible. When I asked if the tree would make it home, my dad smiled in confidence at the resilience of nature's life force.

Trees, like all other forms of life, are amazingly resilient in the presence of care.

The sprout survived our one-hour drive home, as well as our one-hour lunch of green beans, baked chicken, and warm biscuits with apple butter, a classic cuisine of the small town near my camp. I continued to look in the back of our car to check on it throughout our drive. We

soon arrived home and introduced our tree sprout to its many green neighbors – Maplewood, Oak, Rosebud, and a wide variety of coniferous pines handpicked and planted there by my dad over the years. It was suburbia tree heaven. My dad and I traversed the wide, green space together for the perfect spot for the newest resident, a Tulip tree. We chose a spot near the window of our backdoor, where we could watch the tree grow. Over time, my dad transitioned the Tulip tree where it could grow into a fuller-sized tree. It was with great delight we discovered years later not one, but four Tulip trees – three born by the first's seeds.

I realized in this that trees, like all of life, are amazingly resilient, when carefully rooted.

My dad knew this secret, and with the brilliance of a fatherly spirit, he taught me this lesson through a shared experience with buried insights I would discover later, when things counted more. He knew that if he told me directly, I would not hear him then or later. His hidden insights resonate now.

Roots are resilient, and matter. I am resilient, particularly when carefully rooted.

Dads are brilliant.

I eventually moved from our Midwestern home to live the next 20 years of my life on both coasts and overseas, followed by a final move back home with a new career and new family. Relocating near my roots was a welcomed reconnection with a source of nourishment that our family deeply appreciated at the time. The rich diversity that now filled my home setting and my own global sense of identity brought new life to the experience of returning to my roots. The connective soil was richer than when I had left.

Need for the Research

In the *Nature Principle*, Richard Louv (2011) refers to memories as “seeds” and reflects on his most cherished childhood memories with family “associated with nature – with fishing trips, discovered snakes and captured frogs, with dark water touched by stars” (p. 43). Yet, such meaningful and natural connections with fathers may be difficult to secure, in light of increasing schooling pressures around the world. In an article in the *Washington Parent*, Madigan (2014), a father, reflects on the intensifying university admissions process and the increasing competition to ensure one's child gets accepted into a Gifted & Talented program, before being accepted into a prestigious junior high, high school, university, and MBA program, all followed by a high-paying job, purchase of a luxurious car, and down payment on a house. The author questions if we are “asking ourselves the right questions” and encourages asking what our children truly “want and need” (Madigan, 2014, para. 18). He invites parents to reflect on education's aims, and if these aims lead to societal well-being.

Learning to ask thoughtful questions invites parents and teachers to become “students” of their students.

In light of the pressing standards teachers must reach today, it is difficult for educators to integrate curricula that cultivate character and connection with our cultural heritages. Character qualities gleaned through fatherly life lessons can be completely absent from classrooms pressed to prepare for the next standardized test. The qualities of leadership, compassion, resilience, and inquiry may be limited or absent. Learning can become tethered to grades posted on classroom walls, a proclamation of student worth that squelches out the fire of authentic inquiry and the confidence that children gain from directing their own learning. In *Moral character and civic education*, Benniga (1991) highlights the importance of moral education and the value of setting aside the pressures of standards and tests to allow students to “come to grips with a difficult ethical dilemma arising from the life of their classroom” (p. 75). Such real-life encounters are “more effective at arousing children’s thinking and feelings than are ‘canned’ dilemmas from a book or kit” (p. 75). Where is the fatherly spirit needed to cultivate such qualities in students today, including leadership, compassion, resilience, and inquiry?

Research Purpose

The integration of cultural heritage into classroom curricula is a vital need in our comparative cosmopolitan global era, rich with cultural diversity that is often untapped as an educational resource in classrooms fraught with competitive tensions across individual and group identity divisions. In response to our global era of comparative cosmopolitanism, this research engages faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, and elementary students in curricula, or *currere*, as autobiographical, aesthetic, international, and institutional text (Pinar et al., 2004). This research explores the foundations for and impact of a curricula engaging Chinese university students in developing a memoir, academic paper, and a children’s book reflecting on a fatherly life lesson via academic, autobiographical, aesthetic reflection. Students are invited to contextualize this lesson in a broader historical, socio-cultural context, and finally to consider how such curricula – aesthetic connection with a fatherly life lessons and heritage roots – might fit within institutionalized educational curricula across levels, regions, and cultures.

This research engages participants in aesthetic autobiographical inquiry as an academic pursuit of *currere*, the Latin root for curriculum, which literally translates to “running the course” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 515). *Currere* is conceptualized in this paper as relating “school knowledge, life history, and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively” (p. 515). Autobiography as *currere* largely took shape in the U.S. in the 1970s as a strategy for surfacing and studying experience more clearly to understand our lived

experience with deeper meaning and “agency” (p. 518). Continually writing and re-writing our lived autobiographical experiences as curricula in connection with cultural ‘canons’ and institutional structures affirms and empowers students and teachers alike to connect with society and live with greater connective purpose (Pinar et al., 2004). Benefits of such autobiographical reflective inquiry on one’s cultural heritage are not only emotional and social, but also academic and performance in nature, across ethnic and racial groups (Branch, 2014). Participants included one teacher education faculty instructor and students enrolled in one undergraduate and graduate qualitative inquiry course at a top-ranked teacher education university in an urban region of China.

Theoretical Framework

Currere: Autobiographical, Aesthetic Text

Engaging with curricula as an autobiographical text is a participatory process by which students become the authors of the material they create and study. Stories travel across the past, the present, and the future to ask continually the meaning of an event and how it adds to “the larger life story the person may be trying to live” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 144). The autobiographer seeks to “give the meaning of his own mythic tale” (Gusdorf, 1980, 48), and yet does so in such a way that is more invested in asking “Where do I belong?” more so than “Who am I?” (Gunn, 1982, p. 23). The strategy for engaging these questions involves attending “carefully to one’s own inner voice” and asking “what is the meaning of the present?” through observation of a “biographic situation” that is located in “historical time” and “cultural place” and that may contain contradictions across past, present, and future anticipations (Pinar, 2004, p.36). Scholars in the field of curriculum and *currere* highlight the importance of contextualizing personal accounts in broader theoretical study beyond a sentimental retelling (Grumet, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin also warn from allowing a “technical rationalism” (1991, p. 243) or a “sociological or political abstraction or formalism” (1990, p. 243) to disconnect storied events from authentic personhood. The integration of aesthetic aspects to this autobiographical work provides means for reconsidering life events in light of the beauty found in shared life lessons and stories.

An aesthetic literacy lens enables exploring and understanding our own and other cultures, ethnicities, and histories with appreciation for the different values and value systems found therein. Hamblen (1990) encourages an *ethnoaesthetic* approach to studying art and culture together, and Broudy (1988) contends that capacity to decode aesthetic clues is central to the capacity to think. In reconstructing the American school in the 1940s, Harold Rugg articulated the aesthetic process as a needed counter to Dewey’s overly pragmatic, empirical approach to knowing, composed largely of intellectualization, hypothesizing, mental elaboration, reasoning, testing, and re-hypothesizing (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 571). Rugg describes the

aesthetic process for knowing as including: “(1) the urge to create – hazy, intangible; (2) a conception ... of the meaning toward which he is groping; (3) the mastery of the necessary techniques; (4) a long grueling enterprise of the integrative process itself ... successive stages of ruthless self-criticism ... constant polishing and changing” (as cited in Pinar et al., 2004, p. 572). To engage the aesthetic as *currere* is a natural enterprise, considering the parallels between artists and teachers in their professional work. Elliot Eisner (1985) makes this connection in highlighting that artists and teachers both engage the studio or classroom as an aesthetic experience, and make judgments in the course of action that are shaped by the action itself, in process. Finally, in balancing automaticity and inventiveness, artists and teachers move toward unanticipated yet often welcomed outcomes.

Currere: International, Institutional Text

Currere as an international, institutional text recognizes the diverse international context in which our local classrooms are situated, while also recognizing the need for shared institutional norms to connect and guide our norms and processes to live life meaningfully as a global community. As the process of glocalization connects global norms with local diversities (Brooks & Normore, 2006), more than ever *currere* as international text is needed in our 21st century public classrooms. *Currere* as international text recognizes that in high-need regions with limited resources, textbooks produced in more profitable markets, such as Europe or North America, tend to be used, yet do not reflect the culture and history of those developing, high-need regions. An intellectual colonization results, if localized efforts to create meaningful curricula is not initiated. Aesthetic, autobiographical texts offer a meaningful practice for students and teachers alike, to generate and learn from locally meaningful curricula reflecting the students’ cultures, ethnicities, languages, and regions (Pinar et al., 2004).

Currere as institutional text might operate more meaningfully at local levels, while guided by shared global connections and realities. For instance, teachers may be invited to connect and “move beyond their isolation from one another and from the community” (Britzman, 1992, p. 78) to continue their own educational and professional development, while mentoring those new to the profession (Pinar et al., 2004). Shared global connections also offer guidance for the development of curricula, as global education has broadly been shaped by shared interest in “problems and issues that cut across national boundaries,” particularly the “interconnectedness of systems – ecological, economic, political, technological, religious, cultural, and educational” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 800). Global education entails expanded notions of empathy as perspective-taking, not only across regions and cultures, but also across philosophies and values. In our modern *glocal* contexts, cross-cultural empathy is needed.

Empathy as Cognitive and Affective

Empathy is a concept spanning interdisciplinary fields. Neurologist Goleman's (2006) social intelligence theory and sociologist Brown's (2006) shame resiliency theory highlight empathy as vital to our human survival, as individuals and social creatures. Goleman (2006) describes *empathy* as "the essential expertise in social intelligence" (p. 89), involving (1) *social awareness* and (2) *social facility*. *Social awareness* includes *primal empathy* (feeling with others), *attunement* (full receptivity), *empathic accuracy* (understanding another), and *social cognition* (understanding how the social world works). *Social facility* includes *synchrony* (smooth nonverbal interaction), *self-presentation, influence* (shaping social outcomes), and *concern* (care for and action to meet others' needs). Like Goleman, Thorndike explored social intelligence in the 1920s before IQ or its later counterpart, EQ (emotional intelligence), was conceived. Valuing individual capabilities *and* relational connection, Goleman and Thorndike bring us full circle to the reality that "we are not alone" and depend on one another, relationally.

Research increasingly demonstrates the potential of empathy to fuel connection, and the potentially negative impact of judgment to provoke isolation (Brown, 2007). Sociologist Brown (2006) awakens society to the power of *empathy* to silence judgment and *enable connection*. Brown's (2006) research reveals empathy as the oxygen of relationship, and shame as a wet blanket hindering creative potential. In contrast, empathy enables compassion, courage, and connection, diminishing shame's impact. Brown (2007) defines *shame resilience* as ability to *receive and extend empathy*, a heart skill silencing human inclinations to define and draw societal lines between those who are 'right' and those who are 'wrong.' Brown's work replaces this right-wrong narrative with a life-long learning disposition able to handle a more complex understanding of individuals and their societal contexts. Living under a right-wrong world view fuels a fear entangling oneself and others in a *shame web* (Brown, 2007, p. 18). Both the judged and judge miss the opportunity for *authentic growth* experienced amidst suffering as a window to insight and healing (Flowers & Stahl, 2011). As we garner courage to practice the work of building a "connection network" (Brown, 2007, p. 153), we are able to learn as much "from our failures as we do from our successes," by receiving and extending empathic compassion as equals (p. 44–45).

Empathy as Pedagogical and Multicultural

Despite documented benefits of empathy, teachers around the world are being prepared to educate and assess children through an institutional matrix of comparative competition, a practice that thrives on judgment and leaves behind wakes of comparative shame. While posted grades may pressure kids to learn, a spirit of life-long learning may be lost despite momentary performance. Shame becomes the pedagogical norm by which children learn.

Inquiry, empathy, and creativity all too often are lost in such environments. Of course, there are apparent ‘winners’ able to use this system to their benefit by churning out a sense of success dependent on another’s failure or being ‘lesser than.’ Recognizing our children for their diverse gifts – rather ranking our children along a continuum of a few gifts – holds great potential for enhancing societal growth for all. *Empathy* is a powerful teaching tool that helps to release a child’s potential by inviting expression of students’ diverse gifts. This tool particularly is powerful to counter discouragement prompted by institutional or societal judgment. While the art of empathy across cultures has been associated with women and their relational networks, research increasingly shows men have great capacity and need for compassion, as well (Brown, 2006).

Reflective of Goleman’s (2006) social intelligence theory, empathy combines emotional understanding with responsive action. Social intelligence is *empathy in action*. *Compassion* is composed of the Latin roots, *passer* (to *suffer*) and *com* (*with*), and involves joining another in his/her suffering. Such empathic action entails a degree of humility in choosing to place another’s needs before one’s own. Such humility may be illustrated in the ancient Confucian concept of *yi* (義), or *morality*, depicting “I” (*wo* 我) humbly positioned under a lamb (*yang* 羊) (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, p. 53). In Chinese and Western traditions, a lamb has served as a symbolic sacrifice for human misgivings. Such sacrifice and the willingness to recognize this act both entail humility, reflective of a vital form of social intelligence. Empathy moved to action via caring acts of humility is a peak in Goleman’s (2006) *social facility* theory, expressed as *social awareness* moved by *concern* to *action*. Confucian ethical wisdom and Goleman’s neurological research attest that social intelligence is also an emotive, cultural practice that is learned.

The practice of empathy crosses cultures. Pang (2005) highlights need for empathy in multicultural education by asserting that caring teachers seek to understand and affirm students’ cultural backgrounds. Multicultural classroom and societal growth is nourished by the soil of *empathy* and *compassion*. As our cross-cultural classrooms grow to reflect the diverse backgrounds of our global society, willingness simply to “be with” (Kwo, 2010), even to “suffer with” “the other” on the margin (Kumashiro, 2002) emerges as a vital skill to cultivate. Teachers must cultivate caring multicultural classroom environments by reflecting on their own cultural roots, a practice that enables teachers to see and value the cultural backgrounds of their students (Branch, 2004, 2014; Liu & Milman, 2014). Multicultural scholars highlight that developing a “strong sense of one’s own identity” enhances a teacher’s ability to engage with and appreciate the diverse cultural identities of one’s students (Bennett, 2001, p. 192). Gay (2010) adds that *careful scaffolding* is needed to support teachers and teacher educators in countering “denial, silence, and confusion” encountered when asked to reflect on their own cultural identity (p. 148). Branch (2004) further concludes positive

associations with one's own cultural identity increases likelihood teachers will support their students in positive cultural and ethnic identity development.

A similar value is found in Confucian tradition for cherishing the cultural roots of one's own and others' heritages. In the Confucian *Analects* (Ames & Rosemont, 1998), Confucius offers the statement that "exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) learn broadly of culture (*wen* 文)" and then "discipline this learning through observing ritual propriety (*li* 禮)" (6.27). A contrast between traditional Confucian and American multicultural scholars may be found in how propriety is viewed. Confucian tradition emphasizes respect for authority and holds propriety in high regard to practice respect, both in one's own culture and across cultures. While Confucius encourages remaining "on course" in practicing propriety "without straying from it" (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, 6.27), multicultural educator, Ambrosio (2003), concludes need for educators to learn when to lay down authoritative "ritual" to dialogue in "unritualized ways" that allow intercultural others to feel "accepted" and "at ease" (p. 26–27). In the *Analects* (Ames & Rosemont, 1998), Confucius describes authoritative figures as mountain-like and still, in their long endurance, and describes the wise as (*zhi* 知), or water-like in their active learning. Ambrosio (2003) encourages authoritative figures to learn from students by becoming more flexible and fluid in connections.

Ambrosio's (2003) multicultural reflection resonates more with a Taoist regard for water or "water-like behaviour" that is not "striving to get on top or to the fore" (Waley, 2009, p. 17). While the *Analects* emphasize a Confucian regard for remaining "on course" via propriety (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, 6.27), the *Tao Te Ching* teaches the Way (*dao* 道) as found in the fluid-like "goodness of water," benefitting "ten thousand creatures" and being "content with the places that all men disdain" (Waley, 2009, p. 17). The *Tao Te Ching* (Waley, 2009) describes the fluid nature of water as remaining 'on course' in that this fluid nature is profound in thought, gentle in friendship, true in word, ordered in government, effective in deed, timely in action, and peace-keeping in all (p. 17). Confucian tradition holds high regard for the Mountain, while Taoist tradition balances this view with recognized strength of the Valley. Confucius encouraged the development of the exemplary person, or (*junzi* 君子), while the *Tao Te Ching* suggests "we stop looking for 'persons of superior morality' (*hsien*) to put in power" so "there will be no more jealousies" (Waley, 2009, p. 7). Confucius placed high hope in filial responsibility, while Taoist tradition highly regards water-like compassion "content with the places that all men disdain" (Waley, 2009, p. 17). Connecting to Western thought, Confucian tradition seems aligned with Goleman's (2006) *social facility*, focused on *synchrony*, *self-presentation*, *influence*, and *concern*. Taoist tradition focuses more on the *primal empathy* of *social awareness*, *attuned* into others' emotions. Together, *social facility* and *social awareness* are two sides of the same coin in Goleman's (2006) *social intelligence theory*.

Methodology

Purpose

This qualitative narrative inquiry (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) begins with memories of caring moments with our fathers, or fatherly figures, to explore and re-imagine the classroom teacher role as encompassing this fatherly care. Research in sociology (Brown, 2007) and neurology (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014) demonstrates empathy as key in fueling connection, as well as the wounding role of judgment in provoking isolation (Brown, 2007). Yet, many teachers continue to educate and assess children using institutional matrices based on comparative competition, a practice that thrives on judgment and can leave behind wakes of comparative shame. This study recognizes need to cultivate connections in the classroom that develop empathic appreciation and expression of diverse student gifts.

Empathy often is associated with women and their supportive networks. However, Goleman's (2006) social intelligence theory emphasizes *empathy in action*, entailing maternal and paternal qualities. Moreover, compassion, *com passer* – to suffer with another – requires courage, maternal and paternal in nature (Flowers & Stahl, 2011). How can the fatherly elements of compassion, empathy, expression of diverse cultural roots be discovered or recovered in K-12 classroom settings? How might 21st century teacher educators play a key role in preparing teachers to cultivate such classroom environments? What education and teacher education policies might support such environments, and how can educational research continue to broaden our global perspectives and inform our local understandings to embrace maternal and paternal qualities that support “glocal” [global–local] (Brooks & Normore, 2010) diversity?

This narrative inquiry (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) explores the fatherly life lessons of 17 sophomore college students and six education graduate students enrolled in an introductory qualitative research course at one large urban Chinese university. Building on the instructor's own exploration as a model, students engaged in a/r/tography (Irwin et al., 2006; Pourchier, 2010) to reflect upon and inquire into a fatherly life lesson. Students narrated this life lesson both in report form and through an illustrated children's book they developed and shared with a second grade class at a local Chinese primary school. This aesthetic narrative inquiry joins sociocultural views on fathers across education graduate and undergraduate students, and one researcher in a large urban setting in China, to consider how to infuse fatherly life lessons into today's global 21st century classrooms.

This effort responds to globalization scholarship recognizing need to *normalize complexity and difference* (Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004), by exploring more complex, evolving understandings of fatherly figures in attempt to understand internationally contextualized

nuances regarding the maternal and paternal. In this enlightened space, maternal and paternal contributions to 21st century classrooms may be re-imagined and supported in light of intercultural, international distinctions and similarities.

Sacred Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry recognizes the individual as a “social being whose experiences are mediated by and in turn mediate the social world” (Bloom, 2002, p. 311). The words of the individual at the center of the inquiry become a prism by which larger society may be critiqued and understood. In this illuminated space of personal experience, societal “hegemonic tendencies” may be recognized and resisted (p. 311). Hendry (2010) builds on this foundation by identifying three kinds of narrative inquiry: (1) sacred, (2) symbolic, and (3) scientific (p. 74). While the scientific seeks to explain the physical world and falsify any untruths, the symbolic seeks to interpret human experience, with lifelikeness as a reference. In contrast, the sacred seeks to be and cultivate compassion or love, while recognizing that much of life is not fully knowable (p. 74). This study engages with sacred narrative inquiry in that fatherly life lessons involve “understanding matters of existence and larger questions of meaning” in the “realm of the unknowable” (Hendry, 2010, p. 75). Rather than providing answers or explanations maintained by “linear, hierarchical worldviews,” sacred narrative inquiry seeks to “open spaces” for “creative interpretation” (p. 75). Reflective of Trueit’s (2006) use of the Greek term, *poesis*, or poetic meaning making, sacred narrative inquiry seeks aesthetic appreciation – rather than hegemonical domination – of life’s diverse realities.

Hendry (2010) describes sacred narrative inquiry as requiring an “ontology of faith” (p. 75) that places questions – not methods – at the heart of research, and acknowledges the complexities involved in human meaning making of “truth” and “reality” (p. 76). An ontology of faith inspires being present and compassionate (p. 75), and involves an “epistemology of unknowing” that allows for the ambiguous and messy work of grappling with “the unknown” (p. 76). Huebner (1999) adds that sacred narrative inquiry places encounter as central, rather than seeking “to produce change, to enhance prestige, to identify new knowledge, or to be symbolic of something else” (p. 110). Likewise, this narrative inquiry places fatherly life lessons as autobiographical encounters rich in meaning that is then documented, illustrated, and narrated. The sharing of narrated fatherly life lessons with second graders creates additional encounters that add to the shared meanings emerging via sacred narrative inquiry.

Data Sources and Relationships

The data sources for this study include both the researcher’s and her students’ (1) autobiographical reflections on fatherly life lessons; (2) interviews of their fathers regarding these life lessons; (3) children’s books illustrated to depict these fatherly life lessons via an

autobiographical event, and pictures created by second graders sharing positive memories with their fathers or fatherly figures. By partaking in this study along with her participants, the researcher draws upon her “insider status” (Banks, 1998) of being a daughter reflecting on her own fatherly life lessons. Data collection involved the researcher first developing her own autobiographical reflection, father interview, and children’s book on a fatherly life lesson, and then guiding her students also to engage in autobiographical reflection, father interview, and creation of a children’s book on a fatherly life lesson. Some of these interviews took place in person, while others took place over the phone or through email, so that the interview process might be mutually convenient based on regional time differences or other life commitments. Research involving personal realms may entail significant vulnerability to our participants, readers, and even ourselves. Such work surfaces capacities to show self-compassion or self-judgment. Sociologist Brown (2012) defines vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure” (p. 34), courageously exercised in search of the “truth” (p. 37). Vulnerability’s Latin root, *vulnerare*, translated as capable of being wounded, is integral to trust-building (Brown, 2006). Temptation to avoid vulnerability leads to an absence of the relational connection we need to cultivate awareness of ourselves and others. Thus, vulnerability exhibits strength – not weakness (Brown, 2012, p. 37) Trust is built one marble at a time in selectively vulnerable moments with those who have earned our trust (Brown, 2006). Thus, this narrative inquiry benefits from the insider information (Banks, 1998) gleaned from each marble of parent-child trust held within the fatherly life lessons of the researcher and her students herein. The relational vulnerability inherent in this inquiry heeds Hendry’s (2010) concern that researchers place “faith” in “methods” rather than “relationships” (p. 75). Addressing this concern, *aesthetic* narrative inquiry seeks to “attend ... fully and be present” via aesthetic expression in connection with the participants and their narratives that “ultimately speak to the human condition” (p. 76).

Data Analysis

This paper takes a *future forming* (Gergen, 2014) approach to data analysis. Thus, analysis takes place in the “viable middle ground” between “traditionalists” who lay their claim to “objective truth” in the name of “progress,” and their critics quick to point out the “multiple ways one might describe what we might otherwise call ‘the same situation’” (Gergen, 2014, p. 3). This data analysis recognizes that the “relationship between world and word is negotiable” and does not tend toward “naïve empiricism” that assumes data-driven findings to be truly objective, nor toward “linguistic reductionism” that assumes theory alone to determine what counts as data (Gergen, 2014, p. 2-3).

In cultivating the relationship between the “world” of the data and the “word” of this paper (Gergen, 2014), the students’ life stories were counted as viable data. In this light, the students served as “gatekeepers” to the data, while the researcher served as the “instrument of the

research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83). As this research instrument, the researcher needed to consider how the stories were told as a ‘performance’ for an ‘audience’ (Coffey & Atkinson, 1998), specifically course peers for feedback and the instructor for a grade. What details were included? What may have been left out? To what extent did the researcher’s own “reflexivity” shape the findings? (Maxwell, 2005, p. 83). Perhaps such information cannot be clearly determined. Thus, ‘pure objectivity’ may be laid aside as a tenable research aim. Moreover, the “participatory” aspect of “working collaborative with research participants to generate knowledge” can enhance the validity of the findings (Maxwell, 2005, p. 84).

Data analysis took place at the paragraph and document level, primarily (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involved the researcher seeing to identify “the major idea brought out” by asking: “What is going on here? What makes this document the same as, or different from, the previous one” (p. 119). Analysis involved exploring data as “discrete incidents” then “given a name that represents or stands for these” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 103). “Comparative analysis” involved exploring similarities and differences across these ‘discrete incidents’ and then shaping theme-based findings to tell a shared story (p. 105). Purposeful sampling (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88) of a few key stories emerged as representative of three major trends in fatherly life lessons resulting from: (1) stern fatherly authority, (2) forgiven stern fatherly authority, and (3) compassionate fatherly authority. These theme-based findings are detailed below.

Findings

As Li and Lamb (2013) assert, it may remain ambiguous or “unclear what is ‘Chinese’ about fathering, or whether the ‘traditional Chinese father’ still exists” (p. 33). At the same time, this study offers trends and discrepancies found across the 17 undergraduate and six graduate student stories, papers, and children’s books in this study. A key theme that emerged is an increasing value to combine fatherly strictness with fatherly compassion as a means for cultivating character in children who not only do what is right, but also develop a heart desire to do *good* for *good reasons*. In this study, most of the 23 papers depicted fatherly strictness as having a loving root, ultimately. Of course, the father who dives in the icy lake to save his son is a compassionate hero. The father who encourages his daughter on a long mountain hike is an empathic coach. Yet, even the father who yells at his daughter to practice the piano, and then pretends to destroy her piano, is portrayed as caring by simply tightening the piano’s screws while teaching his daughter the value of discipline. Each of these father stories falls in a different place along a continuum from stern authoritativeness on one side to empathic compassion on the other. Yet, each story shares a common search for connection with a father who truly cares.

The findings discussed below are organized according to three themes: (1) parental authority,

(2) parental compassion, and (3) authoritative and compassionate parenting to cultivate character. Three students' stories are shared to represent three primary trends in the data: (1) questioning a father's over-authoritative parenting style, (2) overlooking or idealizing a father's over-authoritative parenting style; and (3) benefitting from a father's blend of authoritative and compassionate parenting style. Due to the paper's scope, these three stories are discussed in depth as a representation of other stories.

Fatherly Authority

Huifang references Chua's (2011) *Battle hymn of the tiger mother* to describe her father's authoritative parenting style that similarly did not allow her to play with friends and required her to stay home to study much of her time. After his daughter's admittance to a top university in China, her father takes credit for this achievement, as a mark of his good parenting. Yet, Huifang questions her father's assumption along with his style of parenting. She reflects that primarily strict parenting may result in a child's entrance to a top university, while also leading to many "defects of character." In her case, "spare the rod, spoil the child," became a basis for her father to push her toward high test scores. Yet character development was not discussed. Huifang's questions contrast sharply with Chua's (2011) view that behind every top student there must be a top parent to thank. Yet, this view that does not consider cases in which top students emerge *despite* challenges experienced in their home settings.

Ling offers a different interpretation of her father's authoritative sternness, one that may be more Confucian and filial in its optimistic regard toward her father's anger. Confucius might applaud her choice not to seek to "reform his ways" while he is still on this earth (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, p. 74). She vividly recounts the hot afternoon in Chengdu when she did not want to practice the piano.

The bomb was about to explode. With the last trace of his patience, "play it or not?" he asked coldly. Threatened, the daughter continued to cry with her full strength, longing for just a hint of sympathy. The quick-tempered father could not stand it anymore. "Well then, seems you have already made up your mind not to play. Let me smash it into pieces to end your pain."

Ling reflects on her sudden realization she values her piano and regrets her own insistence not to practice that day. However, the story then takes a twist. After the "destructive sounds that cracked her fragile heart," her father emerges with a fully intact piano that now has tightened screws. He offers the parental encouragement to "perform better this time." Tiffany jumps from these stern words to the final conclusion of her autobiographical reflection that her father maintains a deep love for her.

Ling illustrates the mixed emotions a child can feel toward parental anger, both in the moment and in retrospect. Initially, Ling's account ended with the smashing sounds and restored piano. A silence floated in the air as I sat with her, both of us trying to interpret a father's stern actions, both of us seeking for the "fatherly life lesson," as required by the assignment. I felt in that moment my assignment may have been too prescriptive in requiring a life lesson – other than learning what we might not want to do in the future as parents. I also believed that everyone in the class, myself included, could learn to see our father's actions through a filter of love, even if realized for the first time.

As the instructor, I prompted Ling to explore her story's "jump" further, to try to add reflective steps that came in between "the bomb" and her declaration of her father's love for her. Ling's reflection began to evolve throughout the course. After prompting her to explore the jump from "smashing" to "love" with more reflective rigor, she struggled to add the following reflection:

It was the very first time I came to know the way my father loved me. The hot-tempered man may easily lose his temper, but will never do any harm to me. He has an iron face that appears to be resistant to any sympathy or compassion, but he always leave a soft part in his heart only for me. Love is not always conveyed by positive, favorable and warm words. Sometimes it is also revealed from unspeakable action that even could possibly be misunderstood.

I recognized the sharp contrast between Ling's more optimistic interpretation of her father's actions and Huifang's perhaps more sober-minded disappointment. At the same time, both students exhibit a deep desire to learn from their father's actions, as well as a lifelong search for a fatherly love that they wish to impart to their own children one day, perhaps as imperfectly and *humanly* as their own parents.

In re-exploring Ling's jump from a piano smashing pain to an idealistic fatherly love, I realized this jump may have been made in light of the many other fatherly life lessons and memories that are not shared in her paper. Many of these moments are shared in her children's book, which not only includes the piano smashing, but also afternoons biking together, explorations of cities together, fatherly hugs, his preparation to send her to college, among other precious father-daughter moments.

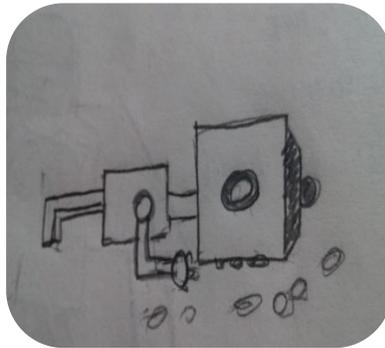
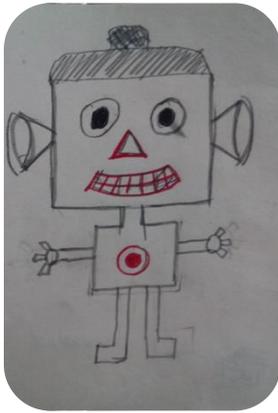


Examining Ling's autobiographical event in light of her children's book, we see a father who loves his daughter, and we see a daughter who loves her father. Her autobiography suddenly emerges as a story of a father working to accept his imperfect daughter, and a daughter working to accept an imperfect father. In their mutual acceptance of the other's imperfections, we discover two humans who choose to overlook the other's failings to see each other in light of one's strengths. Moreover, this "Velveteen Rabbit" view of one's parents seems to encourage such a view of oneself: imperfect yet worthy of love. Examined in broader light, Ling's father emerges flawed and worthy of empathy, even from a child-now-adult who was hurt by these imperfections. Certainly, pretending to smash a piano and leaving a child in tears is not a model parenting method. Yet, a broader view on their shared experiences reveals a deeper father-daughter love that Ling holds onto, even in a moment of acute pain.

In a Facebook era of showing our best side in a snapshot sent to 300 friends, an endangered art is to be known for one's strengths and *weaknesses*, accepted for both, and celebrated for one's growth. Ling reveals a child's capacity to extend such love toward a parent as one grows older and stronger. Moreover, her story reveals a parent's child-like growth to do the same. In this light, filial-parental love is to see and be seen for one's strengths *and* weaknesses, be accepted for both, and celebrated for one's growth. Such empathic compassion is a key ingredient not only for parent-child relationships, but for all relationships.

Fatherly Empathy

Huifang references Confucian classics to merge a fatherly strictness with fatherly kindness. Zeng Shen's (505-434 AD) Confucian classic, the *Great Learning*, asserts that the 'good' father "rests in kindness" (Li & Lamb, 2013) to inspire a sincerity of heart in a child's obedience. Huifang concludes that strictness alone will produce obedience, but not a heart that delights in doing right. She illustrates this lesson metaphorically in her children's book, depicting a robot designed with a "big brain," which weighs down the robot and causes him to crash. After repairing the robot by simplifying the head and building up the body, the restored robot is more balanced and able to function with greater health.



In this, Huifang illustrates her fatherly life lesson to attend to the body/heart as much as the brain, and cultivate character, virtue, and wisdom, along with knowledge. A similar insight may be expressed in the classical *chengyu* (成语), or proverbial Chinese phrase, *shenxin heyi* (身心合一), or *heart/body and mind in harmony*, as well as *zhixing heyi* (知行合一), or *thought and action in harmony*. A Western perspective may view these phrases as suggesting the body/heart must keep up with the mind, or the action must keep pace with the thought. Yet, an alternative perspective places emphasis on the need for the mind and thought to not ask more of the body than what is realistic and good.

A mindful empathy toward the body leads to a more balanced health.

Similarly, empathy is applauded in Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*, in which water serves as a symbol representing the "highest good" in that it "benefits the ten thousand creatures" and is "content with the places that all men disdain" (Waley, 2009, p. 17). Compassion is linked with humility in Chapter 7 when the Sage is described as one whose "personal ends are fulfilled" as he "does not strive for any personal end" (p. 15). Similarly, in Chapter 10, the reader is queried in ability to make one's breath "soft like that of a child" and "love the people and rule the land, yet remain unknown" (p. 21). A Confucian perspective on authority and compassion are more complex, as expressed in Book 6: "The wise (*zhi* 知) enjoy water; those authoritative in their conduct (*ren* 仁) enjoy mountains. The wise are active; the authoritative are still. The wise find enjoyment; the authoritative are long-enduring" (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, p. 109). Moreover, in Book 6, verse 23, Confucius describes a path toward wisdom, or *zhi* (知), as one realized in devoting oneself to morality (*yi* 義), a character depicting the individual (*wo* 我) standing appropriately under a lamb (*yang* 羊). Ames and Rosemont (1998) remind readers of the historical role of lamb sacrifice in Confucian and Western traditions, and the requisite humility to "stand under" this.

Confucius' view on authoritativeness and wisdom, and how they interact, may be difficult to

discern clearly. Confucius places emphasis on *ren* (仁) as authoritativeness, yet literary analyses of the *Analects* increasingly define *ren* (仁) by empathic relationship as much as a hierarchical authority. Ames and Rosemont (1998) highlight other translations of *ren* (仁) as “benevolence” and even “humanity” or a “aesthetic ... human becoming” (p. 48-49). In this translation, *ren* (仁) recognizes humans as “irreducibly social” (p. 48). There is an embodied, relational element that is inherent in *ren* (仁). In this view of *ren* (仁), we might reach a similar conclusion to Li and Lamb (2013) that ideal visions of fatherhood in Chinese contexts increasingly blend authority with compassion to raise children of character.

Authority + Empathy = Character

Chunhua’s children’s story illustrates how compassion might be viewed as a valuable fatherly life lesson, even above propriety at times. Her humorous portrayal of a daughter eager to please her father begins with a young girl seeing her father’s regard for a shiny red car in a magazine. Determined to give her father this gift, she proceeds to paint their black car red. Upon discovering their daughter’s act, her parents choose to respond with gracious appreciation, rather than punishment.



Akin to the lesson of grace illustrated in this story, Chunhua recounts an autobiographical event of her father extending her empathy and grace while on a family hike. When she is tired, he slows down and offers her water and encouragement that the hike is almost done. After becoming replenished, Chunhua regains her strength to complete the climb, while also gleaned the life lesson to slow down and help others who are in need. Grace upon grace, her children’s book and autobiographical reflection demonstrate the positive benefits of compassionate fathering to cultivate character in children. While performance may be something authoritative parenting can push out of children, selfless character qualities, such as compassion and grace, may be more difficult to cultivate. Chunhua’s stories both illustrate how parenting that merges authority with compassion is able to cultivate such character. Many students highlighted character as an outcome of parenting merging authority with compassion. Huifang’s autobiographical story and children’s book illustrate this fatherly life lesson learned the hard way. In recalling the memory of her father returning home after drinking too much wine with colleagues, her father refutes the questions of his family

members by taking credit for his children's academic achievement, and his deserved right to celebrate. Yet, the life lesson Huifang gleans from this moment is the centrality of character to one's education. In this memory, Huifang's high scores became reason for her father to let go of the character that inspired him to bring hot meals to her in high school while she prepared for the college entrance exam. Her school was a one hour bike ride away from their more rural home, a ride that her father made in very cold weather. She is grateful to her father for teaching her to be "diligent ... modest ... a good person who has bright future" and doing "everything" to meet her needs. Yet, she yearns for more from her fatherly figure, as she feels lost in adjusting to new environments, reaching out to new friends, and making her own life decisions. She finally concludes from this event that "good character is more important than good grades."

Huifang references Locke's (2006) wisdom that character should be the primary aim of education, in her conclusion that "a child with the wholesome personality will get more achievements and can adapt to the society easier" (p. 5). She further references Confucian thought to highlight "filial piety, honesty, benevolence, and diligence" as central qualities to cultivate in students. Huifang refers to Li Yuxiu's *Standards for students*, based on Confucian tradition, to contend that academic study should be secondary to character development, particularly filialness, respect for elders, trustworthiness, equity, virtue, and above all, love (Wang, 2008). In this reference to Confucian thought, Huifang longs for support in developing both aspects of Goleman's (2006) *social intelligence theory*, including a *social awareness* that enables a genuine empathy toward others, and a *social facility* that enables building social connection. The fear felt at the thought of receiving a low grade echoes of the 'shame web' that sociologist Brown (2007) describes. What might it look like for Huifang to pursue her academic goals while also maintaining a broader view on life that allows her to view herself in a broader light? Such a view might offer freedom from the accompanying fear felt in placing self-worth primarily in grades. Huifang's work is 'future forming' (Gergen, 2014) in re-imagining Chinese parenting in new ways.

Empathy as Ecological and Cultural

Confucian tradition holds high regard for empathic humility that puts another's needs before one's own. This regard is depicted in the ancient concept of 仁 (*ren*), composed of 人 (*ren*), person, and 二 (*er*), two. This term emphasizes that humans are "irreducibly social" in that an individual "cannot become a person by oneself" (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, p. 48). To be human is to be human together (Kwo, 2010). Merging established authority with compassionate understanding, 仁 (*ren*) expresses a Confucian aspect of fatherhood shared across three "pillars" of Chinese tradition. Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist practices historically have encouraged setting aside personal feeling. This "absence of emotion" is viewed as "beneficial and desirable" (Li & Lamb, 2013, p. 20). Modern interpretations have

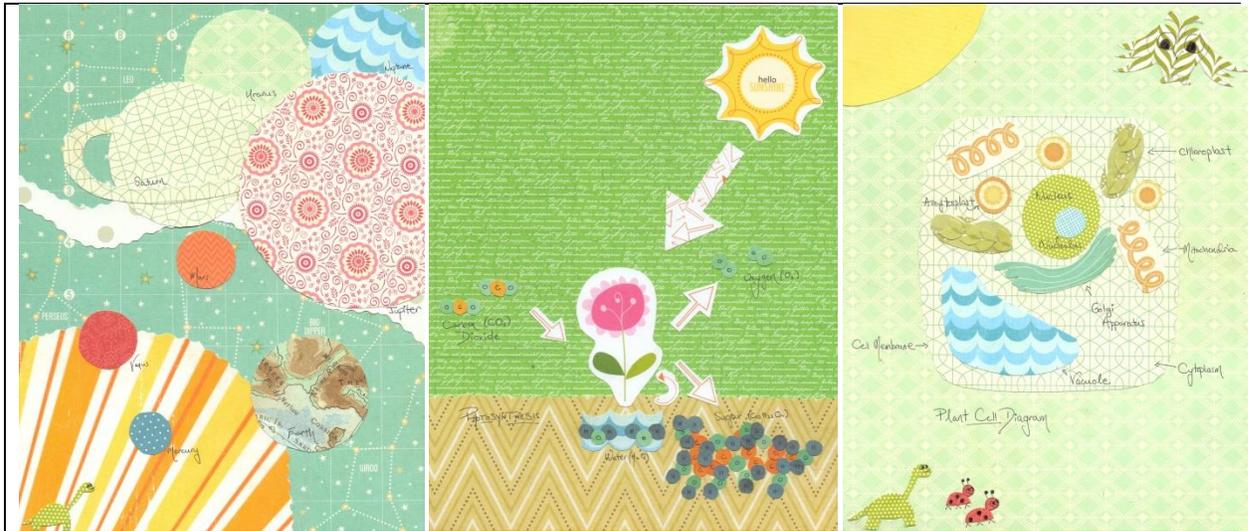
translated 仁 (*ren*) as an “aesthetic project” of “human becoming” through relational growth into a “vital, robust, and healthy participation in the human community” (Ames & Rosemont, 1998, p. 49). In this light, a 21st century Confucian 仁 (*ren*) is not emotionally remote, but can be involved and relational. At the same time, this 仁 (*ren*) connection is tempered with a 禮 (*li*) that “values living in peace and harmony with others” while maintaining flexibility in “principle” and “generosity of character” (Lin, 2009, p. 5–6).

Chinese households traditionally have separated stern authoritarianism and empathic compassion by delegating these two functions separately to paternal and maternal figures (Li & Lamb, 2013). In a modern context, “better educated fathers and fathers who have less rigid attitudes about gender roles appear to be more affectionate” (Li & Lamb, 2013, p. 29). At the same time, many fathers across China maintain a more traditional emotional distance while holding a deep regard for their children. This distance may enable maintaining an authoritative presence (Xu & Zhang, 2008). In 2000, over half of the families in China lived in nuclear – rather than extended – family households (Wang, 2006), increasing the amount and intimacy of father-child interactions (Li & Lamb, 2013).

Laozi’s *Tao Te Ching* presents an empathetic view of water as the “highest good” in benefitting “ten thousand creatures” and being “content” in going “the places that all men disdain” (Waley, 2009, p. 17). Water has capacity to go to disdained places to offer healing and nourishment. Such nourishment is seen literally when Chunhua’s father offers her water when she is tired on their hike, when Qianna and her father offer water to an injured kitten, and when Ben’s father braves the icy cold water in diving into a lake to save his son, who slipped off the bank. Metaphorically, such empathy is seen when Ling searches for alternative interpretations of her father’s anger, and even in Huifang’s work to re-imagine the kind of parenting she would like to practice one day.

Empathy is found within culture and ecology.

Many of the fatherly life lessons presented in this study take place in natural environments, including my own as the instructor. Each of these stories presents nature as both a setting and as a friend by which a child’s character might grow. In nature, parental authority is merged with empathy, effectively. In my own children’s book on a fatherly life lesson, I illustrate a story about three forest creatures learning about the wonders of nature from a fatherly Owl. In this lesson, the wonders of nature point to the great value of the animals themselves, as part of nature. Turtle and her two Ladybug friends attend Owl’s nature lesson, and emerge with a greater desire to care for nature and others.



In this book, the wonders of the Solar System, photosynthesis, and the life of a plant cell demonstrate for Turtle and her Ladybug friends that nature is something to be explored, appreciated, and cherished. In this lesson is the buried insight that they, too, are part of nature and are to be cherished as such. In my own and in my students' stories, ecology is constantly present, surrounding parental exploration.

Louv (2011) defines nature simply as the experience of “meaningful kinship with other species” either “in wilderness or in a city” (p. 52), and emphasizes the increasing need for nature as the missing *Vitamin N* in lives filled with depression and emptiness. As smart phones increasingly intercept attentive in-person connection between parents and children, as well as between humans and our environment, Louv (2011) recognizes that the amount of technology in our lives needs to be answered with an equal healthy dose of Vitamin N, to restore our connection to one another and to our shared ecologies. Wilson (1984) describes this hearty connection as *biophilia*, or the natural human affiliation with life and lifelike process expressed through human cognition, emotion, art, ethics, and cultures. Writing is one way to cultivate connection with ecology and with each other, including across cultures (Gatta, 2004).

Shared lessons that emerged from this project for students and instructor, alike, raise a number of key implications for practice, policy, and research. Each set of implications are explored below.

Implications

Implications for Practice

Cultivating university-level student connection with cultural heritage, specifically through

autobiographical, aesthetic reflection on fatherly life lessons, offers much promise as an institutional practice across international settings. This study encourages participants to share not only their stories, but also the process of creating their fatherly life lesson stories, so that shared struggle might silence “false narratives” that ‘I am the only one who is struggling,’ “a myth that blocks self-compassion and increases isolation so others might not extend their own compassion toward us” (Flowers & Stahl, 2011, p. 97). In developing my own children’s book as the faculty instructor, I shared my students’ work and connected over a key finding that emerged: fatherly authority merged with empathy encouraged rich opportunity for character growth. The illustration of such development taking place in nature was a prominent one throughout the class. By joining in their work, I was able to better guide them through it. Instructor and students alike were able to examine, write, and illustrate our fatherly life lessons in a more appreciative light. In learning to see our fathers as human, imperfect, and worthy of love, participants were more able to view themselves as human, imperfect, and worthy of love. For many students, “the site of a wound” became “the place of healing” when attended with compassion rather than “negative judgment,” which increases the suffering and wound (Flowers & Stahl, 2011, p. 98).

Empathy heals. Judgment wounds.

A similar insight was made by Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest from the Netherlands who experienced the healing power of empathy in leaving his Harvard University faculty position to care for the mentally disabled in a small community in France and then Canada. Many voices in the world tempt us to question our “self-worth,” and tell us we need to “go out and prove that we are worth something,” to “prove to myself and others that I am worth being loved,” to earn acceptance (Nouwen, 1992, p. 40). Yet, by learning to extend empathy to others, we learn to show empathy to ourselves. In this reciprocal exchange, authoritative empathy becomes a shared path toward freedom from societal judgment. This study encourages practitioners across levels and fields to integrate a practice of empathy into our classrooms, including connective empathy across cultures and among humans and nature.

Implications for Policy

This study raises strong concerns regarding the overemphasis on comparative standardized assessments systems. It may be difficult to recognize ways in which comparative grading systems not only are subjective, but also are harmful in negating diverse student gifts. Yet, such recognition is important. Education practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers, along with school counselors and the families they serve, can assert there is far more to a student than a grade and learn to recognize diverse student gifts. Students need opportunity to grow in character and performance. Education stakeholders must envision and implement educational policies that will cultivate character growth in both ‘struggling students’ and ‘high achievers,’

alike. Policies need to be designed not only with a Confucian authoritative mindset, but also with Laozi's empathy. Such growth not only benefits 'struggling students,' but also edifies the development of 'high achievers' who may apply their strengths to the benefit of societal 'others' living on the margin (Kumashiro, 2002).

Implications for Research

Empathy as Multicultural and Ecological

This study encourages future research to explore empathy conceptualizations and expressions across cultures as well as across ecologies – including that between humans and nature, particularly as *glocalization* continues to bring together diverse groups in shared living contexts. Future research might specifically explore diverse manifestations of fatherly care across Chinese and other global cultural contexts. While Western journalist Madigan (2014) and neurologists Goleman (2006) and Siegel (2004) encourage emotive connection between father and child, Li and Lamb (2013) highlight tendency toward stoicism in Chinese society, as found in the Confucian *Analects* (Ames & Rosemont, 1998), while Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*, presents empathy as free flowing as a body of water. Future research inquiries might build upon this study by exploring the pervasiveness of stoicism as the fatherly ideal and standard practice across Chinese cultural contexts, and if this ideal is shared across generations and across urban-rural settings. Is empathy a 'Western influence' or a modern expression of shared Chinese ideals?

Future research collaborations should be wise to avoid characterizing Chinese or Western cultures based on past impressions, but should be open to the possibility of emergent values across global locations. Efforts to identify the "owner" or "source" of emerging 21st century values should be set aside in light of the greater global endeavor to benefit international communities mutually dignified in identifying with, applying, and celebrating common values affirmed across political lines. As Gergen (2014) contends, social science researchers have a central role to play in recognizing, celebrating, and infusing "multiple traditions of the good" (p. 15) at a time when "religious and political conflict threaten the globe" and when "governments are dysfunctional, communities are eroding, longstanding cultural traditions are evaporating, and we struggle with our relationships to our habitat – both natural and technological" (p. 16). Researchers can become *future forming world-makers* in applying capacities for "intelligence and ingenuity" to create "more flourishing forms of living together" (Gergen, 2014, p. 16).

Aesthetic, Autobiographical Inquiry

This study encourages future research that engages students and teachers alike in aesthetic, autobiographical inquiry, particularly to benefit international connection and institutional practices. Aesthetic autobiographical inquiry creates a space for meaningful exploration of

authority and empathy to enhance the development and learning process across teacher and student, parent and child, alike.

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About the Author

Dr. Laura Blythe Liu is an Academic Specialist at Indiana University's Center for International Education, Development, & Research, and previously served as the first full-time international faculty member with Beijing Normal University's Center for Teacher Education Research, where she completed her postdoctoral work on teacher educator international professional development viewed through the Confucian concept of *ren* (仁). Laura's current research focuses on global-local (glocal) civic connectivity and well-being across educational levels. Laura merges the arts and humanities with civics and STEM fields to support students, teachers, and faculty across glocal spaces to engage with cultural and ecological sustainability, social responsibility, and aesthetic angles on scientific study – themes in her children's book series: *Turtle's Treasure*, *Turtle's Tug*, and *Turtle's Turn*.

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