Metamorphosis of Confucian Heritage Culture and the Possibility of an Asian Education Research Methodology

Dr. Jae Park
jaepark@hku.hk
The University of Hong Kong
Faculty of Education
Tel: (852) 9184 8136
Fax: (852) 2540 6360

Abstract
This paper opens with a critical analysis of a paradox in contemporary educational research in and about *Confucian Heritage Culture* (CHC): The assumption that national boundaries coincide with that of a distinct and homogeneous culture, which consistently renders rather homogenous set of educational phenomena, collides against a more widely accepted discourse—culture transcends geographical frontiers and is ever evolving in character. It is claimed that this paradox is due to the fact that a *thin* conception of CHC competes neck to neck with a *thick* conception of it. This paper also addresses the possibility of an *ad hoc* education research methodology in and about CHC and its compliance issues regarding the mainstream Western research dynamics and philosophy of science. Confucian elements relevant to CHC research rationale are discussed to argue that first, a research is inextricably a moral act insofar free actors are involved in it, second, most *sui generis* methodological problems attached to CHC occur in the sphere of ethics and, third, a research methodology that takes into account phenomenographic *variation* could be the best suited to ease emic-etic tensions inherent to CHC-based research.

Introduction

For long time, educationalists have speculated on the role of culture in education leaving no stone unturned. Whitehead (1967) could never have suspected that one day mathematics education, his paradigm for 'specialized knowledge' as distinct from 'cultural knowledge' will also be a subject matter for cultural inquiry (Ref. Bishop, 1988). The related literature is abundant and often incongruous, for instance, education as instrument of cultural struggle and social reproduction (Freire, 1972; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) versus culture as the principal due and goal of education since it should usher the young to understand and live in it (Bruner, 1996). Emerging situated and contextual discourses in education treats culture as one of the most prototypical contexts that permeates all other domains and it is *per se* an independent area of research or unit of analysis. Also termed in plural, *Confucian Heritage Culture* (CHC) is described by education research communities as a group of Asian nation-states with their motherland and overseas population who share Confucian values, which consistently reflect in social behaviour and practices, including academic outcomes and learning approaches (Biggs, Watkins, Comparative Education Research Centre., & Australian Council for Educational Research., 1996; Chan, Rao, & Comparative Education Research Centre., 2009; Li, 2003; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Watkins, Reghi, & Astilla, 1991). Despite its relatively short trajectory, CHC discourse has produced fruitful academic discussions. One such argument has been on the Western misperception of education in CHC partly due to their dichotomous research paradigms that are inappropriate for research in and about (Biggs, et al., 1996; Chan, et al., 2009; Watkins, et al., 1991). It posts a valid concern on whether CHC-based researches can or

should have a distinct process of inquiry, which calls for critical analysis. I put to fore a theoretical analysis on the possibility of an Asian education research methodology and conjecture what kind of conditions such a methodology should meet if it were to produce plausible and fruitful researches, and not misinterpretation-prone, methodologically troubling or of dubious validity.

The present analysis could be considered as more heretical than critical. As an ethnic Korean who has always been exposed to one of the strictest Confucianism in Asia, I am an insider in CHC, yet by training, academic interests and more years of living in overseas diaspora communities, I take an outsider stance. This disagreeing cultural exposure could be both weakness and strength of this paper.

Confucian Heritage Culture, *thin* and *thick*

Although not all CHC educational researches are cross-cultural or international comparative education researches, they share some common methodological concerns. Either refers to the impact of cultural nuances on multiple domains and calls for caution when a methodology is applied cross-culturally. According to Mason (2007), the difficulties associated with cross-culturally applied methodology can be summarized as: (1) the misleading modern construe of 'national cultures'; (2) ethnography usually contains phenomenological data from actors, participants and researcher, with almost no heed to neo-Marxian sort of socio-political critique; (3) ethnographic researches seldom offer the perspective of 'cultural outsiders' (LeVine, 1966); and (4) ahistorical-ness of ethnography in general.

'National cultures' construe relies on an assumption that national boundaries[1] coincide with that of a distinct and homogeneous culture that renders a rather homogenous score of phenomena unique to education, which collides against a more widely accepted discourse that culture transcends nation-state frontiers and is ever evolving in character. CHC has evolved is evolving and always immersed in a context, that is, situated in space, time, history and social structures. Hence, Japanese CHC before and after the *Meiji ishin* are different; post-World War II Japanese CHC contrasts with Korean CHC suffering consequences of the Treaty of Versailles under Japanese colonialism. These two in turn are different from Chinese CHC before and after the *May Fourth* movement and the *Cultural Revolution* of Mao that tried to wipe off Confucianism.

The ways how CHC was introduced and assimilated in different Asian regions are equally heterogeneous. The Korean version of Chinese civil examination was introduced during 10th Century *Koryo* to be definitely abolished during the *Gap-oh* reform (1894) of late *Chosen*, which coincided with the end of formal religion-like Confucianism or *Yu-kyo* (儒教 Confucian religion/code), a term that prevailed in *Chosen* Korea over its original Chinese *Yu-ga* (儒家 Confucian school) or *Yu-hak* (儒學 Confucian study). In Japan, *kami* and *buddhas* were replaced by Confucianism during *Muromachi* period (1333-1568) when people became more this-worldly than afterlife-concerned transcendentalists (Ama, 2005). It would be incorrect, however, to regard *kata* (型 form) that have pervaded all walks and aspects of Japanese life, from trade to suicide code (De Mente, 2005), as totally CHC. Indeed, Confucian share in Japanese *shikata* (way of doing things) is open to discussion. Moreover, inside a kingdom or region reputed as CHC, non-Confucian minorities have coexisted with their unique ways of organizing and leading life, continuously generating self-imageries and stereotypes. Some of these social imageries were not Confucian at all, such as the Uyghurs and Dungans in the Chinese-Kyrgyz-Kazakh borderlands. In some other cases, an opposite phenomenon of entrenchment occurred, such as the case of 'deep-seated'

[1] In his seminal work, David Ho listed only Far East Asian nations, namely China, Japan and Korea and oversea minorities such as Chinese-American (Ho, 1994, p. 286)

educational values of Korean ethnic minority in Chinese Jilin province (Gao, 2010). These facts corroborate the hypothesis of an acculturation process (Berry, 2003), namely 'de-Confucianization' (Rozman, 2002) of some CHC elements, whilst some others have remained rather stable in time, place, history and social structures. I call them respectively a *thin CHC discourse* and a *thick CHC discourse*, not as two poles for a snapshot analysis but as either shore of a flowing river for a contextual analysis. A *thin* CHC discourse as argued here is a socially constructed unity, an evolving category, hence always situationally specific (cf. Lowe, 1996, p. 82) and bears lighter forms of Confucian cultural values with only meagre to modest resemblance to classic Confucianism. A *thick* CHC discourse, on the other hand, meets the following three principles:

- It should uphold some clearly distinct Confucian elements such as *tao* (道 way), *jen* (仁 humanity) or *li* (禮 rite, social ceremonials and conventions)
- These elements should exist across more than one geographical regions and borders, to ensure that they are not folktales
- These elements can be traced back to textual Classics of Confucius or widely recognized Confucian schools

Let me illustrate the foregoing with a case of *thick* CHC discourse. David Ho (1994) suggests that certain Confucian values can explain cognitive socialization of Asian students in America, namely a family-based cognitive conservatism. He argues that much of education achievement of CHC students has its root in an authoritarian moralism and collectivism that can be called as *parental conservatism*. Confucian filial piety is, he claims, the origin of cognitive socialization (chiefly *parental conservatism*) of CHC students and this fact could decode the paradoxes surrounding CHC learners (p. 302). Ho's research work fulfils the criteria for a *thick* CHC discourse: Asian people in several regions and areas share a distinct Confucian element, i.e., *hsiao* (孝 piety), which is textually Confucian. What he does not mention though is the fact that 'filial piety' was a later development in China. In the original text of The Analects of Confucius, *hsiao* appears linked to the concept of *jen* (cf. Waley & Confucius, 1938, pp. 38-39). *Hsiao*'s connection to socio-political paternalism was constructed roughly three to four centuries after the death of Confucius. The association between *hsiao* and the collective sphere occurred in China during *Han* dynasty when rulers instrumentalized CHC for socio-political stability (Liu, 1998). Many elements of Korean CHC were also turned into political tools by the kings of *Koryo* dynasty (918-1392), but it was in *Chosun* dynasty (1392-1910), especially 1650 onwards, that Confucianism became both the political system and a quasi religion dictating a class-based apartheid, arranged marriages between clans and filial piety (only father-son) over conjugal affinity as the basis of family structure (Park & Cho, 1995). Japanese CHC took a non-Confucian-like turn clashing against Buddhism during Tokugawa period when "being intellectual meant being a Confucian [and in] order to be a good Confucian, one had to avoid other religions; Buddhism was thus never accepted"(Ama, 2005, p. 21). Elements of such politicised CHC are, of course, present in our days. Liu Shuxan summarized thus the end-result of the foregoing metamorphosis of CHC and as compared with the West:

> It is...not true to say that the Confucian tradition does not value the individual, as everything must start with the individual. What is lacking is the kind of rugged individualism of the West. Everyone is conscious of a strong sense of responsibility to society; there is no dichotomy between the individual and the society, or the internal and the external. (1998, p. 59)

A *thin* CHC discourse in contemporary education and social science research diverge from classic Confucianism. Hofstede's famous 'Confucian dynamism' (1991) argues that it is possible to identify a long-term orientation and a short-term orientation of Chinese people's social motivation, behaviour and action. His sociology upholds that when

Confucian heritage people foster virtues they are aiming at rewards and 'Confucian dynamism' is a 'dimension of national cultures'. There are other analogous *thin* discourses with the common assumption that national boundaries can encapsulate all cultural nuances of CHC such as 'chopstick cultures' and 'chopstick area' (Funabashi, 1993).

A repercussion of this semantic ambivalence in educational research is that a *thin* and a *thick* CHC discourses coexist side by side in a same research field, in the same body of work of a researcher, in a same book chapter and article.

Methodological Issues in CHC-based Research

The main discussion on CHC-based educational research and the possibility of an 'Asian education research methodology' is on research dynamics. By research dynamics, I mean the research rationale and ensuing action, that is, from deciding a unit of inquiry through choice of research framework to fieldwork and analysis.

A research framework comprises a conceptual component and an outlook, a body of a pre-existing theory or its modified version, also called naively as paradigm, which provides the researcher with an epistemic coherence throughout all the stages of an inquiry. In my view, this and equivalent Western research dynamics and their basic rationale are *sine qua non* conditions to which any CHC-based educational inquiries should pledge. Indeed, CHC-based researchers have no other option but to comply with any of time-honoured 'Western methodologies' because only by doing so their work could get recognition both intra-culturally and trans-culturally. If their researches are to deserve any attention, they should also make sense to, say, Central Asian, African and Latin-American heritage cultures and world research community at large. No one can take lightly Polanyi's *principle of mutual control*, "simple fact that scientists keep watch over each other" (1983, p. 72). If Western misconceptions on CHC and Eastern difficulties to project contextually sensitive self-imageries to the West were real, they would be due to a Western naturalistic coherence's pretence of universalism and its forgetfulness to take into account cultural variations and, Eastern inability to deliver a substantive and convincing discourse. The common fault of either side is an insufficient understanding of cultural variables. Jin Li argues, for example, that a "continual reliance of researchers on Western concepts without considering indigenous or emic cultural meanings and their psychological manifestations" (Li, 2009, p. 42). She adds other three predicaments: (1) dichotomous conceptual frameworks of the West (2) dominant Western individualistic and culture-free anthropological assumptions (3) understanding education univocally as a means to social mobility.

These predicaments, however, do not seem to be exclusive of the West. Asian researchers of both Asian and Western backgrounds do not seem to be especially immune as many of them were trained either in the West or in heavily 'Westernized' academic environments in Asia. Moreover, even those who were not, won't be able to break free from Western philosophies of science, professional ethos and fora, all of which, to be straightforward, converge in to the prevailing Western Anglo scholarly publication bottleneck. This is not to say that these researches have less validity but, rather, to say that they usually use the same dichotomous conceptual frameworks when finger pointing 'Western misunderstandings'. The empirical research series on the "Paradox of the Chinese Learner" by Biggs and Watkins is an example (cf. Biggs, et al., 1996) (Watkins, Biggs, & Comparative Education Research Centre., 2001). If the CHC discourse were a malaise, then it would be a global pandemic affecting both the West and the East.

In order to analyse critical areas of CHC-based research methodology when complying Western research requirements, I choose Karl Popper's *tetradic schema* for knowledge growth. It is preferred over Baconian inductive models because first, not all CHC educational research methodologies must be inductive, such as research on art critiquing education that uses a deductive method—general aesthetic notions allow

interpretation of particular cases (Eisner, 1985) and, second, because it is a research model that can put to rest the preoccupation and ambition for total generalization and total prediction that still haunt some educational research circles. Popper sketched his *schema* like this (1963):

$$P_1 \text{--> } TT_1 \text{--> } EE_1 \text{ --> } P_2 \text{ --> } \infty$$

In plain language, a researcher finds an intriguing problem (P_1); to solve it s/he tries out a first tentative theory (TT_1), after which, errors are eliminated (EE_1) to become aware of an ensuing problem (P_2). This unending process known as *falsification* is ultimately an 'ever discard errors' or 'problem solving by trial and error' heuristics—the quintessence of Popper's philosophy of science, epistemology and social theory.

I now expand the preceding to pinpoint how ethical issues and methodological issues overlap in a research.

The act of singling out a research problem (P_1) from hundreds on the phenomenological horizon of researcher depends on the exercise of researcher's freedom and choice. Bewilderment or sense of wonder[2] is the initial lead to his/her choice of one or more research problems, followed by an act of assigning a subjective relevance and category to each. The act of choosing and delimiting a research problem while dismissing all others, and not changing it lightly without having it tested, implies a free and rational agent and his/her moral act. Ethical-methodological problems are already apparent at this stage, for example, turning research participants into a 'case' or a 'research problem', i.e., the risk of 'problematizing' or 'pathologizing' them (Nind, Benjamin, Sheehy, Collins, & Hall, 2004). In a broad sense, the entire CHC discourse is about 'problematizing' Asian children by categorizing them (e.g., deep or superficial learner) following researcher's mental rubric. At the very start of the research, a process of 'cultural invasion' and disruption of *li* that pervades all aspects of life in CHC societies could take place. "Rite brings out forcefully not only the harmony and beauty of social forms, the inherent and ultimate dignity of human intercourse; it brings out also the moral perfection implicit in achieving one's ends by dealing with others as beings of equal dignity, as free coparticipants in *li* " (Fingarette, 1972, p. 16).

There is more than one tentative theory (TT) or methodology available to the researcher. Is s/he completely free to choose any? Popper's answer is surprisingly illiberal. He says that the *fittest* theory should be chosen. The predicament here is that all available theories are in the still-to-be-tested stage and no test result is known, and there can be neither inner certainty nor outer justification for its adequacy. At this point, Popper's argument takes a subtle turn: "the testing of a theory depends upon basic statements whose acceptance or rejection, in its turn, depends upon our *decisions*. Thus, it is *decisions* which settle the fate of theories" (Popper, 1959, p. 108). The type of *decision* he is referring to is a free decision:

> With the conventionalist I hold that choice of any particular theory is an act, a practical matter...I differ from positivist in holding that basic statements are not justifiable by our immediate experiences, but are, from logical point of view, accepted by an act, a free decision. (Popper, 1959, p. 109)

Researcher's freedom plays a key role in the choice of a theoretical framework and, not only that, freedom is the ultimate justification of why a researcher chooses a theoretical

[2] The beginning of inquiry is *aporia*, the act of marvelling. First described by Plato in his Socratic dialogue *Theaetetus* (155d) and then by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (995a24-b2), *aporia* is openness and active inclination toward truth without feeling comfortable with things taken for granted.

framework and not any other. This is not to say that the naturalistic criteria to choose a theoretical framework are to be neglected. By naturalistic criteria I mean something like, "empirical adequacy, or squaring with observational evidence, consistency, simplicity, comprehensiveness, explanatory unity, fecundity and learnability" (Evers & Lakomski, 2001, p. 503) or any other rational choice of theoretical framework equivalent to that of Thomas Kuhn (1977). Choice of a theoretical framework should be purposeful and rational, yet it ultimately depends on freedom. This is the same ground on which Kuhn, Lakatos and Feyerabend together with Popper have been loosely tagged as *irrationalists* (Stove, 1982). Immanuel Kant's dualism of freedom-moral law provides us with clues to understand the intriguing relationship between free decision and the fittest theory. His second *Critique* states, "freedom is indeed the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom" (1997, p. 4). A vernacular reading could be: Moral law exists because of human freedom, and the reason why we try to know about our freedom is because there is a moral law that keeps our freedom in check. It also suggests mutual dependence between freedom and moral law on existential and epistemological grounds. Then, Kant himself defines freedom quite cryptically towards the end of his productive life, in a remote footnote of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* as briefly as "pure spontaneity" (2006, p. 30). This is the converging point of ethical issues and methodological issues in research, which suggests that critical issues in research methodology occur wherever and whenever any moral interactions take place among research actors. As the stage of tentative theory testing includes research framework formulation, fieldwork, and data collection, it is especially rich in interpersonal relationships. Two issues might be especially relevant to CHC-based research. First, it is just impossible to do a CHC research without any 'research biases', or the other way around, "researchers cannot observe another society or culture a-theoretically" (Mason, 2007, p. 194). To some extent, every research framework itself is a bias. Second, with their *jang* ('讓 yielding' as opposed to confronting), *ch'ih* ('恥 shame' but not quite Western 'sense of guilt for committed fault'), or Japanese *kata* as interpersonal negotiation strategies, fieldwork with CHC research participants could post some perplexing difficulties to Western research. A continuum of etiquette-ethics could silently yet critically distort the research process, everything from planning stage to participant's consent through interview turnout and outcome, even in experimental research (cf. Brashen, 1974).

After testing the chosen theory, research outcomes are analysed. Karl Popper argued that in science, knowledge is acquired by error elimination (EE), the act of discarding wrong hypothesis or false theories, which failed to solve the problem (or, for disciplines similar to sociology and education, theories that failed to upgrade understanding or has no better descriptive power compared with previous ones). In Darwinian biology, one of the favourite examples of Sir Karl, when tentative solution (mutation) does not work, the error elimination turns out to be fatal "for the bearer of the mutation, for the organism in which they occur" (Popper, 1999, p. 5). Although not so extreme, error elimination stage seems not less critical for educational research and cross-cultural comparative education inquiries in particular. Researchers face a moral dilemma at this later stage of research—either discarding errors together with failed theories or dragging them on. The dilemma is whether the researcher could recycle a theory that failed to solve the problem that bewildered him/her at the start of the research project.

Is the field of education invulnerable to this critical view of science and research methodology? Let us take a closer look. A typical education research is already confined to limited number of areas of inquiry (e.g., 'assessment' 'administration-policy' or 'language education') where researchers are usually hijacked by their own specialisms for decades, even perhaps for life. Possible imagery here is that of a furrowed forehead scholar committed to a fixed and small set of research problems and frameworks replicating inbred variables (disciplines, cultures, social sectors and organizations), digging the same pit for life. Many of these researches will claim some

positive and enlightening outcome contributing to a field, or, as meta-analyst John Hattie has recently described, the 'what-works-recipe' or "theories of their own about what works (for them)" (2009, p. 3) in an academic world that is frantically publication-centred and output-dependent, and perhaps a faculty of education becoming a 'faculty of publication' (Ref. Adler & Harzing, 2009). Reality-check, self-criticism and laments aside, whatever is the reason, the fact is that it is not common at all that a second and a third frameworks are tested in sequence, in the same research.

Any attempt to reconcile forcibly the emerging data with failed hypothesis or theoretical framework would mean a regress for the research, if not a full-fledged deception. This wide-awake procrastination in eliminating errors is *akrasia*[3], an enigma of moral philosophy, a failure in self-dominion or lack of drive (free will) to follow the dictates of reason or, in our case, scientific rationality.

Popper says that after EE_1 a new problem (P_2) emerges (cf. Popper, 1972, p. 288). It seems that the term *emergence* is probably a misnomer here since an offspring-problem is not spontaneous but an ensuing version of an earlier one. What has fallen into researcher's lap is then the 'tail' of the first cycle rather than the 'head' of the second. The same 'tail' is the result of the inquiry process that has just ended, because the researcher upheld rational and ethical rigor of scientific inquiry. The transformation of that 'tail' into the 'head' of the second cycle can occur if the researcher freely and consciously decides to take it on, that is, it also has ethical implications. If all right, a second cycle of the *schema* can start, granted that the researcher so wishes and freely.

Emic/Etic Tension in CHC-based Research

My main claim in the foregoing discussion on a prototypical Western research dynamics is that a research is inextricably a moral act insofar free agents intervene and act in each and every stage of it, and not only when, for example, researchers are working on the ethical committee clearance at institutional level. In this section, I examine its corollary: *sui generis* methodological problems in CHC-based research are related to or occur in the sphere of ethics.

Among methodological issues in CHC-based Research, one deserves particular attention—interpretive intervention. When an interpretivist researcher does not belong to the culture *in situ*, s/he should be especially attentive wherever and whenever an interpersonal relationship occurs. Taylor and Waldrip (1999) suggested some practical advises to interpretivist research: A tightly organized initial contact with local participants; prolonged engagement and observation; understanding the connection between ownership of knowledge (information) and social hierarchy; validating interviews with careful triangulation; overcoming language barriers; and keeping the interview process sustainable by being aware of local culture, for example, gender-related misunderstandings. Much earlier, John Berry suggested a three-stage adjustment for cross-cultural ethnography (1969): A first stage of determining *functional equivalence* on either side of cultures under study. A functional equivalence is a social behaviour which "has developed in response to a problem shared by two or more social/cultural groups, even though the behaviour in one society does not appear to be related to its counterpart in another society" (p. 122). Berry's *functional equivalence* bears a resemblance to 'dimensions of national cultures' of Hofstede, who took cue from ethnographers who were contemporaries with Berry (1991, p. 13). Berry's second and third stages of adjustment for cross-cultural ethnography are identifying

[3] Self-indulgence is not the same as *akrasia*, which is a dissociation of rational decision and will:

> a self-indulgent person is deliberately (prohairoumenos) led about [by his desires], accepting that 'I should always pursue the pleasure that's before me'; an akratic person in contrast does not accept this, yet he pursues it anyway. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1146b23-4)

descriptive categories (equivalent to taxonomy or rubrics in education) and creating an adequate measuring instrument.

Conducting education research in CHC requires comparable demands in all interpersonal contact points, while high standards of fairness, trust and acceptance by locals are ensured. All translated research tools such as interview questionnaires, research instruments and inventories should enjoy reliability by verifying their internal consistency and stability in time (Banville, Desrosiers, & Genet-Volet, 2000; Behling & Law, 2000; Brislin, 1986; Vallerand, et al., 1992). CHC-based field research should ideally be in native language, assuming that any translations denote liability.

The *apologia* for 'outsider research' by David Bridges (2001) takes a different approach to the problem. He rightly describes that an outside research could easily be stereotyped by insiders as intrusive, disrespectful and disempowering because "an outsider *cannot* understand or represent accurately a particular kind of experience" (p. 372). But, he continues, outsider research can still contribute to understanding of all parties involved and inhibiting outsider research would only cause an epistemological and moral isolation (p. 381). He justifies outsider research by pointing out that experience of *insider* and its representation by *outsider* are simply different and none has special authority in validity (p. 374) and ends up by adding that an ideal condition for outsider research could be achieved by including cordiality, respect, openness to criticism and so on (p. 384). Although his diagnosis of the problem is correct, I disagree with Bridges's proposed solution on two grounds. First, his conditions are plausible but they belong to the world of prospects and ideals, which cannot be naturalistically coherent and simplest (Ockham's razor) and, second, the chief problem that worries Bridges, namely emic/etic tension, needs a methodological solution and he does not address it. In my view, the core of methodological problems is the disparity between *phenomenon* as experienced and *graphein* (Gk. verb to write) and it lies in a strip between tentative theory stage and error elimination stage. The issue at point is how fairly the researcher represents the experiences. Take the case of children's experience. We educationalists regard them as almost sacred because we know that they are unique, culturally permeated, immanent and non-transferable. When a researcher describes children's experiences, it implies that sense-data undergo a second interpretive intervention (first being that of children's) and this implies in turn an unavoidable distortion. Thomas Nagel (1974) pointed out an epistemological problem of mind-body theorization, suggesting that an alien experience, be it that of a bat or person, is incommensurable for outsiders, and that radical reductionists and physicalists cannot possibly articulate any credible epistemology apart from their own, and perhaps not even their own. A solution to this problem of disparity between *phenomenon* and *graphein*, in my view, is openly and systematically revealing the *variation* between the experience-description of research participants and the experience-description of the researcher. Indeed, this is the sort of gap that *phenomenography* has been trying to bridge for three decades in education (Marton, 1981) (Marton, 1988) (Pang, 2003). What is relevant to the present argument on research in and with CHC is not phenomenography qua pedagogical tool (Marton's original project) but its use of *variation* as research methodology. Only an inclusion of *variation* factor can break the interpretive monopoly of researcher. Emi/etic variation comes into view through behaviour, which in turn depends significantly on culture. A CHC-based educational research should take into account the association between behavioural patterns and culture. When CHC students see a fish tank picture, for example, they attribute the movement of fish to the environment and other animals in the fish tank, whereas Western students attribute it to the fish themselves. Using similar experiments Nisbette et al. (2005; 2001) argued that significant variation exists between the two groups, which seems essential for data analysis in CHC-based research:

> East Asians [are more] *holistic*, attending to the entire field and assigning causality to it, making relatively little use of categories and formal logic, and relying on "dialectical" reasoning. Westerners are more *analytic*, paying attention primarily to the object and

> the categories to which it belongs and using rules, including formal logic, to understand its behavior. (2001, p. 291)

Empirical findings of Nisbette et al. suggest that CHC informs behaviour on the surface, at the same time that it informs underlying metaphysical categories (e.g., accident-substance, essence-existence) and epistemological processes including believes and values. Jin Li's empirical research findings (2002) somewhat corroborate Nisbette's. CHC children's belief on learning and their motivation to learn depend more on the culturally created plus valuation of *te* (德 virtues) such as diligence and personal effort rather than on Western model that values more talent, innate smartness and biological basis of intelligence. It is in this light that parental socialization appears as a powerful influence on CHC children's educational values and attitudes, with epistemological consequences. In my view, research on CHC students should ideally include information/data from parents.

Solving the problem of disparity between *phenomenon* and *graphein* inherent to cross-cultural and international comparative education research won't placate the emic-etic tension completely. The reason is that a *phenomenon* and *graphein* inequality presupposes an intrusion, cultural intrusion and disempowering, without actually solving it. And it is Freire who suggests a solution and candidly:

> "In cultural invasion the actors…superimpose themselves on the people, who are assigned the role of spectators, of objects. In cultural synthesis, the actors become integrated with the people, who are co-authors of the action that both perform upon the world" (1972, p. 147).

The Possibility of an Asian Educational Research Methodology

To conclude, for CHC-based education researches, neither Eastern nor Western conceptual and theoretical frameworks are to be dismissed in a Popperian error elimination fashion. They are not totally *incommensurable à la* Kuhn (1970), furthermore, they clearly share more in common than we would admit at first sight.

The *Confucian Heritage Culture* as an academic discourse is relatively short. An *ad hoc* research methodology in and about CHC would be an impossible were it to attempt bypassing Western research rigor. Yet, Asian education research methodology in and about CHC could be recognized as a particularly nuanced methodology in education subject to certain conditionals:

1. Adopted research problem and theoretical framework should not neglect to articulate a *thick* conception of CHC as opposed to a *thin* conception of it. Without it, calling nation-states by their names should be preferred over nicknaming and bundling them up as CHC;
2. CHC-based research methodology issues are largely ethical issues that derive from interpersonal relationship among research actors. Education research without understanding *re* (Korean), *li* (Chinese) or *shikata* (Japanese) is likely to generate problems, such as low collaboration, unauthentic information, bilateral apprehension and avoidance;
3. Any CHC-based research dynamics and Western research dynamics are not mutually exclusive. *Ad casum* methodological nuances should be addressed in a case-to-case basis;
4. Asian education research methodology in and about CHC should ideally be a methodology that takes into account the phenomenographic variation between experience and description of educational realities, as well as the issue of 'cultural invasion'.

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