

Integration of *Ti-Yong* logic in examining the learning experiences of Chinese international students in Canada

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Summary

Based on the analysis of the narratives of some Chinese international students in a Canadian university, this paper intends to present and promote how the *Ti-Yong* logic or *Ti-Yong* tension can be applied in theorizing studies related to international students from China. This pragmatic philosophy of learning foreign languages has been continuously emphasized and reflected in the concept of “Chinese learning for essence (*Ti*) and Western learning for utility (*Yong*)” over time.

Drawing on Bourdieusian perspectives, sociocultural theorizing, Darwin and Norton’s (2015) investment model, and Chinese *Ti-Yong* logic guiding language learning, my analysis suggests that the current learning experiences of these students should be considered holistically with their past expectations for and understanding of international education being taken into account. In this study, Bourdieu’s concepts of *capital*, *habitus*, *field*, and *sanctuary* are significant ideas in explaining the factors that impacted Chinese students to choose Canada as the international destination for their higher education, what experiences they invest in/divest in, and how they make plans for the future. These constructs are also vocabulary critical in understanding the other frameworks I employ, namely Community of Practice, investment, and identities. I specifically turn to Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment that encompasses identity, capital, and investment. This model offers me a theoretical lens “that explicitly calls out ideology and examines the sociopolitical contexts of schools and communities and the shifting values of linguistic capital” (p. 43). They propose to use “ideologies” to complement their understanding of “identity as multiple and fluid, and of capital shifting values in different contexts” (p. 44). Identity becomes “a struggle of habitus and desire, of competing ideologies and imagined identities” (p. 44). Ideology in the plural form is consistent with the mobile and flexible social order, and expands the concept of investment to inspire more agency and capacity for resistance. This expanded model of investment enables me to integrate the existing language and language learning ideology, *Ti-Yong* Logic, that the participants developed in China. It is this pragmatic philosophy of English learning that has been governing English education policies, curriculum and textbooks, and the popular ideology of English in China.

The stories recorded in this paper are part of the data of my doctoral study on the learning experiences of a group of Chinese international students in the Mountain University (MU) of Canada. This narrative study investigates the English learning and IELTS test-taking experiences of ten Chinese international students before and after they came to Canada to find out how their past and present experiences and imagined futures are interconnected in shaping their identities. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as a story, and a strategy for thinking about as well as approaching that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A premise underlying narrative inquiry is that our lived experiences can be interpreted and given meaning through stories (Andrews, Suire, & Tambokou, 2008, cited in Trahar, 2009). The storied lives of people are described, collected, told, and written through narratives of experience by narrative researchers and participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). As a form of experiential inquiry, narrative inquiry offers a peculiar lens for understanding “the past events of one’s life and for planning future actions” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 7). Narrative inquiry provides me the space to tell my own stories and position myself as a character in co-constructing stories with my participants in this study.

In describing their learning in the Pathway Program and their disciplinary studies, seven out of ten participants of this study ascribed their successful or unsuccessful learning to their instructors and how they were encouraged, inspired, or supported (or not) by them. Their comments on the roles of an instructor are based on the traditional criteria of a good instructor in the Chinese culture, or *Ti* in the *Ti-Yong* logic. They specified some features of instructors that they valued highly. When the participants talked about their unsatisfactory experiences with professors in the MU classrooms, they applied the ideological understanding of good instructors developed in the learning habitus of China. These stories showed that the participants were “governed” by the ideology of learning of their home country when learning in Canada.

Sam and Liushu’s stories on learning in homestay and church settings reflect that their learning out of school is guided by the pragmatic purposes as presented in the *Ti-Yong* logic. Both Sam and Liushu agreed that their homestay experiences were beneficial for their English learning and friend-making, though Sam ended up moving out while Liushu was perfectly happy the whole time. Sam regarded his learning at the homestay as the “authentic way” of learning English; he even thought that his communication with the other international students from China was less important than his interaction with the local homestay family. Liushu’s pleasant experiences with her homestay parents who were originally from Taiwan prove that shared ethnicity and first language makes the process of interaction easier. What Liushu appreciated was the social networks that the homestay helped her to build up, with many opportunities to

interact in English. Liushu understood that her homestay parents intended to convert her to Christianity by bringing her to the weekly fellowship. However, she deliberately ignored their intention for two reasons. First of all, she was not interested in the religion itself. Echoing Sam, Liushu found the Bible stories interesting, and acknowledged the importance of religion in some local communities. But she did not have any intention of becoming Christian; her explanation was that it was not part of her plan of coming to Canada. She had never thought about converting to any religion. Secondly, her homestay parents communicated in Chinese in the fellowships. She chose to hang around with the children in such gatherings because she could speak English when communicating with them

Though Liushu did not attend the religious gatherings and go to church for the sake of Christianity, she was impressed that Christians were nice and willing to help. She enjoyed the company of English-speaking children, and was very satisfied with the combination of Chinese food and English language in her homestay. The pleasant relationship with the homestay family and her friendship with their English-speaking children, especially, exempted her from the frustrations of making friends with local students. After all, Liushu's main pragmatic goals of living with the homestay and going to church with them were to improve her English and make English-speaking friends. Sam's case of running away from the homestay family is different than Liushu's strategic use of the access to the religious group. For Sam, an 18-year-old (when he first arrived Canada) high school graduate working hard for admission to MU, the primary goal in living with a Canadian family and going to church with them was instrumental or pragmatic: to improve his English and learn the local culture.

Considering the long-held emphasis on the *Yong*, or the utility of English in China, in the *Ti-Yong* logic, it is not surprising to see that some participants in this study valued the practical function of English (e.g., improving oral English and communicating with local people) over learning more about religious concepts and ideas: they engaged in religious activities as long as the main purpose of doing so would boost their English learning. When such a purpose was not achieved (as in Sam's case), they withdrew completely.

This paper contributes to the theorization of studies on international students from China. Western concepts and philosophies are prevalent and useful in similar studies; however, a deeper and more thorough understanding of these students may not be possible without knowing the long-held ideas and beliefs like *Ti-Yong* logic/tension that they have acquired before boarding on their journey of international education.

This paper intends to respond to the theme of CSSE 2020 on "bridging divides" theoretically. I hope this paper will draw the attention of researchers and scholars in the field of

comparative and international education to the importance of ideas and concepts in regards to learning and education in general that international students have developed in their home countries and brought about to the host countries for international education. I encourage and invite more researchers and scholars in this field to integrate such theories, concepts, ideas, and beliefs in their studies on international education so that international students could be better understood and supported in the host countries.

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