

What is Global Competence, and What Might it Look Like in Chinese Schools?

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Veronica Boix Mansilla and Devon Wilson

Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA

Abstract

What exactly does it mean to be globally competent in a Chinese context in the early 21st century? In this article, we propose a culturally informed re-interpretation of ‘global competence’ rooted in Eastern and Western traditions. We draw on a longitudinal empirical action-research study of Chinese and foreign teachers working to foster global competence in four Chinese cities. Throughout this work we endeavoured to contextualize a view of global competence commonly used in the US and around the world (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2012; OECD-PISA, 2017) in ways that could inform Chinese educational practice, honor practitioners’ cultural repertoires in a changing national educational landscape, and be informed by state-of-the-art scholarship on Chinese foundational values in education. The formulation proposed foregrounds global competence as a cultivation of self and search to understand and improve the world. It highlights the development of four ‘virtuous dispositions’ – at once cognitive and moral capacities – deemed essential to navigate a more interconnected world: (a) dedicating oneself to understanding the world within and beyond one’s immediate environments, (b) seeking to understand perspectives and relate to others harmoniously, (c) communicating across difference interacting mindfully, and (d) taking action with others harmoniously to help build better societies. Global competence is here viewed as a life-long process of the making of a moral person ‘*zuo ren*’ through daily interactions with the world.

This research stands, humbly, as invitation to advance nuanced and adaptive visions of global competence. At their best such visions might offer a common platform for transnational dialog about the capacities needed to navigate an interdependent world, while honoring the cultural contributions and historical contingencies that can enrich common aspirations for our future generations. It is by capitalizing on the opportunity of context-informed re-interpretations that today’s global educational frameworks might prepare our youth for a world in which hybridity, mix, and complexity are the new norm. The deliberately culturally hybrid view of global competence we propose is informed by a longitudinal record of participating Chinese and foreign teachers’ ideas about global competence education, its meaning, significance, practice and demands, including in-depth interviews, targeted performance tasks, classroom observations, analysis of student work and participatory coding exercises whereby teachers were invited to comment on and inform emerging conceptualizations of global competence for clarity and cultural familiarity.

Keywords

Global Competence, Global Citizenship, Chinese Education, Cultural Hybrid, Project Zero China

Corresponding author:

Veronica Boix Mansilla, Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA.
Email: veronica_boix-mansilla@harvard.edu

Contemporary Shifts in Education

At the dawn of the 21st century children and youth the world over are growing up in an interconnected, diverse and rapidly changing world. An uneven process of globalization involving international trade, digital connectivity, migration and cultural interactions challenges educators to rethink the purpose of education, what matters most for children to learn, how best to prepare them for the world, and how to prepare today's educators to renew their practice in order to be more effective in this new world scenario.

Over the last few years leading educators have called for global and intercultural competence as a desirable outcome of a 21st century education. In 2017 the OECD (OECD, 2017) launched a new framework for educating for global competence at Harvard Project Zero. The framework outlines global competence as a core educational aim for our times and a subject of the PISA test in 2018. A growing consensus on the importance of educating youth for global competence foregrounds important reasons for prioritizing this goal. Global competence education can boost employability as young people become able to investigate and develop a position about an issue of local or global significance, collaborate in culturally diverse teams, and appreciate different perspectives and languages. Perhaps most importantly in today's increasingly diverse societies, educating for global competence can promote cultural awareness and respectful interactions with others. Rapid internal and international migration flows in numerous countries and communities call for new critical understanding of identity, local culture, citizenship and a growing capacity to take perspective, to communicate across differences and to take action collaboratively and creatively to solve social, political, economic and environmental challenges. Global competence education can also prepare our youth to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to lead lifestyles that promote a culture of peace and non-violence, sustainable development, and respect for human rights (OECD, 2017).

Since the *Reform and Opening Up* movement in 1978, China re-opened its doors to the world and has consistently grown as an influence in the international economy, politics and education: in many ways, through progressive international facing policies such as the *Belt and Road* initiative, an initiative exceeding 1 trillion dollars, seeking to expand trade and investment across 72 countries around the world (Kuo, 2018). China is positioning itself to be more internationally involved over time and, as a consequence, faces the need to prepare the next generation of youth for a more interconnected world. The daily experiences of young people in the region are influenced by accelerated urbanization, migration flows, climate change, environmental degradation and a number of other rapidly changing factors. In the face of such changes, youth are called upon to develop a new set of capacities, mindsets and virtues that enable them to contribute to more harmonious and sustainable societies.

Against this backdrop, US Immigration reports an estimated 377,000 Chinese students who studied abroad in the US alone in 2018 (SEVP, 2018). In China, the total number of students enrolled in Chinese international schools more than doubled between 2011 and 2017 (Deloitte, 2018). This number includes students enrolled in: a) foreign international schools established within the territory of China (non-Chinese international students only); b) international divisions or classes established by Chinese-owned public schools (Chinese and international students); and c) private international schools independently or jointly established by non-governmental organizations or individuals (Chinese and international students). In analyzing the educational landscape in China, Deputy Director of the Institute of International and Comparative Education at Beijing Normal University, Teng Jun, writes, 'Global competence should not be seen as a luxury good in the field of education . . . we must acknowledge, with the rise of China, cultivating students' global competence is a necessary trend, and a future direction that China must take. The sooner we acknowledge this, will only be to the benefit of students.' (Teng, 2016) Sharing this sense of urgency, in December

2015 the Chinese government's Central Comprehensive Reforms Commission wrote 'The opening up of education to the world is an important part of our nation's 'reform and opening up' matters. We must raise the quality of education regarding international matters.' (Teng *et al*, 2018). But in analyzing the current context in Chinese schools, Teng writes:

'At the present in China, more and more schools have noticed the importance of cultivating global competence. No small number of schools have a multitude of 'international' activities, but generally speaking, they stay in the initial stages and on the surface level. . . . In the United States, 'global competence' education has already developed a fairly advanced/mature system. But American 'global competence' educational ideas have been produced in a history and context that is different than China's historical and cultural background context. From the perspective of a Chinese educational practitioner, how should we understand the idea of global competence?' (Teng, 2016)

These contemporary shifts in Chinese education beg the question: *What exactly does it mean to be globally competent in a Chinese context?* How can a definition of global competence be enriched by the important cultural variations represented in our planet, including our eastern and western cultural heritage? How can we best collaborate with our peers across cultures to teach for global competence with quality in ways that are sensitive to each context's contributions and traditions? Questions of this kind inspired a two-year collaboration between educators at four schools that are a part of the Weiming Education network in China and researchers at Project Zero, our research institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the United States. A central aim of this project was to examine global competence as a possible aim for education in ways that would be informed by educational and cultural traditions east and west. In this paper, we propose a culturally grounded and internationally informed view of global competence that resulted from a close interaction with teachers in Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Qingdao and Guiyang. In what follows we begin with a brief contextualization of this work, including an example of what nurturing global competence with quality might look like in Chinese schools. We then turn to a comparison of conceptions of learning across cultures, to arrive at our main contribution: a research-informed and culturally sensitive framework for global competence education in China.

The Changing Landscape in the Life of Students, Teachers and Families in China

Rapid global transformations affect children, their families, teachers and their surrounding environment, bringing about new opportunities and new visions with respect to what it means to live a successful and more fulfilled life in our times. Change also increases anxiety. Traditional values and forms of life are revisited, challenged and at times abandoned. Chinese societies' concern with surging corruption has prompted a contemporary re-examination of the importance of moral development of children. The moral, civic, cultural and intergenerational landscapes in which today's children grow in the region are being redrawn, calling on all stakeholders in education to navigate new levels of cognitive, social and moral complexity. Unique to the Chinese context is that anxiety abounds regarding the social consequences of the one-child policy and, more recently, in an age where the policy has been removed, but a majority of parents choose to raise only one child—where children are often under the close scrutiny of multiple adults, placing the possibility of social mobility aspirations on the shoulders of the children. The effects of raising children in such an environment are frequently debated amongst parents and educators, many of whom fear that the rise of single child 'little emperors' has led to a generation of children who are more focused on their personal needs than on the needs and wants of others.

Young people, parents and educators are learning to find their way in a society where notions of success in life, or a life worth living, are being debated. Efforts to prepare Chinese children for the world abound, and strategies about how to do so effectively remain sparse. Yet one thing is clear: throughout history and deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy and social theory is the assumption that cultivating moral capacities enables people to achieve social and moral excellence, which in turn will give rise to better future societies. Within this worldview, education plays a tall role. Chinese ideas about social change and well-being are foregrounded in education's capacity to cultivate self-perfection (Xu, 2017). According to Jin Li (2012), a distinctive feature of Chinese learning and education is that 'learning and knowing are geared not to the external world, but to one's self as a goal of personal striving', based on the Confucian cultural foundations of perfecting self/self-cultivation socially and morally in order to take the world upon oneself (*yi tianxia wei ji ren*). In this sense, China offers a uniquely fertile context to understand how children grow up in contested cultural, moral and civic terrains, and how emerging hybrid pedagogical approaches might capture traditional and modern aspirations for children and respond with nuance and complexity to the demands of our changing times.

Responding to the demands of an interconnected world, China is reviewing the structure and goals of its education system. In 2016, Beijing Normal University published a 21st century key competencies framework that has since informed the Chinese Ministry of Education's proposed reform. The reform seeks to invite more flexible forms of learning. The testing-based structure which essentially determines 100% which universities Chinese students attend is under scrutiny, and prominent high-performing education systems in cities such as Shanghai have reduced the emphasis of the college entrance examination. The goals and purposes are shifting as well; in recent years, the Chinese Ministry of Education has placed cultural competence as a central goal to the pursuit of language apprehension. A call for 'modernization' of the educational system includes the search for open exchange with other countries and the promotion of students' global competence (Su, 2015). Within this shifting educational landscape, schools play an essential role in providing opportunities for young people to cultivate themselves, including the habits of mind, virtues, and capacities that will prepare them to understand how the world works and to find their place in it; this includes cultivating students' capacity to take action and contribute to personal and societal wellbeing. How might teachers nurture these capacities, and what might they look like in a classroom setting?

A Vision for Globally Competent Students

In the Shenzhen first grade classroom of teachers Vicky and Jing, students are learning about children in rural areas whose lives unfold under much more challenging conditions than their own. They explore a picture of a child, asking students to imagine how this student must feel in this picture, and what else they want to know about the context; and reflect about the different perspectives and questions that were raised. They learn that the picture is actually of a resilient boy from a rural area of northwest China who worked and saved money over several months to purchase a soccer ball for his school. These children revise their initial views of the poor as defined solely by their economic condition. 'How can we support friends who live in poverty in some regions of China and other parts of the world?', 'And most importantly what do we learn from them?', the children inquire.

As the example above suggests, globally competent students prepare for complex societies and a global economy through their persistent efforts to understand the world in which we live, and act in ways that improve the wellbeing of societies. These students learn how to *investigate matters of global significance*. They ask, for example: Is social media making direct communication more challenging among young people only in China, or among young people all around the world?

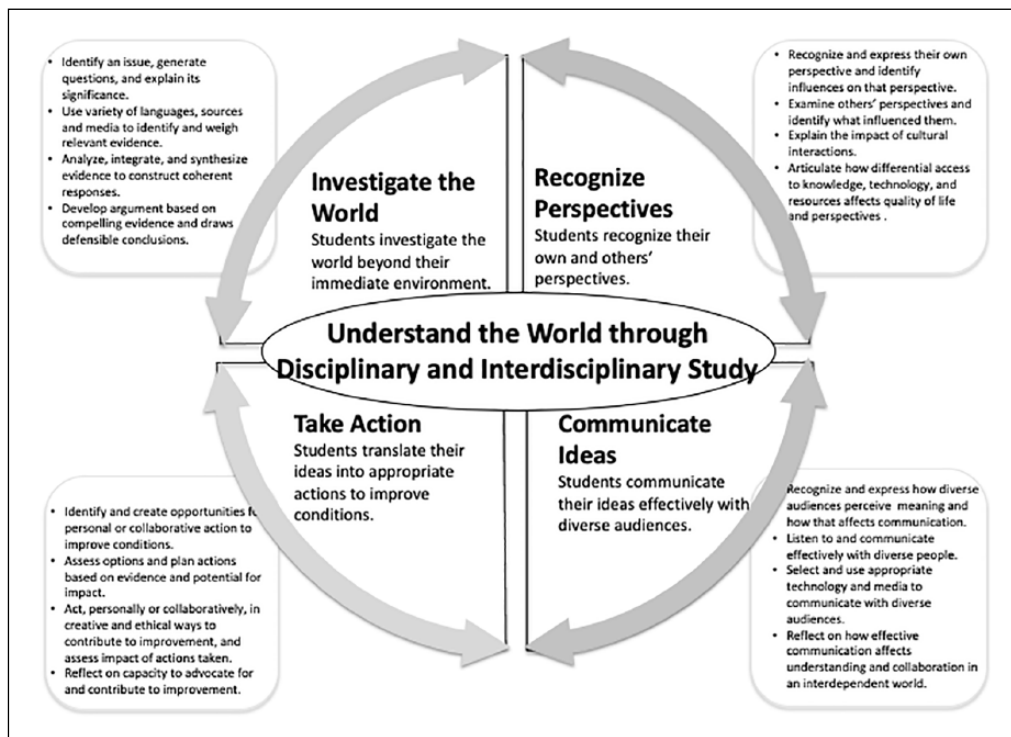


Figure 1. Interaction between dimensions of global competence.

How are the products developed in Shenzhen shaping the lives of people in our city and in other cities of the world? What challenges do migrants face when arriving at a new megacity and what policies can help us integrate them better? How can I introduce myself, my family, my school and my culture to others, using English as our common language? Engaging complex and pertinent questions of this kind can encourage students to *recognize their own and others' perspectives* and *communicate across differences*. For example, students may learn to understand themselves and others, and to bridge cultural, linguistic, economic and religious divides which are essential capacities to live and work in dynamic societies and interconnected global societies. Furthermore, becoming full participants in such societies also requires that students learn to *take action* to improve conditions around them as local, national and global citizens. They will need to learn to identify opportunities for productive action, as well as to develop and carry out informed plans. For example, students may learn to design and promote products to succeed in a digital world or develop an awareness campaign on the environmental consequences of consumption habits in their city. Prepared students, this framework suggests, view themselves as informed, thoughtful, and effective citizens and workers in changing times (OECD, 2017; Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). How can we then define global competence and how can we nurture it among today's youth?

In its simplest form, global competence could be defined as the *capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global and intercultural significance* (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; OECD, 2017). Specifically, globally competent students have the following four capacities. They are able to (see Figure 1):

1. **investigate the world** beyond their immediate environment, framing significant questions and problems and conducting well-crafted and age-appropriate research.
2. **recognize perspectives**, others' and their own, articulating and explaining such perspectives thoughtfully and respectfully.
3. **communicate ideas** effectively with diverse audiences, bridging geographic, linguistic, ideological, and cultural barriers.
4. **take action** to improve conditions, viewing themselves as players in the world and participating reflectively. Figure 1 depicts the dynamic interaction among these dimensions of global competence and serves as the foundation for our work.

What Kind of Learning Do We Seek?

There are a few key premises associated with global competence that build on the kind of learning necessary for preparing our youth for the world (Boix Mansilla, 2016). First, global competence is cast as a capacity to *understand* – that is to use disciplinary concepts, theories, ideas, methods or findings in novel situations, to solve problems, produce explanations, create products or interpret phenomena in novel ways (Boix Mansilla & Gardner, 1999; Wiske, 1999). With its focus on disciplinary and interdisciplinary understanding, this definition embodies *deep subject matter learning*.

Second, if 'understanding' speaks of depth and flexibility *in subject matter expertise*, 'global competence' as a *disposition* speaks of depth in terms of student ownership and transformation. Thinking dispositions, our colleagues at Project Zero have proposed, involve the ability to think with information, the sensitivity to opportunities in the real world to do that, and an inclination to do so over time (Perkins, Tishman, Ritchhart, Donis, & Andrade, 2000). Dispositions are about the 'residuals' of learning beyond formal contexts (Sizer, 1984); they are about the 'kind of person' a student will become (Boix-Mansilla & Gardner, 2000). Focusing on global dispositions directs our educational efforts to nurturing young people's habits of mind – ie their orientation towards globally competent thinking and behaviors: *learning that is long-lasting*.

Finally, as global competence focuses on issues of global significance and action to improve conditions, learning must be visibly *relevant* to students and the world. When significance is considered, global competence curricula become a call for authenticity, for carefully looking to the contemporary world for topics that matter most to examine (Boix-Mansilla, 2008; Perkins, 2015; OECD, 2017). In sum, preparing young people for today's world does not imply adding more continents or rivers to our already full curriculum. Rather, it requires that we foster a kind of learning in, about, and for the world that is deep, relevant and long lasting.

Situating Global Competence in Chinese School Contexts

Generalizations are always dangerous, and a careful recasting of global competence in Chinese schools must begin by recognizing that schools vary, regionally, institutionally and culturally. Schools like other institutions are made by the people, practices, norms and interactions that shape them. Furthermore, cultural practices do not remain isolated and static. Rather they influence one another and change over time. Still, as Brown University's Jin Li points out in her book 'Cultural Foundations of Learning: East and West' (Li, 2012), despite the massive influence of the West on Chinese society and education, and adherence in many ways to the high school and college structure from the west, eastern and western education systems still remain vastly different, primarily due to difference in culture which directly feeds into implied differences in the purpose of education.

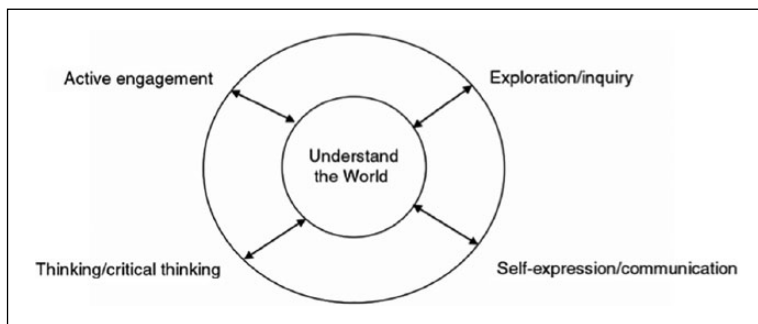


Figure 2. Assumptions about learning (Li, 2012).

Frameworks such as the global competence framework outlined here have the power to provide a relatively shared platform to focus educational efforts across contexts. They concentrate our attention on specific educational aims and provide a shared language with which to coordinate practical efforts. At the same time, each school, context and region will re-interpret such frameworks through local lenses adding meaning and local value to the ideas outlined. Early in our collaboration we recognized that to be effective in our work with teachers and leaders in Weiming schools, the global competence framework would need to be re-interpreted in a culturally informed way. We recognized the need to refine a central tenet of the framework: a view of education as a vehicle to invite students to ‘understand the world.’ We also noticed that while assuming social and moral dimensions of learning, the framework itself visibly foregrounded a ‘mind-based’ and ‘agency-based’ orientation to learning. It featured processes such as exploration, inquiry and critical thinking, as well as self-expression/communication and active engagement in the world. In a sense the framework echoed relatively western assumptions about learning depicted by Li (2012) in Figure 2.

Such an emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge can be seen in the mottos of western universities such as *veritas* – truth (Harvard University), or *fiat lux* – let there be light (UC Berkeley). The goal of ‘understanding the world’ is central to the global competence framework which places the goal of ‘understanding the world through disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches’ in the center of the framework. In the East, education is intertwined with the goal of achieving ‘self-perfection’. Achieving self-perfection requires that one dedicate oneself to learning, and cultivate highly sought-after values in Chinese society including earnestness, diligence, concentration, endurance of hardship, and perseverance. Such assumptions about the purpose of education are depicted by Li (2012) in Figure 3.

Such ‘value-based’ focus can be seen in the mottos of Eastern universities: *Strengthen self ceaselessly and cultivate virtue to nurture the world* (Tsinghua University); and *Diligence, rigor, truthfulness, and creativity* (Beijing University) (Li, 2012). In a discussion about education and his emphasis on virtues, Chen Yi Dan – founding member of Tencent and the founder of the Yi Dan Education Award – argued that ‘virtues should be the core of education’ (Chen, 2018). Similarly, in response to being asked what we should be teaching students in the 21st century, Alibaba CEO Jack Ma’s first response was ‘values’ (World Economic Forum, 2018)

In our own examination, the integration of cognition, morality and virtues stood tall among Chinese teachers’ characterization of their global competence aspirations for their students. When asked about the characteristics they associated with globally competent Chinese students, the qualities of diligence, perseverance, positivity, and honesty were amongst the top 15 attributes listed by

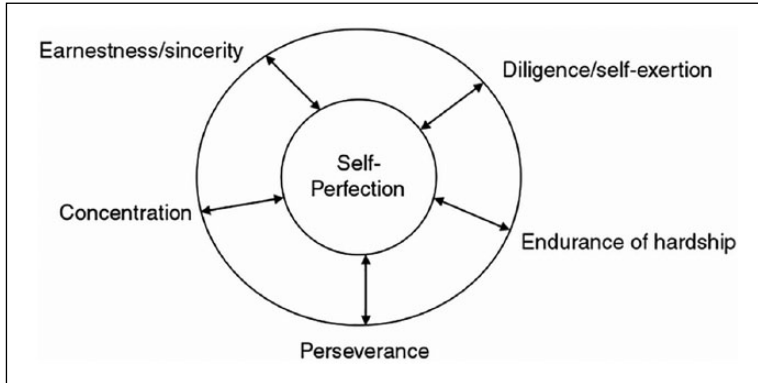


Figure 3. Assumptions about the purpose of education (Li, 2012).

Chinese teachers. These values were not among the top attributes listed by their Western educational counterparts (typically from the US, or UK), whose depiction of the students with high levels of global competence foregrounded qualities such as curiosity, open-minded, seeking opinions and passion.

Perhaps not surprisingly when referring to future directions in education, Chinese teachers also emphasized creativity, collaboration, communication/self-expression and problem-solving capacities/critical thinking skills as areas in which they would like to work to prepare their students for the future. They do so in alignment with national educational agendas that see these attributes as necessary for Chinese students if they are to participate fully in global economies and societies. The ‘4 Cs’ were included among the top 6 responses as teachers described the skills students would need, echoing a more general concern with a current education system viewed as preparing youth to be ‘test-taking machines’ and ‘rote-to-death learners’, and a broader call for an education that enables youth to become ‘directors of their own learning’ and ‘equal partners’ (Su, 2015 p10).

Informed by the available literature on Chinese conceptions of education and the lessons gleaned from our work with participating teachers, we set out to re-interpret the global competence framework. Our goal became to do so in ways that capture elements of the deeply rooted Chinese historical traditions and values, while responding to today’s contemporary efforts of modernization. Resulting from this work is the beginning of a more nuanced vision of global competence, enriched by the intersection of eastern and western educational aspirations. A complex re-interpretation, such as the one we here attempt, is marred by the possibility of over-emphasizing some aspects of learning and culture, leaving other essential ones unaddressed. We share our proposed re-interpretation with humility to invite a conversation that will help educators in and beyond the Chinese schools in which we worked to refine their already growing capacity to distill the most desirable and context relevant aspirations and practices, in order to prepare our youth at the intersection of Eastern and Western oriented worldviews.

Rethinking Global Competence Through a Chinese Lens

Embracing Chinese cultural heritage respectfully and effectively involves reaching a balance between two kinds of efforts. On the one hand is the effort to adapt the global competence framework and associated pedagogical approaches to render them closer to Chinese teachers’ mindsets, and thus create greater harmony with their traditional values, aspirations and practices: in other

words, to position the ideas within teachers' zone of proximal development. On the other hand, re-interpreting global competence outcomes and pedagogies in a Chinese context calls for a critical engagement with traditional Chinese teaching practices, weaving in new aspirations such as that children communicate their point of view more readily or take action to change conditions in the communities around their school and beyond. Ultimately, our aim in embracing Chinese cultural heritage is to advance a hybrid articulation of global competence that stands as an improvement when compared to Western and Eastern views considered in isolation. To illustrate this point, in the proposed contextualized view of global competence below we have sought to move from an almost exclusively cognitive orientation characteristic of our original view, to a language of virtues that does not separate cognition from morality, which we see as being a closer embodiment of Chinese teacher mindsets and a contextual improvement on the original definition. At the same time, the accompanying pedagogical tools call upon teachers to invite students to cultivate virtues through independent thinking and moral considerations in a way that places the learner in his/her unique and full capacity at the center of learning.

The reconceptualization of global competence we propose is informed, on the one hand, by the scholarship on Chinese traditions and practices in education including comparative work such as that of Jin Li. It is also the result of close analysis of data stemming from (a) a longitudinal record of teachers' ideas about global competence education: its meaning, significance, practice and demands, (b) a series of interviews in which teachers reflected upon their practice, and (c) data collected through specific performance tasks whereby Chinese and foreign teachers were invited to craft the profile of a globally competent graduate, compare cultural perspectives, align themselves and their values along cultural continua, and 'code' our emerging reconceptualization of global competence text for clarity and cultural familiarity. Finally, our examination is also informed by (d) observation of classrooms and teachers' designs.

What does it mean to be globally competent in the Chinese context? We have come to define global competence in this context as follows. Global competence is:

'The life-long process of cultivating oneself, one's human capacity and disposition to understand issues of global and cultural significance and act towards collective wellbeing and sustainable development.'

In the formulation proposed, the life-long cultivation of self speaks to the development of virtues that embody cognitive capacities and moral values as essential qualities for citizens of a more interconnected world. Global competence is here viewed as a process of the making of a moral person 'zuo ren' through our daily interactions with the broader world: a world now complexified by globalization, technological connectivity and environmental change; a world of growing diversity and interdependence. The making of a globally competent person is imbued with moral and cognitive growth. It involves the cultivation of intellectual and moral human potential and dispositions toward inquiry, compassion for others, courtesy and care in interactions, and a moral compass rooted in human dignity and social harmony that informs our individual and collective actions in the world: actions that respond to the imperative of constructing more harmonious societies and supporting more sustainable development.

Emphasized in this view is attention to process when cultivating one's capacities through dedication and committed work and a 'cultural preference for long term temporal frames' (Boix Mansilla *et al*, 2013). Beautifully put by an old Chinese proverb: 'It takes ten years for a tree to grow to its full height, but a hundred years for a human to grow to its full maturity' (*shi nian shu mu, bai nian shu ren*) (Xu, 2017). In line with the metaphor, we included a natural element to the framework, symbolizing the long-term nurturing that is required to make the seeds and sprouts of global competence grow (Figure 4).

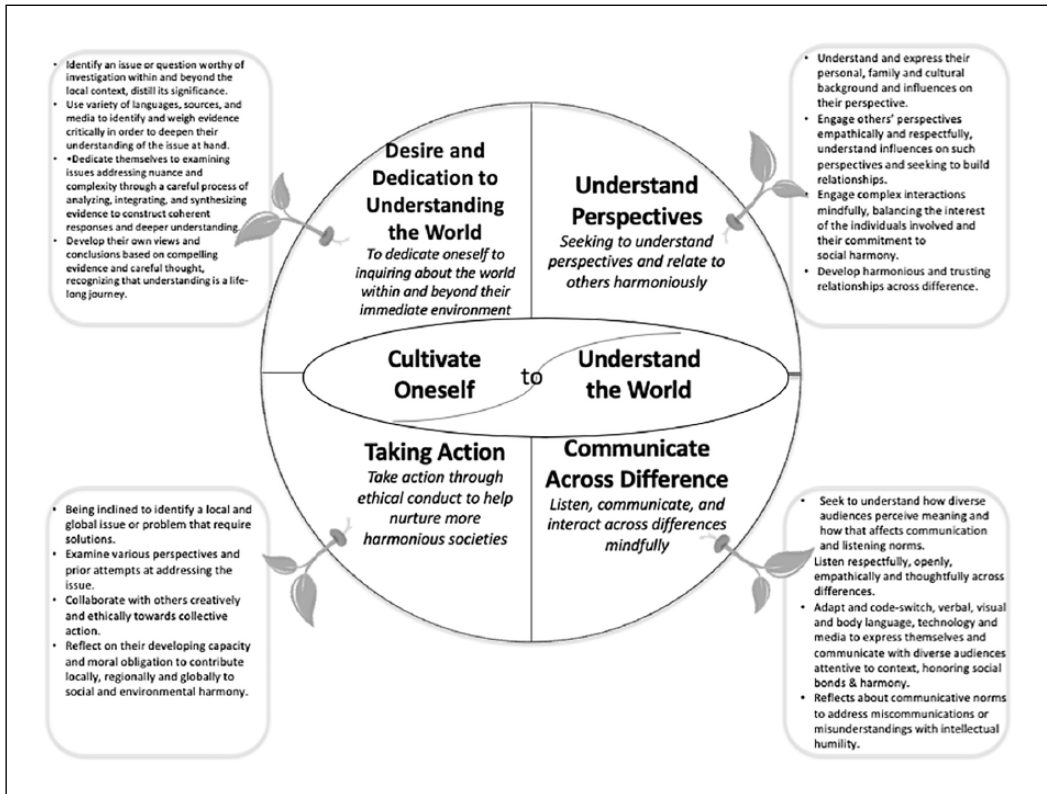


Figure 4. Long-term nurturing of global competence.

Desire and Dedication to Understanding the World

To dedicate oneself to inquiring about the world within and beyond one's immediate environment.

Chinese education often implicitly and explicitly puts emphasis on nurturing students' capacity to 'establish their will' to learn and study, highlighting the value of 'endurance of hardship' and 'diligence' in pursuit of one's learning (Li, 2012). 'Endurance of hardship' and 'diligence' are highly prized values in Chinese society and necessary in the pursuit of perfecting one's human self. Many teachers valued the endurance of hardship in the preparation of the test, echoing traditional Chinese beliefs that mastery of core writings and information directly led to a person's development and ability to lead, in a righteous manner.

References to diligence and hard work emerged frequently in our work with Chinese educators, who often favored the process of engaging and sustaining a long term investigation over short term extrinsically motivated projects such as playing a game in class to get at the right answer first. If developing the capacity to investigate the world is essential in the formation of a globally competent person, doing so in this context highlights the importance of students' desire and commitment to understand the world.

Interestingly, speaking about understanding the world and the issues of today calls for an important and productive shift in focus for parents and teacher. No longer does it suffice to prepare Chinese students to learn English and be ready to study in Western countries. Rather, the emphasis is on understanding the large global issues shaping lives on our planet, from migration to trade,

Desire and Dedication to understanding the world

To dedicate oneself to inquiring about the world within and beyond one's immediate environment

- Identify an issue or question worthy of investigation within and beyond the local context, distill its significance.
- Use variety of languages, sources, and media to identify and weigh evidence critically in order to deepen their understanding of the issue at hand.
- Dedicate themselves to examining issues addressing nuance and complexity through a careful process of analyzing, integrating, and synthesizing evidence to construct coherent responses and deeper understanding.
- Develop their own views and conclusions based on compelling evidence and careful thought, recognizing that understanding is a life-long journey.

Figure 5. Desire and Dedication to understanding the world.

from environmental threats to global governance, from the role of media to the place of literature in culture. These larger themes appeared not only in a world far away but also right around the schools where we worked, shaping the opportunities, lifestyles and needs of human beings around them. So the first disposition to be nurtured among our young is thus a dedication to understanding the world—to dedicate themselves to inquiring about the world within and beyond their immediate environment (see Figure 5).

Classroom Perspectives: Desire and Dedication to Understanding the World

In Hou Tianyou's 7th Grade Chinese class in Qingdao, students are involved in a discussion about the poem 'On the Love of Lotus' (*Ai Lian Shuo*), a classic from the North Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD). Central to Hou Tianyou's explorations are the virtues symbolized through the poem 'On the Love of Lotus', and the principles and attitudes that one should carry in facing the world:

'Of all the flora across land and water, there are plenty to adore:

Tao Yuan-Ming of the Chin dynasty admired only chrysanthemums;

Since the dynasty of Li Tang, the peonies have been popular with the masses.

I, for one, love only the lotus – for the way it emerged untainted from the muck'

(Excerpt from *Ai Lian Shuo*, Zhou Dunyi)

Hou Tianyou asks students to look closely at the poem before sharing what they 'think about the passage' and what 'questions were coming to mind'. Students' thoughts included comments such as:

'The author thought the peony and chrysanthemum represented society at the time'

'To the author, a central positive virtue of a sagely person was to emerge untainted from the muck, to not give into popular ways and what may be associated with 'wallowing in the mire'

‘Chrysanthemum = hermit, peony = the elite, lotus flower = the sage, the author wanted to compare these flowers in part to emphasize the positive aspects of sagely virtue’

Students raise questions about the text and its relevance to society today and in past history:

‘What was society like in the Northern Song Dynasty that caused the author to have these thoughts about virtue?’

‘Is there any value to studying the reclusive nature of the chrysanthemum?’

‘What are the different values of the lotus and peony flower?’

After this initial discussion, Hou Tianyou makes a fundamental connection between the children’s analysis and the world. He challenges them to reflect and discuss why the virtues of the lotus are important to oneself, to society and the world. Among the various responses students offered, he particularly appreciated one student’s statement that ‘Each person in the world is like a flower, each flower has a set of virtues, and people are the same’. In this case, the investigation of a small yet deeply culturally meaningful symbol in a poem has given way to a more universal understanding and appreciations of human diversity.

By sharing their own interpretations and questions of this traditional poem in an open-ended way and connecting it to the world beyond their immediate environment, students learn to value their cultural roots and find new global contexts for interpretation. In reflecting about his purpose for this initial exploration, Hou Tianyou wrote ‘from the age of ancient Chinese literature onwards, there is a tradition of reflecting on the nature of plants, unearthing and refining all of their wonderful moral fibers, and making the pursuit of this moral fiber to be one’s pursuit. . . . I hope that students are able to understand the idea of ‘emerging untainted from the muck’, this noble moral and at any time and at any place they should stick to the pursuit of their inner heart, and not to let the influence of the outside sway one’s will’. In this exploration of the lotus flower, a visible symbol of Buddhist roots in Chinese culture, cognitive and moral dimensions of learning are inextricably intertwined. Students investigate the poem meaningfully, carefully processing and integrating information concerning the cultural meaning of flowers and examining personal, local and universal significance of such virtues. They are asked to extend their thinking to different contexts, considering the impact pursuing high virtues has on oneself, society and the world, reflecting on the long-term process of becoming a more virtuous person and appreciating virtue in the larger world over time.

Understand Perspectives

Seeking to understand perspectives and relate to others harmoniously. Understanding others and relating to them harmoniously is a centerpiece of Chinese collectivist culture. Within this relational tradition, individuals tend to be viewed as inseparable from a world structured by social relations. In this context, being globally competent involves becoming able to care for and understand others and to live one’s life socially and morally, with respect for human dignity and social harmony amongst others. Against the background of the concerns over the psychological impact of the one child policy on youth, attention to young people’s capacity for empathy – for ‘feeling into another person’s heart’ (*jiang xin bi xin*) – is at a premium as an aspiration for parents and teachers alike (Xu, 2017).

Learning to take perspective and relate to others is inherently a social and moral act within a Chinese tradition (Li, 2012). Families and society expect students to become able to foster their capacity for social interactions. Primary relations such as those between family play a central role

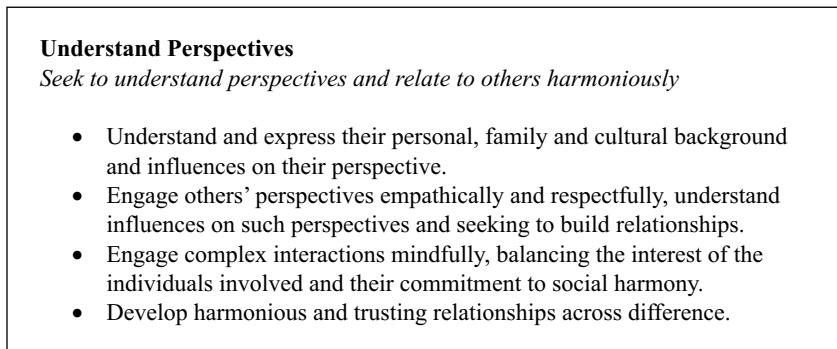


Figure 6. Understand Perspectives.

in the formation of identity, upbringing and throughout life for Chinese youth. Yet today's more diverse, ever-changing and culturally hybrid world presents a greater challenge to the developing child. In discussing the development of global context in relation to Chinese traditional values, Professor Teng of Beijing Normal University points out that, for 5000 years, Chinese culture has sought to approach differences by 'seeking the commonality and ignoring differences' (*qiu tong cun yi, he er bu tong*) (Teng, 2018). These idioms were also consistently underscored and reinforced by teachers involved in our learning communities. While the disposition to seek connections with others may serve as a strength in the act of perspective-taking, as educators preparing students for increasingly diverse and interrelated societies we should also encourage students to be patient in understanding differences. It is a challenge to learn to understand the lives of others who are very different from themselves, and to do so mindfully, with compassion and respect for human dignity. Learning to take perspective is part of the larger effort to learn how to navigate the social world, how to get along with others in school, and in a real world of increasing diversity and complexity-striving for individual self-perfection and contributing to the harmony of the social environment of which they are part.

Seeking to understand perspectives also calls for a certain degree of mindfulness and self-awareness pertaining to the cultural orientations we all hold. Globally competent Chinese students are able not only to understand others beyond their cultural environments but also to share their own culture, beliefs, traditions and point of view, their own individual and collective story, so that others can come to understand and relate to them as well. In this sense students may seek to understand perspectives and relate to others harmoniously by developing dispositions shown in Figure 6.

Classroom Perspectives: Understand Perspectives

An estimated 92% per cent of people in China belong to the 'Han' ethnicity. For many students, this results in lack of opportunity to participate in consideration of complexities and realities of living in a 'multi-racial' society. In Jacob's 10th grade Biology class, at the start of a unit on race and genetics, he was surprised to discover that many of his students did not find the recent appearance of a 'black faced' Chinese actor to be offensive in the nationally televised spring festival gala that year. Jacob asked students to take a perspective as a black person from an African nation. 'Given what you see and know at this time, what do you think this person might experience, feel, believe or know?' Students' responses ranged greatly from 'African people see the video. They will think China and Africa are friendly. They help each other.' to 'I think Africa would think Chinese could open their mind, 'cause many Chinese do not know what the African people are like.'

Such comments open up further discussion about the context of portraying others in the arts, risk of stereotypes across cultures, and what influences perceptions of differences between groups of people. When asked ‘Given your exploration of this perspective so far, what do you notice about your own perspective and what it takes to take somebody else’s?’ students write, ‘Africa and China’s cultures are different. Using language incorrectly (broad generalizations, dismissive terms) is an important problem to solve. We (need to) talk with Africans to understand their culture, traditions and so on.’, and ‘We need to respect them.’ Finally in response to the question ‘What else would you like (or need) to learn in order to understand this person’s perspective better?’, students respond ‘I want to know what the real life of Africa is like.’

Through this investigation, we see students’ thinking beginning to shift from understanding the context of Africa primarily from the perspective of Chinese citizens and media to engaging with the perspectives of citizens of African nations more empathetically, anticipating greater complexity and seeking to learn more about these contexts, contributing to the relations and harmony between these two places. In this initial exploration of matters of race, students move from more over-generalized stereotypical framings of Africa and China as whole entities (Dawes-Duraisingh, 2018) towards the desire to understand what ‘Africa’ is like in nuanced ways. In reflecting about student progress for the unit, Jacob wrote ‘Overall, I think that the entire unit worked well to scratch the surface and get under the skin of what the students see as offensive and inoffensive . . . Introducing this topic to international students that are preparing to study abroad is beneficial, but it is also very difficult to introduce. . . . I do believe they gained an advantageous viewpoint for their future.’

Communicate Across Difference

Listen, communicate, and interact across difference mindfully. In discussing the role of argumentation and eloquence in Chinese society, former Nanjing Normal University Professor Jiazu Gu (2008) writes:

‘In Western rhetoric, argumentation is closely related to the concept of invention (Latin term for *invention* or *discovery*). Proficient argumentation and debate are viewed in the West today as a means to approximate truth understood primarily in logical terms and as admitting no contradictions. Ubiquitous debate and deliberation are seen as providing the pillars of liberal western democracies.’

Professor Jin Li argues that such differences in oral tradition can be traced back to ancient Greece, where many democratic matters were resolved via debate, discussion and questioning; while in Ancient China, Confucius taught students that actions were better than words, and to be wary of people who are eloquent with words because speaking can be used to alter the truth. (Li, 2012) A collectivist tradition in the East foregrounds the building and sustaining of relationships and communication styles that are non-confrontational: able to honor social bonds and mutual obligations that are constitutive of Chinese identity, seeking to find a ‘mid-way’ when disagreement ensues, or avoid an argument altogether if there is risk of one member losing ‘face’ or dignity in relation to one’s status or role. Communicative styles foreground personal relations as a context for exchanging ideas.

If global competence involves the capacity to communicate across difference, as described above, then flexibility to understand multiple communicative styles and adapt our communication to them becomes a key dimension of collaboration, relationship building and dialog in a diverse world. Aware of this communicative demand in a global world, our collaborating Chinese educators insisted on the importance of teaching children and youth how to express themselves if they are to interact with others beyond their cultural contexts. ‘Communication and Self Expression’ appeared as one of the most frequent characteristics teachers associated with globally competent students. Yet efforts to nurture self-expression among Chinese students as a part of their global

Communicate Across Difference*Listen, communicate and interact across differences mindfully*

- Seek to understand how diverse audiences perceive meaning and how that affects communication and listening norms.
- Listen respectfully, openly, empathically and thoughtfully across differences.
- Adapt and code-switch verbal, visual and body language, technology and media to express themselves and communicate with diverse audiences attentive to context, honoring social bonds and harmony.
- Reflect about communicative norms to address miscommunications or misunderstandings with intellectual humility.

Figure 7. Communicate Across Difference.

competence education demand complex balancing acts. For example, many Chinese students may experience a Western '(over)emphasis' on speaking, discussion and argumentation as a veiled critique of themselves as learners. Becoming globally competent in this context involves, on the one hand, recognizing the value and significance of careful listening, time to think, a careful formulation of ideas, and their associated values of respect for others and intellectual humility—all embodied in Eastern oriented traditions.

Metalinguistic awareness, adaptability and some degree of cultural code switching are of the essence in today's interconnected world. Even when the globally competent student is able to understand and value such culturally rooted communicative preferences, this student will benefit from working hard to be increasingly comfortable with self-expression in diverse communicative contexts. The student's comfort may stem from a growing understanding of differing communicative patterns and how language and discourse can have distinct meanings and operate under distinct norms in different cultures. For example, in many Western cultures, to respect someone involves respecting the value of their statements and engaging in back and forth discussion and/or debate over content. Lack of engagement may not signal respect but may instead indicate a lack of interest.

Becoming able to communicate across difference also implies being ready to listen to others with respect and express one's own ideas and perspectives. For many Chinese students who are accustomed to responding to questions by teachers or adults in school with 'the right answer', regardless of what they think or feel personally about an issue, learning to give shape and express their views may require particular attention and work. Learning to express their own points of view is likely to involve having greater ownership of what they say and developing their capacity to consider and find a path toward respectfully disagreeing with others, including adults. In sum, young people become more globally competent when they are able to listen, communicate and interact mindfully across difference (Figure 7).

Classroom Perspectives: Communicate Across Difference

Vicky Yang, a 4th Grade English teacher in Guiyang, found that in the beginning, asking students 'What do you think?' or 'How does this connect with your thinking?' was very difficult: 'Some students will be worried about being incorrect and will not dare to write: looking East and West for the answers of other people. I will encourage these students, saying: if you truly cannot think of anything, you can write 'I couldn't think of anything'. This way eradicates students' fear and

Taking action

Take action through ethical conduct to help nurture more harmonious societies

- Being inclined to identify a local and global issue or problem that requires solutions.
- Examine various perspectives and prior attempts at addressing the issue.
- Collaborate with others creatively and ethically towards collective action.
- Reflect on their developing capacity and moral obligation to contribute locally, regionally and globally to social and environmental harmony.

Figure 8. Taking Action.

anxieties of answering wrong. In the next activity they will be willing to write their own ideas'. Through multiple observations of Vicky's class over time, our team sees students becoming increasingly comfortable with sharing their thinking and working in groups.

Many teachers found that there was often an adjustment period for using classroom approaches that call upon students to communicate their own thoughts to one another, but that over time students' learning and interpersonal skills benefited as a result. Giving students opportunities to learn to listen respectfully, openly, empathically and thoughtfully across differences in the classroom is an important step towards learning to communicate with increasingly diverse groups of people. One teacher wrote 'In looking at students' expressions, I can see that their collaborative abilities are growing stronger with time. I encourage students to express themselves. The goal of sharing is to listen closely to others' perspectives, and ignite one's own thinking: 'The rocks of the other mountain can polish one's jade.' (*Ta shan zhi shi keyi gong yu.*)

Taking Action

Take action through ethical conduct to help nurture more harmonious societies. Western conceptions of local and global citizens and change-makers are infused with the notion of individual agency, and young people in the West grow up in contexts where social role models are often able to identify an issue and lead the way to transform the world around them with respect to such issues. A more collectivist orientation would place the individual inextricably within a complex social context and a moral map of mutual obligations guiding ethical conduct. Action is not foreign to Chinese traditions. In fact, Confucius consistently highlighted the 'worth of action' (Li, 2012), furthermore noting that ideally people should 'be slow to speak and quick to act'. What might 'taking action' mean when considered within a worldview that prioritizes holism and harmony, that understands people and events as interconnected and views the world in constant change? Again, in this case we may expect young people growing up in China to interpret the invitation to take action within their cultural frames, recognizing its value, but exploring the possibility of adopting new dispositions that may enrich their capacity for collective influence.

Globally competent students learn to 'take action' to improve social wellbeing when they identify, individually or with others, an issue of concern in the form of a human injustice, a violation of the harmonious interaction among people, or between humans and nature, an environmental risk that might affect societal wellbeing, a technological challenge, and so forth. Chinese students are likely to see the issue in context, connected to a broad range of interconnected forces and events. When considering solutions, students may seek to understand prior attempts and deep causes of the problem at hand. They may hold in mind that the world changes, and today's solutions are not permanent but may require ongoing dedication to the theme. This student may be more skeptical

of our human capacity to control our environment than her Western peers, yet will nevertheless commit to her moral obligation to improve conditions. This student is likely to seek to coordinate with others, looking for resonance with her efforts and seeking to maintain social harmony, while also working with others to make the world a better place. She may begin in her inner circles of family and friends, in the middle circle of school and community, or in the larger realms of country and the global scene.

In relation to change in Chinese society from a philosophical perspective, Professor of Chinese History at Harvard University Michael Puett (2016) writes, ‘We tend to believe that to change the world, we have to think big. Confucius wouldn’t dispute this, but he would likely also say ‘Don’t ignore the small.’ . . . Our lives begin in the everyday and stay in the everyday. Only in the everyday can we begin to create truly great worlds.’ Due to the emphasis on rituals and everyday action as mediums for creating change, it is worth exploring how change and social impact are viewed by students at small (everyday) and large scales.

Through an education that seeks to integrate and attend to Eastern and Western aspects, students may also have the opportunity to experience a greater agency or an expectation that they can indeed make a difference for others. They may come to view their role as local and global citizens as those who can identify issues, frame them productively, experience a sense of moral or civic responsibility and find ways to make an informed change. Ultimately, in China’s stage of rapid and constant change, students will need to construct their moral compass and their role as local and global citizens through the process of navigating a complex and shifting sociocultural terrain. Schools and families are in a key position in which they can stand by students to accompany and enrich this process of growth (Figure 8).

Classroom Perspectives: Taking action.

Ceng Aicheng and Zhang Yue, two 4th Grade Chinese classroom teachers in Shenzhen, sought to take students deeper in a unit from their textbook focused on animals and the environment. Among their goals for the unit, Ceng Aicheng and Zhang Yue wrote ‘Explore the importance of protecting the environment’, and ‘What’s most important to students in exploring this topic is to see the effects protecting the environment can have in the environment immediately around them and on the whole world, raise their awareness of environmental protection and take realized action.’

Towards the end of their exploration, students reflect on the following set of questions:

‘What can I do to contribute . . . in my inner circle, in my community, in the world?’

Students collaborated together in groups to generate ideas: These students engaged in an effort to consider multiple perspectives to consider a path forward. Students’ responses include:

‘One should not throw trash, and if you see others throwing trash, you should remind them not to do it, and pick up the trash if they don’t listen.’

‘Online I can share a few posts about conservation, and work with others to collaborate on conservation efforts.’

‘Try to use less paper, and try to conserve resources on class projects’

‘I want to try to walk more and try to use cars less to reduce CO₂ emissions’

From these ideas, students prepare and present a collective action plan before working to integrate them at a classroom, school and community level. This classroom illustrates students developing

capacity to take action as they collaborate with others creatively and ethically, examining various perspectives in the decision-making process. Through opportunities to check back on their progress, students will be challenged to reflect their developing personal and collective capacity to contribute to improvements locally, regionally and globally.

Taking action was initially beyond the realm of teachers' typical pedagogical approaches or learning aspirations for students. However, with the support of pedagogical tools, such as three simple questions: 'What can I do to contribute in my inner circle? in my community? in the world?', teachers were able to ignite and document students' desire for action and support them to reach their goals. Over time, teachers increasingly engaged this dimension of global competence and made this a more regular part of their instructional design.

Conclusion

The examples above illustrate the opportunity embedded in global competence education in the Chinese context when driven by committed teachers who are open to learning and reframing their practice. With these teachers and through this longitudinal project we have pursued the questions of 'What exactly does it mean to be globally competent in a Chinese context?', and 'How can a definition of global competence be enriched by the important cultural variations represented in our planet including our Eastern and Western cultural heritage?'. The reconceptualization of global competence we propose is informed on the one hand by the scholarship on Chinese traditions and practices in education including comparative work such as that of Jin Li. It is also the result of close analysis of data stemming from (a) a longitudinal record of Chinese teachers' ideas about global competence education, its meaning, significance, practice and demands, (b) a series of interviews in which teachers reflected upon their practice, and (c) data collected through specific performance tasks whereby Chinese and foreign teachers were invited to craft the profile of a globally competent graduate, compare cultural perspectives, align themselves and their values along cultural continua, and 'code' our emerging reconceptualization of global competence text for clarity and cultural familiarity. Finally, our examination is also informed by (d) observation of classrooms and teachers' designs.

Resulting from this work is the beginning of a more nuanced vision of global competence, enriched by the intersection of Eastern and Western educational aspirations. In the formulation proposed, the life-long cultivation of self speaks to the development of virtues that embody cognitive capacities and moral values as essential qualities for citizens of a more interconnected world. Global competence is here viewed as a process of the making of a moral person '*zuo ren*' through our daily interactions with the broader world. Emphasized in this view is attention to process when cultivating one's capacities through dedication and committed work, and so we included a natural element to the framework, symbolizing the long-term nurturing that is required to make the seeds and sprouts of global competence grow. Along with the shifting of the center of the framework, each competency (Dedication to Understanding the World, Understand Perspectives, Communicate Across Difference and Taking Action) includes an increased level of nuance in considerations for cultivating the competence in the Chinese context.

The framework proposed finds itself comfortably amidst the rising attention towards human capacities such as collaboration, communication/self-expression, creativity, and critical thinking/problem solving in Chinese education today. For example, investigating the world invites students' creativity and critical thinking as they carefully consider novel ways to investigate an issue, as they weigh and interrogate multiple forms of evidence, as they craft their own conclusions and share them with the group. To the degree in which this investigation is done with others, collaboration and communication are also enhanced. When it comes to taking perspective, a fundamental learning opportunity is one of critically engaging social and cultural stereotypes. A critical understanding of one's own

and other people's conditions, including the cultural influences they have, prepares young people for more meaningful relationships, more effective collaborations, and considerate development of communication skills. Similarly, the dimension of communication across differences foregrounds students' capacity to deploy multiple symbol systems, becoming more nuanced communicators, able to analyze critically the communication patterns in which they are involved and to find creative approaches to bridging differences. The four Cs are also featured when students engage in taking action, as novel solutions to local and global issues demand creativity and collaboration. For these solutions to be informed, students need to be able to engage prior attempts at addressing the same problem critically and weigh positive, negative intentional and unintentional consequences of their action. The framework here propose moves beyond the 4 Cs, by foregrounding moral social and non-cognitive learning targets, including respect for others, commitment to hard work, and the aspiration for young people to embody the virtues associated with global competence.

In conclusion and to reiterate, we share our proposed reinterpretation with humility to invite a conversation that will help educators in and beyond the Chinese schools in which we worked to refine their already growing capacity to distill the most desirable and context relevant aspirations and practices to prepare our youth at the intersection of Eastern and Western oriented worldviews. In an increasingly culturally diverse, economically interdependent geopolitical multi-polar landscape, few educational endeavors could be more significant.

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Author Biographies

Dr Veronica Boix Mansilla is Principal Investigator for the Interdisciplinary & Global Studies Project at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA. Her research examines the conditions that enable experts and young learners to produce quality interdisciplinary work addressing problems of contemporary significance. She co-developed the OECD framework for global competence education and serves as an advisor to the International Baccalaureate, the OECD, the Ministry of Education in Argentina and in USA among other organizations.

Devon Wilson (戴伟) is Project Coordinator and Research Assistant for the Interdisciplinary & Global Studies Project at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he works on Global Competence Initiatives in China, Japan, Vietnam and the US. Devon has worked closely on the analysis of signature pedagogies in global education and an exploration of global environmental citizenship in the early years. Prior to working at Harvard, Devon has served as a 3rd-6th grade teacher; grade level chair; and curriculum writer with Teach for China (美丽中国), a Fulbright Scholar at Shaanxi Normal University, and a program manager for a young entrepreneur non-profit through UC Berkeley.