

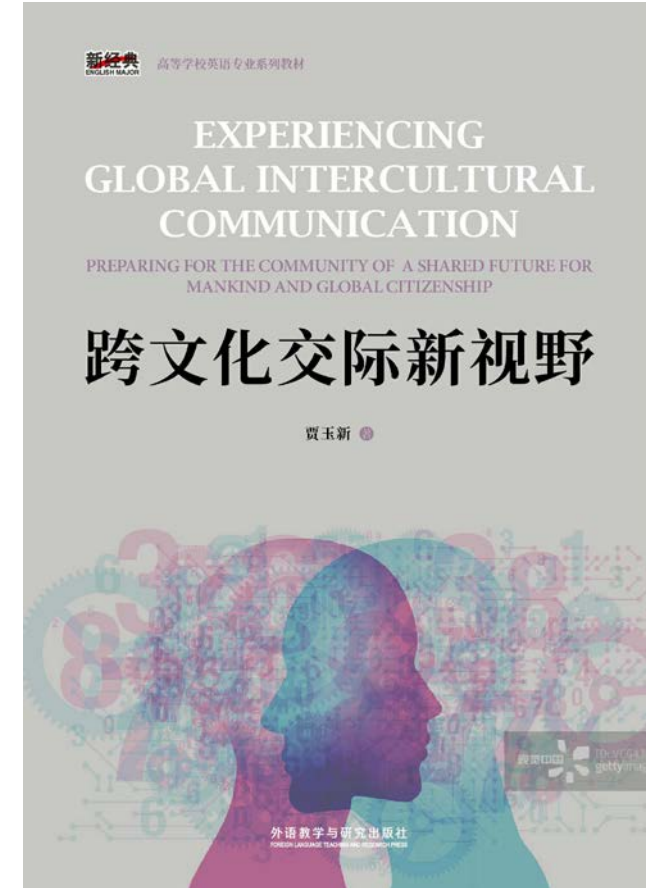
# Becoming Intercultural Through Experiential and Reflective learning

Jia Xuelai

Foreign Language School, Harbin Institute of Technology

***Experiencing** Global Intercultural Communication*  
—*Preparing for A Community of Shared Future for  
Mankind and Global Citizenship*

- Experiencing or experiential learning as the fundamental approach and reflective learning as the key method
- **Application** of experiential and reflective learning in the class.



Warming up: Guess what is in the bag?

How did you come to such conclusion?

How come that different conclusions are made about it?

# Experiencing and learning through experiencing

Embodied experience is the way of human learning, source of human knowledge of the world, of self and others /self in a field of selves.

Experience is embodied. Images and symbols grow out of human bodily experience, and so do our understandings of the world and the people in the world.

观物取象，立像取义  
**Emphasis on Bodily Experience  
in Chinese culture**

### 1.1 Chinese Characters as Cultural Concepts: 象/xiang as Human Perception Metaphor (象/xiang 乃人类认知之隐喻：夫象者，出义者也)

In the Oracle -Bone Inscriptions ( 甲骨文) and early Bronze Inscriptions ( 金文) , the character 象 is a vivid sketch of an elephant seen from the side, with its long nose and broad trunk especially prominent. However, as ancient people had rarely seen a living elephant, they sketched the elephant according to the collected bones of a dead elephant and thought the picture they drew was *like* a living elephant. In this way, the elephant, 象 in Chinese was borrowed in the sense of “likeness” in shape ( 形像) , thus the meaning of image or symbol ( 形象/象征) , which became an important concept of human perception in Chinese culture. It is also believed that it is out of image and symbol that meaning grows ( 夫象者，出义者也) . Stated in different terms, meaning/concept grows out images or symbols ( 形象、意象) . Images and symbols in turn grow out of human bodily experience, visual experience in particular. In this way, ancient people laid the foundation for their experiential knowing and learning ( 体验/体知) about the world in the Chinese cultural context.



- Is embodied experience reliable as an approach to learning?
- Are we being objective or subjective when we learn through experiencing?
- What process do we undergo when experiencing?  
Bodily experience ? Non-experiential/Rational? Emotional?

I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.  
不闻不若闻之，闻之不若见之，见之不若知之，见之不若行之，学至于行之而止矣。

(Confucius/Xun Zi, 450 BC)

Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I will learn.  
(Benjamin Franklin, 1750)

# Experiential learning and reflective learning

- Experiential learning can only takes place through reflection;
- Without reflection, experiencing only has potential for learning.
- No reflection, no meaning, no learning, no change in personhood (attitude, value, behavior, identity, etc.)
- Learning without reflection is means labor lost; reflection without learning is perilous. 学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆
- Learn the way broadly, question it in detail, reflect on it carefully, distinguish it clearly, and act on it with earnestness.” 博学之，审问之，慎思之，明辨之，笃行之。



Chinese characters 思 /si or 反思 /fan si

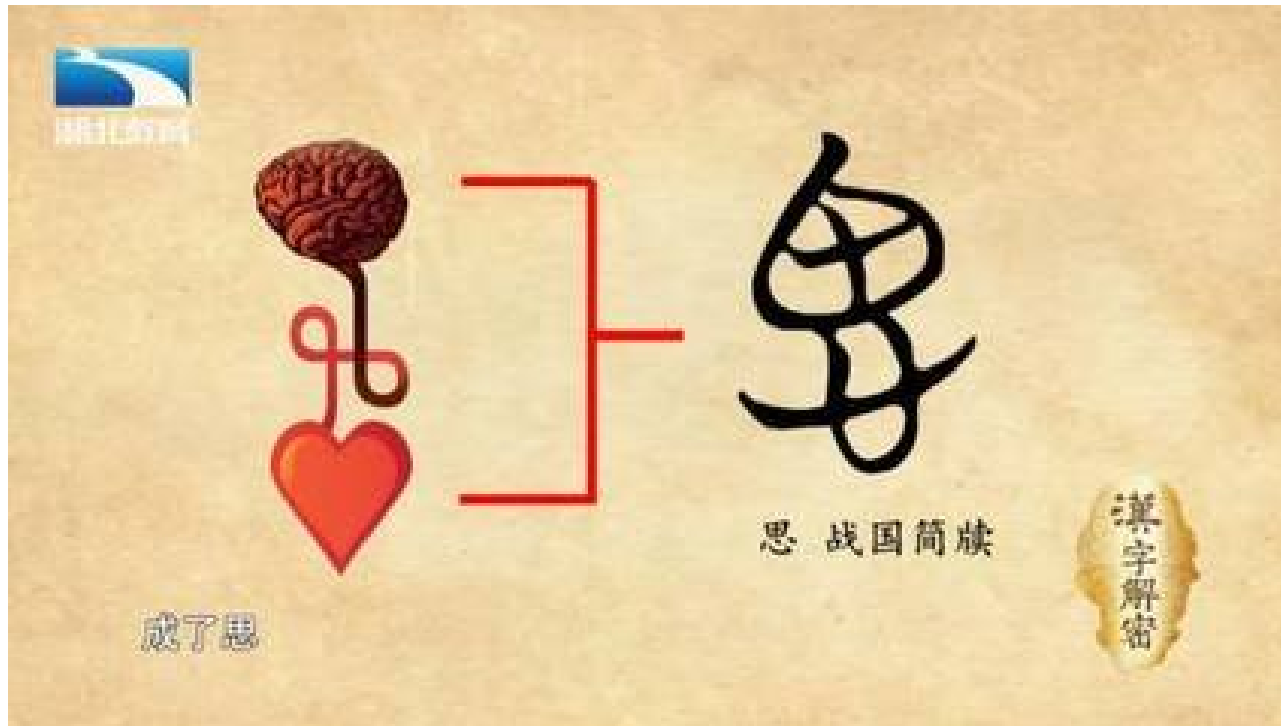
- 思/si, the metaphor for human mind and heart:
- Human mind as engaging the whole person, the mind/reason and heart (思/si乃情理之隱喻：思乃情理也)

金文大篆	小篆	繁体隶书
		

In the ancient later seal character (篆书), the character 思 consists of the pictograph 囟 / chuang, the shape of a window on the top and the pictograph 心 /xin, the heart at the bottom. The former, the window, refers to the brain while the latter, the heart, refers to the organ for thinking/reflection, ideas, as well as emotions and imagination such as concern, sympathy, empathy, compassion, etc. In other words, 思 /si, thinking/reflection, is traditionally seen as

a process engaging the whole person: the brain, the mind, the heart, sensory apparatus and emotions, etc. In the form of the ancient regular script (正楷), 思 /si comprises 田 /tian, field and 心 /xin, heart, with the metaphorical meaning that the heart functions as the faculty of thinking/reflection (心之官则思) and the faculty of sympathy empathy and compassion. So, the formation of this character reflects the Chinese traditional view of human mind as a dynamic process engaging the heart and mind (情理), or the whole person rather than merely the cognitive or reasoning (理性) process as it is conceived to be in the tradition of modernity in the West. The full range of meaning conveyed by the Chinese character 思 /si is twofold: thinking/reflection and emotion or feeling, in Chinese, 情理, rather than reason alone.

# Chinese mind engaging the whole person



思想

- **Situation:**

An interaction between a British superintendent and a Chinese clerk in a office.

- **The Event:**

There was a quiet knock at the door and in came a young Chinese clerk. He saluted the superintendent and stood smartly to attention in front of the large wooden desk.

Who is to be blamed? What do you think may have caused the trouble and what could be an alternative way of making such a dialogue?

Reflect on what has happened between the British superintendent and the Chinese constable and try to position yourself as the superintendent, or the constable or the third person.

**Now experience and reflect : The Dialogue: My mother isn't well, Sir.**

-- “Yes?” enquired the superintendent.

-- “My mother isn't very well, sir,” started the constable.

-- “Yes?” repeated the superintendent, a frown appeared on his brow.

-- “She has to go into hospital, sir,” continued the constable.

-- “So?”

-- “On Thursday, sir.”

The superintendent's frown was replaced by a look of exasperation.

-- “What is it that you want?” he asked sternly.

At this direct question, the constable's face fell and he simply mumbled,

-- “Nothing, sir. It's all right,” and turned and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed the superintendent turned to the third person and said:

- “You see. A classic case. They can’t get to the point.”
- “So, what would you want him to say?” the third person asked.
- “Well, instead of beating around the bush, he should’ve come straight to the point. He obviously wants some leave so he can look after his mother. He should’ve asked for leave and not have wasted my time going on about his poor mother.”
- “You want him to say, ‘Can I have some leave please, sir?’”
- “Yes, exactly,” replied the superintendent.

# Questions for Reflection

- (1) Who is to blame for the failure? Why?**
- (2) What are the reasons behind the misunderstanding?**
- (3) Do you think that the British superintendent knew the way Chinese tend to behave?**
- (4) Do you think that the Chinese constable knew how the British usually behave?**
- (5) What sort of mistakes do you think the British superintendent made?**
- (6) Do you think the Chinese clerk is in any way to blame?**
- (7) Is there anything we should condemn and reject?**
- (8) Should both reflect upon their experience? How, if yes.**
- (9) Do you think the awareness of self and other can automatically lead to effective communication?**



- Chinese: *My mother isn't very well sir.*
- You: *I am sorry to hear that.*
- Chinese: *She has to go into hospital, sir.*
- You: *That's bad.*
- Chinese: *On Thursday, sir.*
- You: *What do you want to [do]? Go home early, or have some leave?*
- Chinese: *I would like to have some leave for my mother.*
- You: *OK. You can look after your mother.*
- Chinese: *Thank you, sir.*

Chinese: *My mother isn't very well, sir.*

You: *That's too bad. How bad is she?*

Chinese: *She has to go to the hospital.*

You: *Very soon?*

Chinese: *Yes, on Thursday.*

You: *So, do you want some leave?*

Chinese: *Yes, please. Thank you.*

Chinese: *My mother isn't very well, sir.*

You: *Really? Is she ill or something?*

Chinese: *Yes. So someone have (sic) to take care of her.*

You: *OK. Does anyone can do that?*

Chinese: *No, only I can help her.*

You: *So I will give you some leaves.*

Chinese: *Thank you very much.*

You: *I wish she will get well soon.*



## More reflections:

- What makes the result of the dialogue so different?
- What implication is there for intercultural learning?
- Did the Chinese get the leave he needs?
- What did the superintendant get then?

Now imagine another situation: the Chinese constable was very upset but he had to get some leave for his mother's sake. He came back to the superintendant the next day and started the conversation differently. What could he say to get the leave he needs?

# Conclusion

- Learning through embodied experience and reflections upon such experience, involving the whole person, the mind and the heart.
- Experiential and reflective learning leads to attuned behavior or engagement with others, based on both rational thinking and empathetic understanding.
- Intercultural learning: experiential and reflective learning  
/Hands-on+minds-on+hearts-on