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(Re-)Conceptualising and Teaching 'Culture' in a Short-Term Stay Abroad Programme in China: Students from a Danish University Abroad

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Introduction

Within the field of education, internationalisation is commonly understood as a direct response to globalisation. At a student learning level, a key question has been how educational institutions can prepare students to understand and navigate a global world (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). The development of students' foreign language proficiency and intercultural competence has emerged as the answer to this question, and in the current sociocultural learning paradigm, studying language and cultures in situ, most often meaning abroad, is considered as a natural part of this

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process. Consequently, studying abroad has become an increasingly central part of internationalisation strategies. This is also true in Denmark, where the Ministry of Education intends to improve 'international competences'[1] through an increase in short-term studies abroad (STSA). Specific aims have been defined for institutions of higher education, for example, reaching a level of student mobility in which 50% of all graduates in the year 2020 will have experienced either a stay or an internship abroad lasting a minimum of 14 days during their education (Danish Government, 2013). This is a passive response to the aims of developing intercultural competence, which seems to assume that the act of staying abroad will itself spontaneously lead to the development of intercultural competences. However, the outcome of stays abroad in general remains up for debate, and more research on this is needed (Byram & Dervin, 2008; Coleman, 2013; Deardorff, 2009, Dervin, 2009; Jackson, 2016). While the connection between studying abroad and higher language proficiency seems to be relatively well established, the outcome in relation to the development of intercultural competence is less certain. Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 23) points out that it has been assumed that cultural understanding is developed as a by-product of language learning, but such an assumption lacks empirical support. For instance, Dervin (2009) notes that people who travel often and spend extensive time abroad are not necessarily more open-minded than others. Some quantitative studies of short-term stays abroad point to a correlation between students' level of intercultural competence and time spent abroad. However, these studies show general inconsistencies and rarely explain what experiences or activities during the stay abroad led to the development of intercultural competence (Coleman, 2013). Furthermore, the underlying conceptualisation of culture for measuring intercultural competences is often too static (Härkönen & Dervin, 2015). Thus, it is challenging to identify effective learning processes and to design and facilitate the kind of learning that directly corresponds and relates to the ultimate goal of developing intercultural competence. According to Byram (2014, 216–217), there is a lack of knowledge among teachers and designers (practitioners) of how to implement

[1] The term *international competences* is not precisely defined in the report but is repeatedly used in connection to skills related to navigating international environments and does not substantially differ from the more commonly used concept of intercultural competence, which will be used in the rest of the chapter.

development of intercultural competence in teaching. Considering that the Chinese educational system has shown interest in internationalisation relatively late, this problem is probably just as prevalent in China as in Europe. However, micro-level qualitative studies of teaching practice and design in relation to teaching culture in the context of short-term study abroad in China are relatively few.

A closer analysis of the planned learning activities in a study abroad programme and students' experiences may give a more detailed picture of the use and outcome of the different concepts of learning applied in relation to learning about culture and developing intercultural competences.

First, how practitioners (teachers and programme designers) conceptualise and facilitate learning about 'culture' and how students from a Danish university make sense of culture through their learning experiences will be examined. Secondly, how these experiences either help students or create barriers to them reaching their ultimate goal of developing international/intercultural competence will also be explored.

Literature Review: Use and Definition of Concepts

In reviewing the research which informs this study, we first discuss the different conceptualisations of the concepts of culture and intercultural competence and how they are connected. Next, this will be related to learning concepts that are identified in this study.

The Interconnected Concepts of Culture and Intercultural Competence

Learning designs must be assessed in relation to their specific learning goal. In this case, the goal is learning about culture and intercultural competence. First, it is necessary to define these concepts. Two distinct understandings are dominant, upon which learning designs can be based. Researchers have described them slightly differently, using different terminology. In this chapter, we use the terms *descriptive* and *complex*

culture from the Danish researcher Iben Jensen (2007). In short, the descriptive concept of culture reflects a more traditional understanding, in which culture is a well-defined entity that is confined to a nation's borders; is stable and changes slowly; and explains why people act as they do and moulds entire populations to share the same values, ideas, rules and norms. In the complex concept of culture, culture is created between individuals, is dynamic and always changing, is shared between some but not all individuals in a society, and finally, cannot be limited to entities, which also means that the significance of culture can never be predicted (Jensen, 2007). Most culture theories do not pertain fully to one or the other understanding and sometimes even include elements from both. Therefore, it could be more useful to understand the two terms to form a fluid continuum, where culture theories can be described as being more or less descriptive or complex.

Intercultural competence is understood differently depending on whether it is based on the former or the latter concept of culture. The general definition of 'competence' puts emphasis on the ability to cope with new and unknown situations based on what one has previously learned (Illeris, 2014). If culture is fixed and easily delimited, intercultural competence would similarly include fixed knowledge about national cultures that could be used to predict an individual's behaviour. Conversely, intercultural competence based on a complex concept of culture focuses on personal analytical skills, since the use and meaning of culture can never be predicted.

More recent research has found that descriptive understandings often dominate syllabi 'by narrowing the perspective towards factual knowledge' (Byram, 2014, p. 221), and researchers' and students' discourses in stays abroad resulting in stereotyping and simplistic learning about 'others' (Dervin, 2009, 2011). To avoid, or reduce, this, the educational goal of studying abroad should be to move students from descriptive to more complex understandings of culture. This general movement towards a more complex understanding of culture as a key in developing and assessing intercultural competence was commented on by Fantini (2009, p. 464) who noted a rise in qualitative strategies. Many contemporary understandings of intercultural competence base on, or emphasise the importance of, a reconceptualisation of culture for the learner to

a more complex understanding. See, for example, Byram's model of the intercultural speaker (Byram, 2009), Dervin's suggestion of proteophilic competences (Dervin, 2009), Holliday's book on intercultural communication (Holliday, 2013) and Jensen's own model suggests having a complex point of departure for intercultural communication (Jensen, 2007). Thus, a very important step in all of these suggestions involves a reconceptualisation of culture for the learner from a descriptive to a more complex understanding, which will be the main focus of the analysis in this study.

In practice, this means that we use this broad understanding of intercultural competences and analyse whether an experience has created a move from a descriptive to a more complex or a complex to a more descriptive understanding of culture as a general indication of development of intercultural competences.

Approaches to Intercultural Learning

Earlier studies in the field has mainly conceptualised study abroad as an entirely experiential learning space which has led to a better understanding of the study abroad experience and outcome as a whole (Hopkins, 1999; Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002; Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). However, at a micro-level, a stay abroad is based on several learning concepts. Stays abroad include various learning spaces—for example, formal and informal (Byram & Feng, 2006)—and activities informed by different eras, traditions and concepts of learning and culture. In the following section, we will present three main concepts of learning identified in the STSA studied in this chapter, which are also commonly used in STSAs overall. These will be explored more thoroughly in relation to culture throughout the analysis.

First, in a very general sense, stays abroad are based on an understanding that learning comes through experience and practice. Instead of reading about cultures and intercultural meetings in a classroom disconnected from the normal contexts of these phenomena, it is understood that a stay abroad offers experience and practice in situ. This is what distinguishes a stay abroad from in-class learning, and this approach is based

on constructivist concepts of learning, such as Dewey's (1938), in which learning content is closely connected to real daily life contexts, and students learn through meaningful experience and practice. As a continuation of Dewey's thoughts, Kolb (1984) coined the concept of experiential learning theory (ELT), in which he emphasised the importance of reflecting on experiences. Experiences do not themselves lead to learning, but it is experiences and the subsequent reflection and reconceptualisation process that lead to learning. As such, the learner must be able to reflect on the experience, possess and use analytical skills to conceptualise the experience and possess decision-making and problem-solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience (Kolb, 1984). Because culture is an abstract and idealising notion that does not exist by itself, a person's experience of culture is related to his or her conceptualisation of it (Holliday, 2010). As such, it will be of interest to identify experiences that the students themselves categorise as cultural and to analyse their subsequent reflections to see whether or not their experiences have led to learning or reconceptualisation. As in other short-term stays abroad, a student logbook was given to the students by the authors to provide a reflection tool in which they could record their reflections. From a learning perspective, a logbook is based on an understanding of learning as a process of experience followed by reflection, as in Kolb's model (Ellmin, 1999; Lund, 2008). However, there are different types of reflection ranging from descriptions and comparisons to interpretation, justification, evaluation and critical discussion (Cowan, 2014). In relation to reflecting on learning experiences about culture and intercultural competences, the latter type is important, as it will typically lead to a more complex understanding of culture.

Second, there is a significant element of sociocultural learning in stays abroad. Dewey's understanding of learning includes a social dimension, but learning theorists like Lev Vygotsky and Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger build on this and develop a more complete social dimension. For them, learning takes place through participation and interaction in activities with others, through which people are socialised and become members of cultures (Vygotsky, 1987) or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this line of thought, it is the creation and sharing of knowledge between individuals and

groups that is important. Furthermore, it is stressed that learners are not passive receivers of information but co-creators of their own learning (Wenger, 1998). Most often, this type of learning is related to learning activities outside the formal curriculum and traditional classroom teaching activities, where the social interaction and practising aspects are important.

Finally, traditional classroom teaching remains a significant part of many STSAs' learning design, including the one studied in this chapter. Classroom teaching can be inspired and carried out based on different understandings of learning, but in this case, it is manifested most often in the form of the transmission of static ready knowledge in a teacher-centred approach. This kind of teaching builds on an understanding that learning is primarily a cognitive affair, taking place in a more or less decontextualised context in which the teacher is considered all-knowing (Illeris, 2012, p. 67). This also means that the teacher's job is, first and foremost, to transmit static and factual knowledge to students.

Stays abroad do not rely on just one concept of learning. In fact, in most cases, a single learning activity draws on and includes ideas from several different learning concepts. However, most activities are inspired by one concept more than others. In this chapter, we will draw on the different types of learning found in the programme through our own observations and the logbooks in order to understand the interplay between learning design and students' experiences of culture.

Studying Contexts and Learning Processes

The Context

This study explores STSAs of three different groups, comprising a total of 70 students (mainly Danish), at a Chinese university in Beijing from 2012 to 2014. After a pilot project in 2011, the 2012 STSA was the first of three that were carried out. Every year a group varying in size from 20 to 25 students obtained scholarships from Hanban, the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, to enrol in the STSA. The only requirements were that the applicant at the time of application

was enrolled at the Danish partner university, had received at least 40 hours of Chinese language teaching at the local Confucius Institute and was between 16 and 30 years old. Students from all study programmes could apply and participate as long as these requirements were met. The duration of the STSA in 2012 was four weeks, while it was only two weeks in 2013 and 2014. The students lived and studied on the university campus during their stay. The schedule from the 2014 STSA is presented in Table 5.1.

Although the programme varied in length, the content across the years was very similar. The main difference was the number of language teaching hours and the inclusion of a trip to Xi'an in Shaanxi province in 2014. On a normal weekday, the students would take Chinese language

Table 5.1 Schedule

Date	Activities
June 29 (Sun)	Arrive in Beijing, check-in, campus tour
June 30 (Mon)	Opening ceremony, placement test, Chinese language class Lecture: An introduction to Chinese culture
July 1 (Tue)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Traditional Chinese painting
July 2 (Wed)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Shadowboxing (Tai chi) Acrobatics performance
July 3 (Thurs)	Chinese language class Communication with students from BNU
July 4 (Fri)	Chinese language class Cultural class: Shadowboxing (Tai chi)
July 5 (Sat)	Visit to Great Wall, Bird's Nest, Water Cube
July 6 (Sun)	Visit to Tiananmen Square, Forbidden City
July 7 (Mon)	Chinese language class Visit to Confucius Institute Headquarters/Hanban Beijing opera
July 8 (Tue)	Chinese language class Tour of Beijing Hutong and Siheyuan
July 9 (Wed)	From Beijing to Xi'an, visit to Shaanxi Museum
July 10 (Thurs)	Visit to Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum Performance: 'A Poem of Tang Dynasty: To pay tribute to a time of peace and prosperity with music and dancing'
July 11 (Fri)	Visit Small Wild Goose Pagoda and ancient city wall of Xi'an; Travel back to Beijing
July 12 (Sat)	Departure from Beijing

courses from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm and then have a lunch break. In the afternoon, they took culture classes or participated in cultural activities. There were also cultural activities some evenings during the week, while longer daytrips were reserved for the weekends.

Methods

Studies of students abroad have often relied on interviews taking place after the stay abroad and often from the host perspective, observing the guest/'other' in the foreign environment, explaining 'their' behaviour solely from a cultural perspective. Examples of this approach can often be found in the literature on Chinese students abroad. However, this method of exclusively studying and describing one part of an encounter in purely cultural terms and relying solely and uncritically on interviews has shown its perils by unintendedly contributing to culturalist discourses that are simplistic and reductionist (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2010). While we focus on the Danish students' experiences abroad, our goal is not to give them or the Chinese people they met a cultural description. Instead, we take a socio-constructivist approach to shift the focus to the context and creation of learning during intercultural encounters. For this, we study contexts and participants, Danish *and* Chinese, in relation to how the students experienced their time abroad.

The Data

Data was collected using participant observation, student logbooks and interviews with programme coordinators. We experienced and observed first-hand what the students experienced by having one of the authors of this study participate in the study abroad programme each year. In agreement with the students and the Chinese university, the author participated in planned activities and was also often invited to join in activities organised by the students themselves outside of the official programme. A key to good participation observation data is the natural legitimacy of the observer (Wadel, 1991). In our case, the author collecting data had two roles in relationship to the students: first as a representative,

co-organiser and contact person from the home university/Confucius Institute and second as a researcher. These roles legitimatised the presence of the researcher in all situations and meant that he could be a natural part of the activities. This intense and time-consuming approach was deemed necessary in order to avoid the above-mentioned perils, to look past research participants' immediate statements that should not always be taken as fact and to identify the discourses that lie behind them (Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2013).

The second part of the data was collected using student logbooks. The logbook is a reflection tool that allows the students to note and reflect upon interesting, puzzling, irritating or otherwise significant events that they experience (Whalley, 1997). At the end of every week, the students were asked to revisit the experiences they had written about earlier. This was a voluntary exercise, but most students chose to participate. The richness of descriptions and reflections in the logbooks differed from student to student. In a recent study, Moloney and Xu (2015) examined to what extent a teaching intervention facilitated development of intercultural competences in students, as evidenced in student reflective writing and in focus group interview. In this case, the researchers themselves were responsible for the intervention, involving training of reflexive thinking among others, which supported a development of intercultural competence. Similarly, this study makes use of student logbooks to gain insight in student's learning processes in relation to specific learning experiences. However, the context of this study is different, as the activities studied are part of a study abroad programme. Furthermore, we try not to intervene in the existing teaching design as this is partly the object of our study. Consequently, we do not use the student logbooks as a learning tool per se, but rather a journal that can reflect student experiences and reflections.

Finally, semi-structured interviews with two programme coordinators, Coordinators A and B, were conducted to understand participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) by providing opportunities for them to express their understanding of the STSA and to explain their choices of the different activities in the programme. The interviews lasted for around half an hour each and were audio recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis

An integrated approach was employed to analyse the multiple sources of data. Student logbooks, observation notes and the interview transcripts were coded. Then a theory-driven approach was employed to relate the data to the framework of programme design to guide the analysis. A content analysis technique (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was used to identify patterns and categorise meanings in their context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and to provide an abridged portrayal of the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Finally, we integrated the thematic analysis and framework to ensure they match the aims of the study. In the analysis process, the authors firstly read the texts a number of times individually to identify patterns and then discussed and revised collaboratively through several rounds of comparing and merging multiple sources of data.

In the following analysis, we begin with the STSA programme and the experiences described by the students in their logbooks but also draw on the different sources of data mentioned above in order to gain a more nuanced and complete picture of the students' experiences.

Analysis and Findings of Teaching Design and Student Experiences

The basis of the analysis is learning experiences from the programme activities and interviews with the programme coordinators from the Chinese university. These will be analysed from a learning and culture theory perspective. The first part of the analysis will concentrate on the learning design of the STSA programme and will mainly be based on interviews and observations. Then, observations from the STSA programmes and analysis of student logbooks will shed light on how the students experienced the learning activities and if their experiences helped them to develop their understanding of the concept of culture and intercultural competence in general.

The Programme

Identifying Underlying Understandings of Learning and Culture

In interviews with both STSA programme coordinators, both confirmed that learning about culture was a main goal of the programmes. Coordinator A even considered it more important than the language component, as expressed in the following: 'I think it is a very good opportunity to them to have a deeper understanding about Chinese culture. Of course, language is a part of it, but more important is Culture.' Coordinator B described experiencing China and Chinese life as equally important to the language component. As designers of the programme, they were responsible for planning how to include instruction about culture in the programme. When asked how they had chosen to do this, they emphasised the inclusion of culture classes and performances, excursions to historical and cultural sites and free time for the students to go out and explore on their own, as spaces for the students to learn about culture. For example, Coordinator A expressed: 'We, like, Chinese painting, martial arts, these classes, because we think they are culture heritage of China, so we want students to know about it. We also offer them opportunities to go sightseeing, like visiting the Great Wall or grand palaces. These can be seen as symbols of China.' Below, we will analyse the learning design and content of these activities to identify the underlying understandings of learning and culture.

Teaching Methods in Relation to Culture

As seen in Table 5.1, the afternoon culture classes were mainly centred on a variety of Chinese arts. Typically, the teacher started the class with a short presentation of the particular art and its Chinese origin, followed by a hands-on experience. For example, in the Chinese painting class, the teacher first presented the historical background and basic components, including the tools and materials used, after which the students received brushes and paper. They were then instructed to follow the teacher stroke

by stroke to paint a picture of, for example, bamboo, a panda or other objects that can be considered specifically Chinese. This teaching pattern was typical for all the culture classes.

There was also a lecture titled 'Introduction to Chinese culture', which was in fact an introduction to Chinese history. After a short introduction to Confucianism and Daoism, the students were taken through all the dynasties, from the first up to the end of the last dynasty, complemented by a Tang dynasty musical interlude, performed by the teacher on a Chinese zither, a traditional Chinese musical instrument.

The day trips included excursions to different, mainly historical, scenic spots and performances of Chinese arts. These were conducted in a rather touristy fashion by local tour guides. Normally, they used the transportation time to present the scenic spots or art while standing at the front of the bus speaking into a microphone, without allowing the students to interact or ask questions. Depending on the specific destination, after arriving, the students either went directly to watch the performance or had a certain amount of time to explore the scenic spot on their own before the excursion continued to the next scenic spot/performance or back to the university campus.

The programme also included a meeting with students from the host university. The meeting was arranged by the programme coordinators, but the actual facilitation was left to the students themselves, and in practice, the Chinese students had prepared some activities and topics for discussion. After the initial formal presentation, the students were divided into mixed groups, with one Chinese student for every four to five students from the Danish university. After going through the prepared topics, some of the students discussed different topics about everyday life, politics, travelling and more. It was an open opportunity for both sides to satisfy their curiosity.

In Table 5.2 below, each activity has been analysed and categorised according to the underlying understanding of the concepts of learning and culture.

From Table 5.2 it can be seen that there was an overwhelming weight placed on presenting culture as something 'pure': something that originated from ancient time that was static, homogeneous and national. 'High culture', in the form of different kinds of art, also made up a considerable part

Table 5.2 Understandings of learning and culture in programme activities

Underlying concepts of learning and culture	Social learning	Experiential learning	Cognitive learning (transmission of knowledge)
Descriptive		Calligraphy Tai chi Chinese painting Performances: Chinese acrobatics, Peking opera, tea culture in China Excursions: The Great Wall, The Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, Olympic Park, Tour of Beijing hutongs, Xi'an	Calligraphy Tai chi Chinese painting Tea ceremony Introduction to Chinese culture Language classes
Complex	Meeting with local students		

of the schedule and was most often presented as representing something particularly Chinese. This choice of cultural representation is very much in line with a descriptive understanding of culture and was especially present in the traditional teacher-centred, classroom-based teaching, characterised by an understanding of learning as a process of transmitting static knowledge, which was the preferred teaching method together with a kind of experiential learning. In the classroom, teaching was very focused on presenting static, factual-like knowledge, rather than on developing competences like analytical skills. From a learning point of view, this is related to the teacher-centred style, in which the teacher has traditionally been considered an all-knowing source of 'true' knowledge. This understanding of knowledge is also consistent with the descriptive understanding of culture. If culture is believed to be something fixed, and therefore easily defined and delimited, then it makes sense to teach in a lecture-based way, thus transmitting static knowledge to the students (Du, Kirkebæk & Aarup, 2013). However, in teaching and representing culture only in the form of static knowledge, there are political choices to be made about how to present said culture. For example, in this case, the culture/history lecture conveniently

only covered the golden age of China but avoided the downfall in the early twentieth century and the following politically sensitive topics related to contemporary China.

This approach to education has been problematised by many a scholar. Most famously by Freire (1970), who called attention to the oppressive nature and lack of critical thinking in 'banking education', as he termed it.

In the informal learning spaces placed outside of the daily teaching schedule, we found a somewhat different approach to learning seemingly inspired by ELT. This type of learning activity included trips to historical sites as well as watching performances of Chinese arts. A hasty conclusion based on looking at this kind of activity would be to say that it is clearly based on ELT, and indeed, some elements of ELT can be found. In practice, however, the activities were still carried out based on a static understanding of culture, and the excursions in many ways served as an extension of the classroom teaching, transmitting static knowledge of Chinese high culture and ancient China. Therefore, one of the basic ideas of ELT needed to focus on developing students' processes of learning, instead of only on fixing learning outcomes such as a cognitive knowledge of facts, has not been prioritised (Passarelli & Kolb, 2012). This is particularly reflected in the framing of the excursions, since they were presented as expressions of, or facts about, Chinese national culture as a whole, giving the impression that all Chinese people shared the interests, values and ideas expressed therein. In relation to learning about culture and developing intercultural competences, this approach does not help students to reconceptualise their understanding of culture based on their experiences but instead feeds and reinforces pre-existing, stereotypical understandings of Chinese people and culture, thereby adding to a descriptive understanding of culture.

Some might argue that the experience of the learning design is itself an expression of 'Chinese culture', from which the students can learn by experiencing and reflecting on it. However, in analysing the learning activities of the programme, this aspect cannot be included, since there was no active attempt to emphasise this in the learning design, for example, through reflection tasks. However, we, the authors, as researchers, handed out reflection logbooks to the students, and from this perspective

the STSA did provide a significant element of ELT by situating the learning in meaningful real-life contexts and offering a tool for reflection. However, whether or not this aspect of learning was accessible to the students or led to a reconceptualisation of culture greatly relied on their ability to reflect critically and the weight the students put on their own experiences, which will be discussed in the following.

Student Experiences: Observations and Logbooks

As emphasised earlier, learning is not a one-way process according to constructivist understandings. Learners are not passive receivers of fixed knowledge. As complex human beings, students not only contextualise and interpret transmitted knowledge but also, more importantly, they are co-creators of their own learning. No matter the intended learning outcome, different learners rarely gain the exact same learning from the same experiences. Therefore, the rest of the analysis will be devoted to understand how the students actually experienced and learned about culture in the planned activities, regardless of the intended learning in the programme. In the logbooks, we can find descriptions of the students' experiences and reflections on culture according to their own understanding. Three main issues were used to process and categorise the students' experiences into type of activity and reflection on activity.

1. How did they experience culture in the planned activities?
    (a) Does the reflection on the activity reflect a descriptive or complex outcome?
        (i) Did students experience similar or different outcomes from similar experiences?

Through the content analysis, the data from 70 student logbooks was coded and synthesised resulting in different categories related to the experience and learning of culture emerged. The findings are presented in this synthesized format in the following section.

Planned Activities

In the planned activities, most of the students describe experiencing culture in several learning spaces and activities. The categories that emerged through analysis and for the purpose of structuring the data for analysis are as follows: culture activities and excursions, lecture on Chinese culture, meeting with Chinese students and teachers and teaching method. The student logbooks show that these are the spaces and experiences that prompted the students to reflect on culture. Below, we present the student reflections on these experiences.

Culture Activities and Excursions

In this category we have collected the students' experiences of the more touristy excursions to historical monuments and performances of Chinese arts and also their experiences of the classes in which they were taught about and performed various Chinese arts.

In the logbooks, we find that the vast majority of students described the cultural activities and excursions as 'exciting', 'fun', 'great experience' and 'interesting'. Many of the students did not reflect further on these experiences in relation to culture. Thus, a substantial portion of the students, despite the programme designers' intention, did not connect the 'cultural' experiences with learning about culture but rather assessed them as a form of recreation. A few students mentioned that they regarded most of these places and arts as important parts of Chinese culture and thought that they 'reflected' Chinese culture, and in some cases the 'Chinese psyche', and that they helped them understand Chinese culture in general. However, most of these students had a hard time describing their learning and kept to general statements about the value and importance of the performing art or place they had seen showing the descriptive nature of their reflections. A few students noted in a more critical type of reflection that they were aware that what had been presented was a specific part of Chinese culture and history and as such did not say or explain much about the everyday lives of Chinese people, but rather about the specific art or place. This set of students pointed out that the

presentation of traditional versus modern culture was disproportional and felt the programme lacked representation of modern and everyday Chinese culture. One student proposed that instead of only visiting the 'pompous surface as the official China likes to present itself', trips to art districts, a company, news stations or political parties would have offered more and different learning. Often the students who had similar reflections describe having a difficult time connecting what they had seen in these activities to the life they observed outside. This group often felt they had missed out on an opportunity or had been denied the opportunity to learn about lived modern culture and therefore had a difficult time seeing the educational value of the activities.

All in all, the students' reflections do not suggest that much, if any, learning about culture occurred as a result of the cultural activities and excursions. A few students concluded in a rather descriptive tone that these arts and places can reflect the 'Chinese psyche', while others take a more complex, analytical approach, only to conclude that they missed out on learning. This indicates that the experiences as a whole have not helped the students in reconceptualising their understanding of culture. Instead, experiences were interpreted within the students' existing frame of understanding. Most surprising, though, is that a significant number of the students did not reflect on the excursions in relation to learning about culture at all.

Lecture on Chinese Culture

There were only a few comments about this activity, and they mainly state that the lecture focused on 'ancient', 'traditional', 'historical' Chinese culture. Some students appreciated the philosophical and historical knowledge and found it useful when observing historical Chinese arts or places. Two of these students added, however, that the lecture was biased and did not help them in understanding the modern China they observed on a daily basis outside the classroom. On the other hand, a couple of students found the philosophical sayings and traditional culture 'important to fully understand' … and 'offered an insight into Chinese culture', or that they 'explain[ed] why [Chinese] people and businesses act as they do'.

Most notable, again, is how few students chose to comment on this in relation to learning about culture. The few who did comment are split in descriptive and complex understandings. From the reflections, however, it is clear that the lecture only offered a descriptive understanding of Chinese culture as a learning outcome. Some had critical reflections about this, while others commented in general terms about its utility.

Meeting with Chinese Students

The students' description of this activity ranged from 'disappointment', to 'great' and 'informative'. In this case, one portion of the students used the logbook more as a tool for evaluation rather than for reflection. They agreed that the meeting had seemed superficial and that it had been difficult to get into a deeper conversation. This was explained by shyness and the choice of less interesting topics for conversation. Other students had different experiences, which included conversations about schooling, views on education and everyday life. Some of these students kept in contact and met privately in their free time afterwards. Based on observations, it was also apparent that some groups had very lively talks, while other groups finished discussing the proposed topics in a short amount of time.

Students' reflections on the meeting show that the conversations in most cases focused on comparing national differences, which did not lead to deeper critical reflections about possible reasons. As a result, the learning outcome was also characterised by this. Several students described the hard life of a Chinese student, and it seemed that the stories of the individual Chinese students became representative of all Chinese students. It was thus concluded in the reflections that 'they' spent much more time on schooling, respected their parents' wishes, were under pressure to perform and so on. This generalisation of Chinese students at large based on a few students must be contextualised. The Chinese students participating in the meeting were a small, select group from one of China's top-tier universities, where the STSA took place. These Chinese students had volunteered to participate in this activity in the midst of their summer vacation. It is safe to say that they probably belong to a more universal, international category of 'hard-working and ambitious students' than the

very general category of 'Chinese students'. None of the students seemed to critically reflect on the context of the meeting, but took the Chinese students as general representatives of Chinese culture. Meeting with more and different students might have added some nuances to this one-sided perception of the 'Chinese student'.

Teachers and Teaching Methods

Up until now, the student reflections have been related directly to the content in the individual activities. However, a different kind of meta-reflection was also found in most of the logbooks. These reflections considered not only the teaching content but also the teachers and their teaching methods as expressions of culture. As such, this aspect of learning transcended the learning design of the individual activities and became a more general reflection on experiences.

Overall, the experiences of the teachers and the teaching methods can be divided into two categories. One group of the students found that there was a specific 'Chinese way of teaching', which differed from the 'Western/Danish' style by being more 'traditional', 'disciplinary', 'authoritarian', 'controlling', 'repetitive' and 'structured'. The other group largely found that the teaching was 'modern', 'flexible', 'effective', 'pedagogical', 'better than in Denmark', 'patient', 'not so strict as expected' and 'good'.

The reflections following the descriptions above were naturally different depending on the individual students' experiences. The first group of students had rather comparative and descriptive reflections following their experience of the teaching. In this group there was a general understanding that there is a specific 'Chinese' way of teaching and that all Chinese teachers follow this ideal. Some students modified this understanding later in the logbook as they noted differences between the different Chinese teachers. While most comments reflected a negative experience, a few students evaluated the teaching to be different but better than 'Western' methods. However, their overall conclusion that Chinese education is traditional, repetitive, authoritarian and so forth remained consistent, as most tended to base their overall conclusion mainly on the teachers who had confirmed their preconceptions. An alternative conclusion,

which a few students in this group also came to, could have been that, as in other places, there are good and bad and experienced and inexperienced teachers in China.

For the second group of students, the positive reflections on the teaching were very often accompanied by a sense of surprise. Several students commented that the teaching was not as they had imagined or as it was portrayed in the media back home. This suggests that the students' understanding of Chinese teachers and teaching culture has become slightly more complex. They have learned that Chinese teachers *can* be pedagogical, modern, patient and so forth. For most of these students, however, a negative stereotype was debunked only to be replaced with a positive one, as the new positive experiences were often generalised to Chinese education as a whole. A few students commented that they suspected that the teachers had changed their 'normal' teaching style to adapt to the students' Western mindsets or that these teachers were not representative, or typical, of the 'normal' Chinese teacher. This suggests that these students still believe that their Chinese teachers have a more real 'Chinese' essence, which they tried to hide while they were with them. The students could instead have drawn the conclusion that skilful Chinese teachers, like any other skilful teachers, can be flexible and know how to teach depending on the context of learners with different learning styles and that this method is also part of modern Chinese education. Despite their experiences that helped to debunk some myths and stereotypes of Chinese education, the basic understanding of culture being descriptive remained and was not reconceptualised based on their new experiences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The students' varying reflections on the same activities show the co-constructional aspect of learning. The students were not passive receivers of information, but rather active co-creators of their learning. Overall, it was found that the activities in the programme mainly offered a descriptive understanding of culture. Lundgren (2005) showed that when there is a lack of guidelines, practitioners with limited theoretical knowledge about culture tend to sort to layman understandings of culture and stick

to old practices for the basis of designing teaching. However, the way that students reflected on the presented information differed. Some of the students' reflections only related to the presented information in an uncritical descriptive and evaluative sense. Consequently, this group of students adopted the rather descriptive understanding of culture present in the teaching, which led to generalising conclusions about Chinese culture and people. This risk of actually increasing stereotype understandings during study abroad has also been described by other scholars (Castro, Woodin, Lundgren, & Byram, 2016; Jackson, 2016; Yang, 2016). A smaller portion of the students showed a more complex understanding of culture, which was reflected in critical reflections on the descriptive presentation in the programme. Some of these students expressed some appreciation of the often static and historical knowledge presented but also longed for more contemporary representations of Chinese culture. For this group, the teaching design did not offer ways of expanding their complex understanding of culture and left them critical and wanting more nuanced and modern experiences.

As such, the analysis of the data did not show any examples where the teaching design, or the reflections in the logbooks, led to a reconceptualisation of a student's notion of the concept of culture. Instead, the students' preconceptions of culture defined how they experienced the culture activities and reaffirmed their understanding of culture. As previously discussed, culture is an abstract and idealising notion that does not exist by itself (Holliday, 2010). Therefore, whether or not the descriptive content, present in most of the activities, actually led to more descriptive learning about culture relied heavily on how an individual student already understood culture. Some students showed an ability to reflect critically on the representation of culture in the different activities, while others regarded the content as 'true' and representative of Chinese culture. Therefore, the learning outcome about culture varied to an extreme degree, and depending on which concept of culture one subscribes to, this STSA can both be said to have offered relevant experiences of culture or to have mainly offered experiences that stereotyped and simplified Chinese culture and people. Dervin (2009) has suggested that students learn basic culture theory as part of preparation for studying abroad. However, this is not to be mistaken with the common cultural training

preparing learners for encounters with a specific national culture. Instead, what Dervin suggests is that students acquire self-reflective and analytical skills for deconstructing cultural discourses. This kind of learning would enable students to critically negotiate simplistic and selective representations of culture.

The STSA provided a multitude of activities conveying descriptive learning about Chinese culture but offered next to no activities with a more complex approach to culture. It is our belief that this lifeless and static representation of culture cannot stand alone. The different arts and historical sites can hardly be said to represent modern China. In fact, the places the students visited and activities the students participated in cannot be said to represent much more than the old cultural elite of the Han Chinese, at least in the 'pure' form in which it was presented. Presenting these as a national and homogenous part of Chinese culture without explaining their cultural and historical background might give an incorrect, stereotypical picture of the modern Chinese as traditional and old fashioned. Similarly, the destinations of the excursions were all, except one—the Olympic Park—historical places from ancient imperial times. To give a more complex understanding of China, the programme could have included visits to more varied places like the 798 Art District, Guomao CCTV headquarters, Hohai's modern music and night life, a company visit, a visit to the parliament and so forth. Thus, representations of culture as something contemporary, dynamic, inconsistent and conflicting which are found in everyday life were largely left out of the programme or left to the students to explore on their own, which cannot be credited to the programme design. In a review on the state of internationalisation of higher education, Byram (2012) commented that new(er) ideas of culture, such as the complex concept of culture, has not been integrated well in education still as of today, which the study abroad programme in the present study also has illustrated.

Returning to the question asked at the beginning of this chapter—that is, whether or not the experiences in the STSA in China helped the students in developing intercultural competence—the answer would partly be that it depends on the understanding of the concept of culture that lay the groundwork for assessing the learning outcome. This conclusion reflects the need for clearer definitions and aims in terms of intercultural

competency (Dervin, 2009). Until then, most STSAs, regardless of the actual teaching content, qualify as international experiences that will help higher education institutions in Denmark reach the 2020 goal of reaching a level of student mobility where 50% of all graduates will have experienced either a stay or an internship abroad. That being said, there is less certainty about the actual learning outcome in terms of intercultural competence, as was the case in this STSA.

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