The changing landscapes of a journey: educational metaphors in China

Lixian Jin and Martin Cortazzi

As Chinese higher educational institutions move towards more learner-centred approaches, it is crucial to understand Chinese values and beliefs about learning. This chapter explores continuity and change in views of learning through a study of metaphors: we examine the official external landscape of English teaching in China and the internal unofficial landscape of students’ ideas of ‘learning as a journey’. We show how the learning journey is elaborated as a constant, determined effort in bitter-sweet travel from hell to heaven, in which teachers direct, guide and show devotion and sacrifice. This is an insightful model for teachers and learners anywhere.

The external landscape of the current system and organisation of education in China can be characterised by the enormous scale of mass learning with widespread enthusiasm and a series of recent developments, changes and reforms. However, the internal landscape of the cultures of learning in China has arguably changed much less. This is not surprising if we understand that cultures of learning comprise the implicit expectations, values and beliefs of teachers and students underlying the interpretation of practices, since culture changes more slowly in education than policy or curriculum requirements. On the other hand, it can be expected that the current extensive developments and changes in practice will influence cultures of learning at some point: the continuity of socially transmitted values will be influenced or modified by the challenges of applied innovations and the demands of new situations.

This chapter focuses mainly on the inner landscape held in the ‘heads’ and ‘hearts’ of students and teachers in China. In general we are asking: what are the values and beliefs of students regarding teaching and learning? Specifically, we examine a large corpus of students’ metaphors to investigate their interpretations of ‘teacher’ and ‘learning’, especially their ideas of journeys in learning. Our research shows that this metaphor of ‘Learning is a journey’ is commonly characterised as a journey ‘through hell to heaven’, a bitter-sweet journey of ups and downs towards ideals and dreams of future success. We take English language teaching (ELT) as a specific case
of educational change and rapid development and, although the data relate to all learning not just ELT, we ask how far ELT in China has gone on a parallel journey through ‘hell to heaven’. We draw on two key concepts: cultures of learning and theories of applied metaphor research. These are briefly explained before we turn to the external landscape of ELT in China and then to our main focus on the internal landscape of students’ metaphors of learning as a particular journey.

Cultures of learning and metaphors

We have developed the concept of ‘cultures of learning’ over a number of years to draw attention to the often implicit values, expectations and interpretations of learning and teaching which frame ideas and pedagogic practices (Jin and Cortazzi 1993, Cortazzi and Jin 1996a). Cultures of learning are socially transmitted in family and social contexts and especially in classroom practices and are distinct from personal or individualised ideas. Cultures of learning embrace beliefs about what constitutes a good teacher or student, what their roles and relationships should be; about preferences, expectations and interpretations of classroom interaction, materials and outcomes; and about how classroom learning relates to broader issues of the nature and purposes of education. Chinese cultures of learning (we pluralise the term to include diversity and difference within a broadly understood consensus) have arguably evolved through a Confucian heritage, but they have changed (Cortazzi and Jin 2001, Jin and Cortazzi 2006). An underlying assumption is that by looking at ‘other’ cultures of learning, we can gain insights into different ways of interpreting learning and teaching and reflect on those which are more familiar. In intercultural contexts we can investigate whether there are common features or gaps in understanding between different communities and whether different expectations of cultures of learning may be bridges or barriers. This is tricky because they are bound up with collective and individual identities and because a researcher’s preferred culture of learning may implicitly frame intercultural research issues and interpretations of practices (Jin and Cortazzi 1998, Cortazzi and Jin 2002). If researchers work in teams whose members come from complementary cultural backgrounds (as we do, and as do other research teams writing in this volume) and are familiar with a range of international educational contexts, this may resolve this issue.

Metaphors and images of teaching activities are part of a culture of learning. The analysis of metaphors for teaching held in common among participants in a Chinese culture of learning can be shown to be coherent with observed representative classroom practices or with photographic and video data of classroom interactions, and with the outcomes of research by survey questionnaires or interviews (Cortazzi and Jin 1999, Jin and Cortazzi 2008).

This chapter uses applied metaphor research (Cameron and Low 1999) which extends investigations of metaphors for Chinese teachers (Cortazzi,
Jin and Wang (2009) to those for journeys of learning. Metaphors are devices for comparison in everyday speech: one thing in the ‘target’ domain, which is often relatively abstract, is compared to another in a ‘source domain’, which is often derived from familiar everyday experience. Collecting large numbers of metaphors and analysing them shows clear patterns revealing underlying concepts. Thus, the metaphor of ‘learning is a journey’ examines the relatively abstract experience of ‘learning’ (the target domain) in terms of a journey (the source domain) over an area, space or landscape. This ‘journey’ in ordinary student–teacher discourse has characteristics of direction, movement and speed (going forward rapidly, forging ahead, moving on, going up, reaching upper levels, making slow progress), goals (getting there, arriving, attaining the target), and a path (following a route, staying on track, on course, following guidelines), with demarcations (stages, steps, levels) and features of a landscape (climbing a mountain, reaching a peak, going downhill) and perhaps guidance (having a map, following a guide).

Similar features of a journey can be seen in the etymology of ‘curriculum’, which is ‘running’, ‘the course to be run’, ‘a race’ or ‘race course’ (from Latin curro: ‘run’, ‘hasten’ or ‘move quickly’; curriculum: ‘a race’, ‘a course’, ‘a chariot used in races’, ‘a lap’ or ‘career’) so that in the first Oxford English dictionary ‘curricular’ meant ‘pertaining to driving of carriages’. Accordingly, in discourse about a curriculum there is a cluster of expressions which illustrate ‘a journey round a course’: a starting point, a goal or destination; direction, movement, speed and pace through stages or a sequence; and, sometimes, a competition with test or exam results and winners and losers, celebrations and disappointments. Such expressions about learning and the curriculum are so commonplace in both ordinary and professional talk that they are easily overlooked, but they show a coherent pattern which may guide or constrain discourses of learning and how we think about learning.

Metaphors have ‘entailments’: these are the underlying reasons and the points of comparison (how the source domain and target domains are linked), according to the provider of the metaphor. By analysing patterns of metaphors with their entailments, researchers can identify cognitive patterns (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Lakoff 1987, 1993), or socio-cultural and linguistic features of the community in which such metaphors are common (Berendt 2008), or socio-cultural features of educational discourse (Cameron 2003). Here, we use ‘landscape’ as an over-arching metaphor (a meta-metaphor) to include many other metaphors for learning which are expressed as ‘hills, mountains, rivers, seas, trees and plants’, and other features of a landscape to group these together to analyse key beliefs and values underlying metaphors and then construct a model for these within Chinese cultures of learning.

The external landscape of ELT in China

ELT in China is characterised by its massive scale: nationally it is linked with modernisation and with global development, but popularly it is linked with
perceptions of success for many learners (Cortazzi and Jin 1996b, Jin and Cortazzi 2004). China has the world’s largest education system and in both formal and informal spheres there are more learners of English than in any other country. This represents a journey of numerical success. Authoritative estimates of the numbers of learners of English in China were 200 million in 1995 (Zhao and Campbell 1995) but 300 million in 2009 (British Council 2009). Numbers of teachers of English have increased too, but they lag behind those of students: in 1957 there were only 843 full time middle school teachers of English in the whole country (Ross 1992) but about 400,000 in 1995 (Cortazzi and Jin 1996b). Nationally, 100,000 teachers of English are now needed annually at all levels – and there is a current shortage (British Council 2009). Increasing numbers of the over 20 million children attending kindergartens (aged 2–6), at least in urban areas, are now learning English. Of around 120 million attending primary schools, those from grade 3 are now mostly learning English and often the younger ones are too. English is overwhelmingly the dominant compulsory foreign language among around 70 million attending junior middle and vocational schools and another 30 million or more attending senior middle schools. In higher education institutions (HEIs) English is again the dominant foreign language for 10 to 12 million students. For most students English has a gate-keeping role: it is necessary to achieve well in tests in English to enter university and to graduate, and students see that English opens doors to professional success and career progression (see also the discussion of this gate-keeping role and the problems of ELT at the higher education level in China in Stanley 2010). This helps to explain the popularity of around 50,000 other ELT institutions in China which teach increasing numbers of adult learners and often children. Apart from preparing for exams and tests or to achieve qualifications in English, many learners see English as a language of aspiration: they envisage higher social status, using English in work contexts or to improve their career prospects, particularly through oral English skills.

Changes in university requirements for College English show current directions and demands (see Figure 6.1) which are consistent with changes in emphasis in schools. It is envisaged that College English courses will be more flexible and more individualised, and that they will make considerable use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). While these features accompany the development of more student-centred, autonomous and independent learning, and attempt to meet the huge demand and rising expectations, they are also designed to offset the problems of large classes and limited resources and staffing. The new emphasis on practical skills and the ability to use language is in line with ELT internationally, but in China it also counters long-standing criticisms that teaching is ‘duck-stuffing’ and that learners emerge from college as ‘deaf mutes’ in English because of emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, texts and tests. There have been parallel reforms in English in schools (Ministry of Education 2001 and later) which include developing learners’ active participation, their thinking skills, a ‘creative
spirit’, and new elements of cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills, with uses of multimedia and ICT.

These developments in ELT in universities and schools represent a quite radical stage in the qualitative journey of English. Older teachers of English have experienced the historical drama of this journey in China with shifts in the value, purposes and methods of ELT (see Figure 6.2, which draws on Buley-Meissner 1991, Cortazzi and Jin 1999, Lam 2005, Adamson 2007). Developments are not purely linear, however, and might be better characterised as overlapping waves. Aspects of grammar-translation, though widely deprecated as outmoded, still continue (translation is regarded as a fifth skill, with listening, speaking, reading and writing). Classroom activities still often centre on the 3Ts of the teacher, text and test, though more interactive uses of pair and group work are often integrated with them. The 3Ts are often still the basis of actual class uses of technology (with CD-Rom, Powerpoint or multi-media). While the New Requirements are challenging for many teachers, for some others they simply match current movements towards forms of bilingual education (Feng 2007) and e-learning (Spencey-Oatey 2007).

The historical landscape is heavily contoured with ups and downs, which are reflected in metaphors for teachers that were widely promulgated in official documents. Many of these now seem outdated; they evoke smiles among

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Standardised for students at all levels in all HEIs</td>
<td>More individualised and flexible; can be locally adapted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated language skills; focus on grammar, vocabulary and reading, knowledge of language, exam performance</td>
<td>Emphasis on practical skills, communicative ability and oral skills, use of language, development of whole-person and learning capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on form, structured content</td>
<td>Focus on meaning and use, more flexible content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-centred; transfer of knowledge</td>
<td>More student-centred; develop more autonomous, independent learning; more interactive teaching; incorporate ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop students’ effort and discipline</td>
<td>Develop students’ motivation, collaborative and creative thinking, critical thinking and problem-solving, intercultural learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 6.1 Reforms in university teaching of English in China based on Ministry of Education Guidelines (1985, 1999) and the New Requirements (2004, 2007)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods of National Development since 1949</th>
<th>Features of the journey of English language teaching</th>
<th>Official metaphors for all teachers, including English teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruction (1949–1957)</td>
<td>Neglect of English; Russian favoured</td>
<td>gardeners, brain-power labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Five Year Plan (1953–1957)</td>
<td>Some English for science and technology using Russian pedagogic approaches; grammar-translation methods</td>
<td>people’s heroes, advanced producers, engineers of the soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Leap Forward (1958–1959)</td>
<td>Shift back to English for the economy; English as transmission of knowledge; grammar and vocabulary</td>
<td>obstacles; common labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrenchment (1960–1965)</td>
<td>English for international engagement with caution; some audio-lingual methods</td>
<td>machine tool makers, engineers of the soul, ‘red and expert’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)</td>
<td>Foreign learning repudiated, English suspended, then some English for renewing international ties in ‘reform and opening up’</td>
<td>freaks, monsters, or stinking number nines; warriors, weapons in the class struggle, red thinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening Up 1980s</td>
<td>English strongly promoted in drive for modernisation; debate communicative and eclectic or mixed approaches; centre on teacher, text and test</td>
<td>technicians, machinists, people’s heroes, ‘red and expert’, ‘teach the book, cultivate the people’; performers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market economy, Reform 1990s</td>
<td>English for international status; rising popular demand; schools and colleges focus on exams and English for study but make efforts to develop communication</td>
<td>candles, lamps, golden key-holders, engineers of the soul, ‘plunging into the sea’, ‘stir-fry night’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennium economic development 2000s</td>
<td>English for global roles; huge popular demand; reforms of pedagogy; applied skills; emphases on developing thinking, creativity and uses of technology</td>
<td>conductors, directors; cultivators of talents and ability; nurturers of creativity and future professionals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 6.2 Some features of the journey of ELT and official metaphors for teachers

Chinese teachers; they are museum metaphors but are not part of a contemporary scene (see Figure 6.2).

These metaphors reflect public attitudes and track changes in perceptions of teachers (Cortazzi and Jin 1999). Most periods show a positive evaluation of teachers in socialist terms: labourers, producers, warriors and weapons.
or red thinkers. Some are mechanistic or technical: tool-makers, technicians, machinists, but it is important to recognise humane aspects of this, as in the recurrent metaphoric expression, engineers of the soul. The meanings of some other expressions are more holistic than may be apparent: red and expert signifies moral worth and exemplary behaviour to balance technical subject expertise, and while teach the book (jiao shu) seems to indicate a didactic book-centred approach to teaching, the partner expression cultivate the people (yu ren), indicates a more holistic and humane approach. Noticeable deprecations of teachers are seen in the low points of the Great Leap Forward (teachers as obstacles) and particularly in the Cultural Revolution (freaks, monsters), when many teachers were held to represent bourgeois groups or feudal aspects of Confucianism, which at that time was severely criticised. English teaching was repudiated. English teachers were likely to be regarded with suspicion as having links with the West and held to be stinking number nines – a category which put teachers in the ninth place in a list of ‘enemies of the people’ who were publicly shamed and often exiled to the countryside for ‘re-education’. In this harsh educational landscape, schools and universities were closed for long periods; however, a few teachers were weapons and warriors in the class struggle. Since then, the landscape for teachers has steadily improved through the rising uplands of the 1980s to the hills of the 1990s and millennium peaks.

While features of the ELT landscape look largely like transmission, the teacher as a performer has expertise not only in knowledge per se but brings this knowledge to students through a performance of demonstrating and explaining with carefully thought-out classroom examples, and in how the teacher predicts learners’ problems with any given concept (Cortazzi and Jin 2001). Metaphors of the 1990s reflect a market economy and a period of low teachers’ salaries: plunging into the sea (xia hai) meant going into private business, as a second job (particularly English teachers), while references to stir-fry night (chao geng – geng means both ‘a dish of food’ and ‘night’) or using a sieve or net (lao wai kua) showed some teachers moonlighting for extra money. Since then, teachers’ salaries have much improved. Teachers are again candles, a metaphor of light and sacrifice (to be discussed later), and cultivators or nurturers of talents, ability and creativity or, in universities, cultivators of professionals. Such metaphors with Confucian resonances are used with scientific-technical overtones in educational reform and ‘rejuvenation’ (Li 2004). Teachers are alsoconductors and directors, with management and guidance functions rather than being transmitters of knowledge. They are masters who have the power to guarantee the success of their students, if their students make efforts.

Internal landscapes: metaphors for teachers and learning

The metaphors for teachers cited above are from official documents, representing a view from the top. This view was, however, at least partially derived
from common sayings of the time. To investigate how these compare with
the views on the ground, we elicited 2,882 metaphors on ‘teachers’ and 3,235
metaphors on ‘learning’ from 1,140 university students in two major universities
in China by asking them to complete a form requesting three metaphors
for teachers and three for learning (Cortazzi, Jin and Wang 2009). Students
were also asked to write reasons for their metaphors (i.e. the entailments).
Students were given a non-Chinese example to illustrate what was meant
by metaphors and reasons. Most students wrote metaphors in English but
some wrote in Chinese and while some found the task difficult many gave
thoughtful examples and showed aspects of creative and reflective thinking
in both languages, though more elaborately in Chinese. This demonstrates
that a proportion of students have some competence in the direction required
under ELT reforms (Figure 6.1) although many lack confidence. Students
were free to write practically anything in this open format so any patterns
which emerge strongly may be important themes in cultures of learning. These
extensive data were grouped, classified and analysed inductively by first
building up categories and then analysing the entailments. This second step
is an essential requirement to investigate the student’s beliefs rather than impose
those of the researchers. For instance, a teacher is a robber
would be perceived
negatively in the West because it equates teachers with criminals, but the
student giving the metaphor specifies in her entailment a positive moral
rationale of the teacher ‘robbing our bad things so that we can do every-
thing to perfection’. This example would thus be categorised with positive
metaphors and grouped with others which show that the teacher has a ‘cleans-
ing’ or ‘purifying’ function. The analysis needs care because one metaphor
given by a number of students may have several entailments, while a
classification of entailments shows that one entailment may be realised in
several metaphors. To inductively construct a model, such as ‘learning is
a journey from hell to heaven’, we use only metaphors given by at least
several students, with at least two network links in the overlapping inter-
relations between metaphors and entailments; this method ensures that the
analysis is not biased by a few students or rarer metaphors or entailments.

Significant student metaphors for teachers show continuity with the previous
official metaphors (Figure 6.2): teachers are engineers of the soul, candles,
keys, and there is a consonance with current official metaphors of teachers
as cultivators, nurturers, farmers or gardeners, and weapons. Figure 6.3 lists
common examples of metaphors from our corpus for both ‘teacher’ and
‘learning’. This shows a number of points beyond the fact of continuity of
metaphors in Chinese education.

First, the use of the same metaphors for both ‘teacher’ and ‘learning’ (e.g.
light, food and drink, friend or parent, book or pen) surely shows recognition
of the overlapping of concepts: teaching as an activity depends on the
presence of learners and learning, yet most learners need teachers. This might
indicate a high degree of student dependence on teachers, for example, learning
as farming needs a farmer (a teacher) and learning as construction work needs
A teacher is. . . .

| A light: gives brightness, warmth, love, life, guidance, direction; is a source of knowledge and energy. | Light: brings brightness, hope, beauty, love, knowledge, guidance, direction to the future. |
| A candle: burns itself to enlighten others; shows devotion and self-sacrifice. | A candle: lets students see wisdom, hope; lights up the mind; brightens students’ lives. |
| Food and drink: gives necessary nutrition, flavour, knowledge; helps students to grow; gives energy; is attractive, delicious and fragrant; can bring a bitter and sweet taste. | Food and drink: is daily nourishment for the healthy growth of body, mind and spirit; is essential for growth; the more, the better; it is delicious; can be bitter or sweet. |
| A friend or parent: gives care, help, encouragement, guidance; shows closeness, good communication; shares knowledge, feelings and happiness. | A friend or parent: for knowledge, care, frequent contact, closeness, comfort, companionship, happiness, beauty, love. |
| A gardener, farmer: gives care, shelter and protection; cultivates and nurtures students’ growth, spreads knowledge; is hardworking; brings beauty and sacrifices for the future. | Farming: has growth processes for knowledge, intelligence, feeling, life; takes time, needs care and cultivation; students make hard efforts for future rewards, success, beauty and happiness. |
| The engineer of the soul: produces talents for the future; designs, modifies and builds up students’ spirits. | Construction work: building up the human soul, the foundation of success, of a good life; building knowledge and a spiritual world; it needs daily effort. |
| A weapon: two-edged, cuts ignorance but also cuts creativity; increases feelings but hurts friends. | A weapon: to defeat others with knowledge; valuable; two-edged – has both positive and negative sides. |
| A book: a rich source of knowledge; guides generations to progress, solves problems, is full of answers. | A book: endless knowledge, truth, beauty, effort through hardship. |
| A pen: uses up its own ink to produce knowledge and record valuable things. | A pen: writes students’ future life; needs hard work. |
| Water: needed for knowledge and life; vast, endless, constantly moving knowledge; has an enduring effect. | Water: the necessity, vastness and value of knowledge; nourishes, satisfies and purifies; source of happiness and life. |
| A boat: carries students to the unknown; gives hope and helps them to achieve goals. | A boat: drifting or goes with direction towards a goal; needs constant effort. |
| A bridge: to knowledge and wisdom; links students to learning, progress and success. | A bridge: to the world, knowledge, success, the future; links dreams and reality |
| A ladder: students climb to knowledge; a support for progress. | A ladder: to endless knowledge, wisdom, growth, progress, success, light, life. |
| A key: opens up minds; opens the door to knowledge, wisdom and life. | A key: opens the mind; opens the door to knowledge, wisdom, success, the future. |

Figure 6.3 Representative metaphors for ‘teacher’ and ‘learning’ given by students
an engineer of the soul (a teacher). The identification of both ‘teacher’ and ‘learning’ as a book could further reinforce a 3Ts idea (teacher, text, test) but tests and exams are not mentioned frequently and the metaphors have a strong holistic quality that goes beyond a teacher or text-centred classroom.

Second, the students’ explanations for their metaphors (the entailments) have far more depth of feeling than simply education as instruction, shown by the frequency of warmth, brightness, beauty, hope, love, and life; teaching and learning are not simply cognitive acts, shown by the range and high frequency of terms like knowledge, truth, wisdom, mind, feeling, spirit and soul. The tone of many of the Chinese students’ metaphors is thus deeply reflective. The tone is also affective: many students show strong feeling for teachers and for learning, seen in frequent mentions of care, closeness, comfort, sharing and companionship. However, learning is not easy. It demands constant effort, hard work and may involve hardship. The roles of the teacher are broader and far more nuanced than the official metaphors might suggest. In the words of many students (Figure 6.3 and elsewhere in the data), these teacher roles in relation to students include sharing knowledge, giving enlightenment, helping progress, nurturing growth, caring, guiding, directing, supporting, advising, leading, controlling, mediating, protecting, sheltering, cleansing, purifying, understanding, entertaining, being close, giving friendship and beautifying life.

Third, the picture of teaching and learning is not uniformly positive. Although a positive view is the clearly dominant one, there are negative (but critically reflective) elements: teachers are tigers because they may attack me at any time; a stone pressing on students’ heads, which gives them a headache; a mixture of an angel and a devil; a surgeon cutting off the cancer in us, but also cutting off our creative skills. Learning can also be a blend of positive and negative. It is torture in fire and ice; a doctor but also an assassin; an olive, bitter at first then sweet; a durian, it smells terrible but when you try it, it is delicious; coffee, it has bitterness and sweetness – at first it is bitter, later sweet and wonderful. These negative and mixed critical evaluations may reflect increased student diversity with the expanding numbers (a few students struggle – they would not have been admitted to university previously) and a change from the past (students feel more open to admit negative elements or have a more socially realistic view now). Some negative elements are expressed with creativity, humour and poignancy, so perhaps these qualities are more evident now as ELT policy, for example, emphasizes creativity: A teacher is an ancient clown, you scarcely dare laugh at it; a teacher is a rich slave owner, rich with knowledge but we are their slaves and we want to get a little spiritual food from them. Some mixed evaluations show a change over time as students develop:

In primary school, the teacher is like a babysitter, caring for students; in middle school, the teacher is like a candle, giving the light of knowledge; in university, the teacher is like a road sign, giving students directions, but it is up to students to choose their way.
A teacher is a god in primary school, all they said was right; a priest in the middle school, their words were correct but I began to have my own thinking; Satan in the university, I don’t want to be seduced by him, but angels before the exams – their words are gospel, every sentence.

Fourth, on the positive side, is the students’ widespread recognition of teacher devotion, suffering and sacrifice as an important part of a holistic and humane educational landscape. This is found in the entailments of many metaphors, as can be seen in the examples in Figure 6.4, but this element of teaching is rarely, if ever, mentioned in educational studies especially in the West. While teachers can readily recognise the sentiments here, the point of interest is that many students are aware of this and can articulate it in a creative variety of metaphors.

Some of these examples (Figure 6.4) are common or at least understandable elsewhere (e.g. the candle is a common metaphor for a teacher in the Middle East); others are not: calling a teacher ‘an old cow’ in Britain or Australia is likely to be understood as a gender-based insult because she is thought to be unpleasant, ugly or stupid.

Learning as a journey

The most frequent metaphor in the data is that ‘learning’ is a journey over a landscape. This overarching metaphor is richly characterised and it is realised by a huge number of expressions. An analysis of the conceptual model behind it gives insights into Chinese cultures of learning. The journey is described by different students as endless, exciting, hard, happy, marvellous and mysterious. It is an expedition of exploration, an exploration in the dark; an exploration of time and space; an adventure, searching the universe, and seeking treasure. These epithets are often accompanied by conditions which indicate a mindset of preparedness and a sense of the process as well as the goal: only if you try your best can you reach your goal; you can arrive only by persisting; it needs a strong will and a healthy body to arrive; we need to be ready for any difficulty for a happy ending; only if you stick to your dreams will you be finally successful; you can enjoy beautiful scenery during the journey of learning; you should not put too much emphasis on arriving but keep an eye on the road and appreciate the landscape.

The destination of the journey of learning is heaven or happiness. It is a journey to paradise; a happy paradise, we can travel freely in it; a place for fair angels; the studious student’s Garden of Eden; a garden in the sunshine of heaven; a journey to get happiness, to the fountainhead of happiness. There is an interesting theme of religious symbolism here: learning is a church, it is supposed to take you to heaven. Some students write of happiness as both the destination and a characteristic of the journey: simply, learning is happy travelling; learning is happiness. The journey is also often characterised as realising our dreams, desires and ideals. The means to do this is usually travel.
along a road or to see learning as a ladder, steps or a bridge (i.e. as a medium or means to ascend upwards or cross to reach dreams): learning is a wide road to ideals; the road to heaven; a ladder to paradise; a ladder to ideals; steps to paradise; a bridge leading us to our desires, to cross the gap between ideal and reality; a bridge between the real and your ideals. Crucially, in modern China, the ‘paradise’ is strongly linked to future success. In the words of many, the journey is the essential way to success; the highway to success; the road to success and to make dreams come true, the essential road to the peak of success; the bridge to success; the ladder to success; a bridge to success, crossing reality to your goal.

However, this journey is not at all simple. It is ‘a journey through hell to heaven’. This is reminiscent of the life journey through hell and the mountains of purgatory to a paradise beyond time and space in the most famous

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<tr>
<th>Metaphors for teachers</th>
<th>Entailments of metaphors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A piece of ice</td>
<td>Melting, running out herself to wet students’ dry hearts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalk</td>
<td>Teaching their knowledge to students but losing their youth gradually, it writes out the whole world, leaving marks of knowledge, sacrificing itself, writing down the most beautiful text even with the last bits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A red candle</td>
<td>Burning itself and enlightening us, lighting my desire for knowledge, sacrificing itself to give light to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A falling leaf</td>
<td>It sacrifices itself enriching the soil, burning its own youth, living an ordinary life with a moment of magnificence; it falls to bring up the next generation by fertilising the soil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A silkworm</td>
<td>It produces silk selflessly until the last minute of its life; devoting its whole life to others, it sacrifices itself but gives silk to create the most beautiful clothes for people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An old cow</td>
<td>She has selfless devotion and gives great help in life, silently suffering; she won’t stop until she has given out all her strength to serve society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bee</td>
<td>Selflessly working hard for others, spreading the pollen so that flowers will grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A gardener</td>
<td>He uses his own sweat to water flowers for the motherland; he pours out his blood and sweat selflessly to cultivate our growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An engineer</td>
<td>He is selfless to offer himself to enrich others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A boatman</td>
<td>He sacrifices himself to help others reach their goals.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
poem in Italian, the Divina Commedia by Dante (1265–1321) or perhaps of
the difficult travels of Xuan Zang (604–664) across mountains and deserts
to the west, a journey of learning to get the Buddhist scriptures from India
for China (portrayed in fantasy as the Journey to the West in the Monkey
stories of Wu Chchengen (1506–1582). For these students, learning is the jour-
ney from hell to heaven; a way leading to heaven but also to hell; a road with
thorns, but at the end there’s a paradise filled with flowers; it is a pilgrimage,
searching for your true self. Hell is briefly but graphically described: it is
torture, horror, war, a vast sea of woes; a bottomless chasm, a bottomless pit,
an abyss, an endless hole, a black hole; to separate flesh from the spirit; more
suffering than separation and death; a curse, poison, purgatory, hopeless and
painful if you don’t study, God’s punishment for humans.

In many expressions with oxymorons, the students show that for them pain
and suffering are necessary stages in the journey to happiness: the journey
is full of pains with satisfaction; taking pain and sweetness together; a jour-
ney with both hardships and happiness; bitter happiness; travelling in rain and
sunshine; the process is bitter, the result is sweet; no pain, no gain; no sweet,
no sweet.

Many students indicate two further conditions for success in their jour-
ney of learning. The first of these is that they should make a constant effort
and show continuous determination. This is a matter of sweat and efforts
and it seems to correspond to the selfless sacrifice and devotion of teachers
(FIGURE 6.4). Students say they must strive without stopping, you can be more
happy because of your effort; if you want to get greater success, you should
make greater efforts; if you want to make progress, you must make efforts;
climbing a high mountain to reach the top, you should be more diligent than
others, we just need to climb unremittingly; only if you climb ceaselessly can
you arrive at the top, we should keep learning constantly, endlessly. Such effort
is said to be a marked contrast with American students, who as the neces-

sary condition for successful learning may emphasise the need to possess
talent and intelligence, rather than the need to make this sort of constant
effort (Stevenson and Stigler 1992). In many sailing metaphors, this critical
need for effort by Chinese students is linked to sailing in the wind against the
current where not to advance means dropping back: students say they must
go ahead or fall behind; if you can’t make progress you will fall behind; you
will fall behind, if you don’t make efforts; sailing against the tide; if you don’t
make progress you will rush away in the opposite direction. This constant effort
is held to be well worthwhile because these students have a strong belief in
their future success, which is linked to heaven and realising their dreams.

Learning is the road to success and to make dreams come true; learning is walk-
ing on the highway to success; making an effort results in success; learning is
the essential road to the peak of success.

The second condition is the need for direction and guidance, either explic-
ently from a teacher or implicitly in many metaphors of a lighthouse, beacon
or guiding light, which is the teacher (FIGURE 6.3). Thus students state the
condition: only when we find the correct direction can we reach the right destination; you need a guiding light; the hope of light, guiding the way of your head; the lighthouse that guides ships sailing in the darkness, it leads us to go forwards; our teacher, guiding our direction forward; the encouragement of a teacher, a teacher who constantly points out the way.

In the journey of learning, students are conscious of a time dimension – a positive past and of how they are changing some of their past in the move towards a future (which is always bright and linked to success). Learning is the road travelled by our ancestors, moving along the road on which our forefathers have passed. In a favourite quotation from the seventeenth century Isaac Newton (who derived it from the twelfth century French scholar Bernard de Chartres), which students have learnt from English textbooks, learning is standing on the shoulders of giants or in more contemporary terms, it is a time tunnel, through it we can enter ancient times as well as predict the future. This past does not, however, fix the present; it is mutable:

Learning is the means to change our destiny, the change from the old to the new, the change to forget the past and adapt to a new life, supplementing the past with new knowledge continuously.

Learning is a beautiful future, the key to making your dreams come true, a key to realising ideals, a bright lamp, illuminating our future. It can give you what you want, bring you your dream, you can gain anything that you want if you use your heart and control yourself to reach your goal.

Figure 6.5 A map of Chinese students’ metaphors for ‘learning is a journey’
Continuity and some change in landscapes of learning

As shown, some students display awareness of continuity of the past, but more generally the landscape outlined above has geological features which reflect traditional Chinese sayings, many of which are well known, which are taught to children by modern parents and stem from the Confucian heritage (Jin and Cortazzi 2008) (see examples in Figure 6.6). These relate to values, many of which will presumably survive rapid technological developments in learning, the increased individualism, personalised and applied learning, and the need for critical and creative thinkers (the obvious changes).

More specifically, there are key passages within the Chinese classics, appearing like geological sub-strata, which underlie some features of the landscape of current cultures of learning and, surprisingly, they match some recent reforms and requirements (Figure 6.1) by giving a step-by-step process of study. The Zhong Yong (The Mean), as one of the Four Books of the Confucian classics, gives this sequence as part of a learning journey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of learning</th>
<th>Traditional Chinese sayings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>It is a waste of time to live without learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an effort</td>
<td>If you make enough effort, you can grind an iron pillar into a needle. . . . Personal practice with effort. . . . The master leads the student to the door, but the perfection of the learner’s skill lies in the individual learner’s own effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make constant progress</td>
<td>Learning is sailing a boat against the current; not to advance is to drop back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diligence</td>
<td>Work diligently and tirelessly, learning only comes from diligence; without diligence, one ends up with an empty belly. . . . 30% talent, 70% study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal relations</td>
<td>In education, teachers and students mutually benefit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking questions</td>
<td>Learning, learning, if you want to learn, you’ve got to ask.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective thinking</td>
<td>Learning without reflecting gains nothing; thought without learning is dangerous. . . . Learning without reflecting is like eating without digesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering setbacks</td>
<td>Without terrible sufferings one cannot be a superior person . . . Suffer a loss, learn a lesson . . . If rivers do not bend, the waters will not flow forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future success</td>
<td>If you are full of learning, do not fear that fortune will not visit you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.6 Some traditional Chinese sayings about aspects of learning
one must learn extensively, examine carefully, think prudently, distinguish clearly and practise sincerely the good way. He should not stop learning until he has known all, neither should he stop asking until he has exhausted his questions, nor should he stop thinking until he has found all the answers, nor should he stop distinguishing until he has made the differences clear, nor should he stop acting until he has done his sincere best. If others succeed by making one ounce of effort, I will make ten times as much effort.

(Zhong Yong, transl. Fu 2006: 85)

This sequence was advocated in commentaries by a leading scholar of the Sung dynasty, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), who had them written for all to see as the basis for education in the White Deer Grotto Academy in 1180. He also wrote:

In learning we have to read for ourselves, so that the understanding we reach is personally meaningful. Nowadays, however, people read simply for the sake of the civil service examinations . . . reading must be an experience personally meaningful to the self . . . in reading we must first become intimately familiar with the text so that its words seem to come from our own mouths. We should continue to reflect on it so that its ideas seem to come from our own minds. Only then can there be real understanding.

(Cited in Gardner 1990: 17, 148, 43)

Another of the classics, the Li Ji (Book of Rites) gives this advice for teachers on the way (the Way or Tao) of learning:

In his teaching the superior man guides his students but does not pull them along; he urges them to go forward and does not suppress them; he opens the way, but does not take them to the place. Guiding without pulling makes the process of learning gentle; urging without suppressing makes the process of learning easy; and opening the way without leading the students to the place makes them think for themselves. Now if the process of learning is made gentle and easy and the students are encouraged to think for themselves, we may call the man a good teacher.’

(Lin 1938: 247)

While ‘the guide’ here plainly fits into current students’ metaphors of learning, making learning ‘gentle and easy’ does not match the journey through ‘hell’ that many students still describe (though it might be a solution once there). The journey through hell to heaven (Figure 6.5) would be recognised by many current Chinese educators though, including the eleven eminent university leaders portrayed in detail by Hayhoe (2006), who comments that all of them endorse the traditional way of the scholar, with Confucian
concerns. Their careers reveal a drama of struggle and suffering, with bitter-sweet experiences, but their teaching and educational administration were driven by constant effort, devotion and inspired vision for the future. None would claim to have reached heaven, and some are reticent about hell (drawing a veil over the Cultural Revolution) but all contributed to the remarkable journey of progress of education in China and the recent changes. The institutional histories of their universities have at least some features of this journey, too. The journey of ELT (Figure 6.2) could also be characterised in large part as such a journey. The massive interest and numerical involvement in learning English is in some ways a huge success after difficulties, setbacks and constant effort by teachers and policy makers. However, the very existence of the new requirements (Figure 6.1) and recognition of newer needs shows change in progress and this demonstrates that heaven is still some distance away. This study of students’ metaphors shows continuity and some change: one change is the fact that there are so many creative metaphors among Chinese students now, compared with the few in the 1990s (Cortazzi and Jin 1999).

A geological stratum underlying the current landscape shines through these metaphors. This is the sense of educational values in Chinese cultures of learning. Teachers are fundamentally sources of knowledge and guidance, energy, warmth, hope and love; they show profound care and a sense of cultivation of humanity and morality. Learners strive constantly for knowledge, knowing that this is a long process which requires constant effort; learning may be a bitter-sweet experience but there is guidance and cultivation from teachers and a strong belief in success and the value of learning now for the future. Allowing that there are exceptions to this and that the model may represent the ideal (of course not all features of this journey of learning apply to all learners), and that there are certainly a few negative elements and experiences, the model provides insights to those outside China. Insights include the features of teachers having a cleansing and purifying function and beautifying life, while showing devotion and sacrifice, while learners are hardworking because they believe this leads to success and that their dreams can be realised through struggle.

Finally, we can see the research process for investigating the landscape metaphors of learning as the five steps of study outlined in the Zhong Yong. First, to learn extensively we have collected a large corpus of students’ metaphors of learning. Second, to examine them carefully we have translated those in Chinese, grouped all metaphors into inductively-derived categories and sub-classified them according to the entailments. Third, to think prudently about the metaphors we have related them to official metaphors and to the case study of the development of ELT in China (we have also reflected on them from photos, videos and classroom observations). Fourth, to distinguish clearly the individual expression from socially-held values we have only mapped frequently occurring metaphors whose entailments matched those of other frequent metaphors: we confirmed the categories
discussed through extensive cross-checking within the data sets. Fifth, for sincere practice we have thought about how the results related to continuity and changes in education in China but also about how those outside China can learn insights by considering the Chinese changing landscapes of learning. There are many educational landscapes around the world and different journeys of learning in different cultures. Thinking about Chinese journeys with a map in our hands gives Western teachers a clear orientation to teach Chinese students in China or abroad. It gives both Chinese and Western teachers (and, interestingly, perhaps Western students) the means to reflect on their own educational practices of teaching and learning, wherever they are. In this way, we can all look at our own inner landscape so that the Chinese landscape changes us.

References


