

CJ Koh Professorial Lecture Series

Ruth Hayhoe

and Her Scholarship

by Wing On Lee



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Introduction

It is my great honour to pen a few words in honour of Ruth Hayhoe to express my thanks to her for all the contributions she has made as a scholar, as a professional, as a friend to many of us, and as a humane person to everyone. I started to read Ruth Hayhoe's work while I was studying for my PhD at the University of Durham. I read more of her works later when more publications came along. However, I only started to understand her scholarship more when I had an opportunity to work closely with her for 3 years during the time she served as Director at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

It was a very rich 3 years of learning to me, as I did not only read her works, but I was also able to see how she finds meanings and creates meanings in life, and to me this is the crux of her scholarship and professionalism. I was particularly impressed with the way she wrote, as she was doing her research and writing in a style ahead of her time, a time when comparative education was significantly influenced by systems analysis, patterns of development, policy transfer, and like what she has described about what she learned from Brian Holmes, a problem-oriented, rationalistic and scientific approach.

Hayhoe always writes in context.

This does not mean that Hayhoe has not been influenced by those approaches, but as she mentioned, she decided to go her

way, while she grew in her scholarship and obtained a diversified personal experience, to deeply understand another culture, that is, Chinese culture.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce Ruth Hayhoe's scholarship to our audience for her presentations in Singapore, as part of her visit as CJ Koh Professor at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Hayhoe is a prolific writer, and has published volumes of work with a vast coverage of areas and topics. It will not be an easy task to analyse all her publications. Instead, I would like to focus on what is beneath her scholarship: her approach to life, to friendship, to knowledge, and to human understanding. Her scholarship is distinguishable in many ways, I would like to expound on four prominent ways which I have found striking of Hayhoe's approach.

Significance of the Context

Hayhoe always writes in context. Contextual analysis penetrates her works and is characteristic of her writings. The diverse topics notwithstanding, I always find that the most fascinating part of her books is the introductory chapter that precedes each of them. For example, in her introduction to the book *Education and Modernization: The Chinese Experience* (1992), she particularly mentions that context is important in understanding the concept of modernization in China:

Much of the conceptual terminology used to explore issues of education and modernization has been drawn from Western experience. Its

application to China is thus almost inevitably a process of measuring Chinese experience against that of the West. We have tried, therefore, to be consciously theoretical in our use of the key concept “modernization”, weighing its meaning for the Chinese context. (pp. xiii–xiv)

The significance of the cultural context is beyond being a background for understanding. Hayhoe (2011) describes it as a kind of resource – a cultural resource – a source for understanding, and a source for insight and wisdom. Because the cultural context is an epistemological resource, dialogue across cultures is therefore an important means of enriching human knowledge and understanding. Amidst her works, a penetrating academic agenda of Hayhoe’s is *Knowledge Across Cultures* (Hayhoe et al., 1993; Hayhoe & Pan, 2001), and in her writings she has called this variably “dialogue among cultures”, “dialogue among civilizations”, “East–West dialogue”, “cultural interchange”, “civilizational interaction” and “international interaction”.

One of Hayhoe’s most impressive contextual analyses is in Gu Mingyuan’s *Education in China and Abroad: Perspectives from a Lifetime in Comparative Education* (2001). The introduction to this book by Hayhoe demonstrates her mastery of comparative education in China, and amazingly, her mastery of the works of Professor Gu, the most eminent comparativist in China. The book is a collection of Gu’s articles, selected for translation into English. The selection of the articles in this book was made on her recommendation.

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The Introduction really shows the detail that Hayhoe has mastered about the development of the field of comparative education in China; about how this field started as a means to learn from the West and how the attention was turned to the former Soviet Union as a target of learning; how the Cultural Revolution became a testing time for Gu, yet an opportunity for progressive learning; and how new opportunities came about during the opening up period. It shows how Hayhoe can not only discuss educational changes in the context of political changes, but also how all these changes become meaningful to a person’s life, and how the professional growth of an influential person like Gu can further create impact on the system. This is the beauty of Hayhoe’s scholarship. She manages to integrate all these situational and contextual aspects of an issue, a time, and/or a person to create meanings and insights.

Another book showing a similar approach, but further breadth of her scholarship, is *Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators* (2006). Her first chapter, “Creating the Portraits – An Interpretive Framework”, provides an artful summary of Confucian, Neo-Confucian and Daoist philosophies of education, particularly the thoughts that would help in understanding features of education in contemporary China.

This summary does not only provide an “interpretive framework” but also “a context for the educator’s life” (p. 38).

The wonder of this book is that Hayhoe was able to identify the most influential Chinese educators to be portrayed. “Influential Chinese educators” is a difficult topic of choice, as it all depends on what grounds she takes to judge that these educators being selected are the “influential educators”. There is no doubt a “personal experience” dimension in her judgment, particularly how Hayhoe’s life came across the lives of these educators, and the specific and significant impacts they have made in their times and their localities. For the influential educators she chose to write about, she even called them “ten lives in mine” (Hayhoe, 2005).

This is really crucial to Hayhoe’s research methodology as all along she has been a very engaged “participant observer”, and her writings are records and narratives of what has happened in her life and the people around her.

A common thread in these people’s lives is how they worked ahead of their time or how they preceded their time in what they said, what they did and what they foresaw, and how these educators persisted over time and against oppositions and difficulties, particularly over the cultural revolution period. They are all progressive educators in one way or another, and the choice of these educators to be narrated also reflects on Hayhoe as a progressive

educator herself. It is the process of life touching life that has made her choose the progressive educators whose lives to narrate.

Research Methodology: The Researcher as the Instrument

Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators offers a deliberate section on Hayhoe’s research methodology, and I think this represents the culmination of the methodology she has all along adopted. In the main section, she criticizes the shortcoming of the “secular rationality” and objectivist research as it only focuses on what can be observed, measured and patterned, and because of this, philosophy is losing its cultural role and the inner meaning of human lives tends to be ignored. The narrative approach allows Hayhoe to fill the gap of empirical research, and more importantly allows the researcher to be the focal point in the process of research and discovery, that would both allow and require the researcher to interact with the environment, with the subjects, and even develop a relationship between the researcher and the participants.

This is really crucial to Hayhoe’s research methodology as all along she has been a very engaged “participant observer”, and her writings are records and narratives of what has happened in her life and the people around her. It not only shows her intellectual interpretation of her surroundings and the people around her, but it is a process of sense making, and she has found meanings and created meanings about herself, about those

people she chose to narrate about, and about the broader intellectual and cultural frameworks that have created the context for those meanings.

Hayhoe has fully regarded herself as the research instrument, and her own experience is a source for interpretation of her times and the people around her, and in return they have provided meaning in her life. It is in this context that I see her motivation in writing *Full Circle: A Life with Hong Kong and China* (2004). This is a record of her meaning making in her life, a life that integrates her experience into research, and a life that generates insights from the experience, which further provides insights for her research into her surroundings and the people around her. *Full Circle* provides insight, too, about how Hayhoe finds meanings in her life, how she finds life meaningful, how she makes others' lives meaningful, and how she creates meanings in life. It is through her interactive engagement with others in the course of life that she has conducted her research not only through cultural dialogues but also personal dialogues.

A Storytelling Approach to Comparative Education

One striking feature of Hayhoe's academic writing approach is storytelling. Two of her books were entitled "portraits", namely *Portraits of Influential Chinese Educators* (2006) and *Portraits of 21st Century Chinese Universities* (Hayhoe, Li, Lin, & Zha, 2011). *Full Circle*, although not named "portrait", is actually a self-portrait. However, explaining and defending

storytelling as an academic writing approach was most elaborately discussed in her early work *China's Universities 1895–1995: A Century of Cultural Conflict* (1996/1999), a book developed from her PhD thesis.

The introductory chapter of this book is called "A Story, Not a History". In this chapter, she explained in detail why she adopted a storytelling approach. In the main section, she identified a couple of dilemmas among comparative researchers. First is the dilemma between universality and particularity, and second is the dilemma between objectivism and holism or monism. The former dilemma creates a dualism between factual knowledge and moral imperatives but the latter goes beyond factual knowledge to moral imperatives (Hayhoe, 1999). In sum, she regards the dichotomy between fact and values in European dualism as an unnecessary dichotomy (Hayhoe, 2006).

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Hayhoe feels there is a need to bridge these polarizations, and she has found a way that would attend to the demands of scientific objectivism and cultural/personal particularism, by using an integral storytelling approach. Thus, "telling the

story” is a particular approach she has adopted to share her academic analyses and insights. As indicated from the title of the introductory chapter, her storytelling is more than a historical account or a narrative – she has something more to achieve. She not only wants to tell what has been and what is, but she also wants to probe what should be and what might be in the future, but not in a prescriptive way. In her words:

Thus my intention is to go beyond the kinds of explanation associated with the modernization narrative, which traditionally tried to discover contextual “causes” of particular phenomenon or make predictions on the basis of deductive theory and then test them in a carefully defined context. It is not, however, to offer a prescription for the next stage, derived from socialist narrative. Rather, I hope to tell the story in such a way that there is an integral link between understanding what is, or what has been, and reaching forward toward what should be, or what might be, the case in the future. There should be a room for openness, and a sense of responsibility, a recognition that moral direction can be derived from a logical working out of a preferred future within the university community. (1996/1999, p. xiii)

Her storytelling is more than a historical account, as the stories she tells are interwoven with her personal experience – telling the stories that she has experienced herself. In this way, her scholarship is developed from her personal experience, and the breadth of the stories tells the breadth of her exposure and experience. Also, because of her wide exposure and

experience, she has an inner urge to share these stories with others as well. This is how she explains her drive to write *Full Circle*: “Part of the explanation is a kind of inner compulsion” (2004, p. 17).

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To some extent, Hayhoe feels that there is no better approach than storytelling in expounding on the academic insight that has to be understood in cultural contexts. This is particularly so when she was pondering the approaches to write the introduction for Gu’s book:

In reflecting on what this introduction might contribute to this volume, I have wrestled with different possible approaches. I decided on one that is simple, but which I hope will provide a helpful background for readers of the volume. That is to use a narrative approach, outlining highlights of Gu’s own life story which were important in his development into a scholar of such distinction and national influence. (Hayhoe, 2001, p. 8)

Hayhoe has extended this approach in crafting the book on influential Chinese educators. By writing their stories, she was “opening up the story of their lives to an

international readership". In writing their stories, she was also "sketching out the story of their institutions" (2006, p. 12).

A Progressive Educator

One important reason that Hayhoe adopts a storytelling approach in her academic writing is the attempt to integrate diversities and cultural particularities. This is what she explained she wanted to do, for example, in portraying the 11 Chinese educators:

Each of the educators was a unique individual, who had made remarkable contributions in both educational thought and action. They had grown up in different time periods and different regions of China, and had served within different institutions in all the major regions in China. Their lives and educational ideals were quite diverse, yet there were certain threads that bound them together, reflecting their educational heritage. (2011, p. 15)

Hayhoe's writings have covered quite a wide array of topics, such as Chinese universities, cultures, philosophies, epistemology, and individual educators and scholars. Yet, there is also a thread in her academic analyses. She has tried to bridge cross-cultural understanding about progressivism in the Chinese contexts, to make it understandable to international readers.

The concluding chapter of *China's Universities* reveals her fundamental concern about the progressive contribution of higher education in China:

Hopefully, China's universities will play an important role in the future, not only as channels of new knowledge and technology for needed arrears of economic and social development within China, but also in introducing to a wider world progressive dimensions of Chinese culture and lessons learned from China's social development over a dramatic century of change. (1996/1999, p. 272)

She has taken effort to look for insights from traditional Chinese thoughts and contemporary Chinese educators. She points out the progressive tradition of China through her discussion of Neo-Confucian thoughts, particularly through analysing the thoughts of Wang Yangming:

Why have I told his [Wang's] story in such detail here? Largely because I believe his life provides a picture of the patterns of life that are seen less as personal choices, than as the way life is to be lived by Chinese intellectuals steeped in the Confucian tradition. The first point is that a Confucian philosophy by no means commits one to a life of conformity and stereotype, but to a life of creative thought, writing and teaching, combined with social responsibility, that may come at a very high cost. (2006, p. 34)

In portraying the 11 influential Chinese educators, the descriptors she uses are: visionary leader, independent thinker and educator, pioneer, a life that bridged China and the Anglophone world, new directions, new career, new disciplines, integration of heritage, a vision for science and internationalism, a vision for transformation, and an open and committed heart and mind.

Commenting on the individuals, she highlights that:

- “One is struck by the remarkable degree of autonomy he [Zhu Jiusi] was able to exercise” (p. 139);
- “Its [Pan Maoyuan’s theory] ultimate purpose is to enable human beings to realize their full humanity” (p. 168);
- “The nurturing of the self, of individualism and of a strong subjective awareness, is important [Wang Fengxian]” (p. 221);
- “What he [Wang Yongquan] values most about the Beida spirit is its openness and the way in which their lively debates on all kinds of topics are always taking place” (p. 260);
- “Gu Mingyuan has probably done more than any other Chinese educator to lay a foundation that will enable Chinese thinkers to articulate a global vision for education and culture” (p. 291); and
- “Chinese education thus has a complex dual role in the present period – ‘it must establish the independent individual personality, and stimulate the rich and varied development of the individual, while at the same time function as a kind of antidote to the unlimited development of individualism [Lu Jie]’” (p. 319).

Overall, Hayhoe concludes that her portraits of the 11 influential Chinese educators show that “most of the educators had come across Deweyan progressivism in one way and another” (p. 370) and that:

The lives and ideas of these educators do not conform to either of the stereotypes of Confucianism that have been dominant in Western educational thought – that of a closed hierarchical social order that encouraged subordination and conformity and was

antithetical to modernization, on the one hand, or that of an instrumentalist ethos of self-discipline, community cohesion and nationalist loyalty which produced the “East Asian economic miracle” on the other. (p. 359)

Hayhoe tries to clarify that we also need to adopt a cultural lens to understand progressive concepts in China. In her latest book, *Portraits of 21st Century Chinese Universities*, she explains the contextual meaning of such concepts as “university autonomy” and “academic freedom” in China. The Chinese term for university autonomy is autonomy as “self-mastery” (*zizhu*) rather than autonomy as “self-governance” (*zizhi*) which has the connotation of legal and political independence.

As she avails herself of research, research shapes and inculcates her understanding of the people and environment around her.

In regard to “academic freedom”, Western epistemology is dominant with rationalism and dualism in the Western context. In the Chinese context, academic freedom is more often expressed through the degree of “intellectual authority” (*sixiang quanwei*) that Chinese scholars enjoy. Also, the meaning of “intellectual freedom”, quite different from European rationalism, requires knowledge to be demonstrated through action for the public good, and that knowledge be seen as holistic and interconnected, rather than organized into narrowly defined separate disciplines.

Conclusion

Hayhoe's scholarship is distinctive in four significant ways, in the praxis she writes, thinks and approaches her works. Like a novel writer, she inscribes the background of her works, depicting the setting vividly to her readers that they may appreciate the significance of the context which shapes one's understanding. Beyond a canvas for her characters, the setting serves as a character in her story – a rich cultural resource, without which it loses the soul of the story. It provides insight, wisdom and understanding. The cultural context is an epistemological capital, cultural exchange is fundamental to enriching human knowledge, enlightenment and development.

Her works reflect her dedication, humility and passion to appreciate cultural diversities and the meaning of human existence.

She plunges into her research, taking the form of an instrument in her research – her narrative approach seals the cracks in empirical research, taking research to a richer level, developing relationships within her research. As she avails herself of research, research shapes and inculcates her understanding of the people and environment around her. Approaching the topic of comparative education, Hayhoe embraces the role of a storyteller; to amalgamate the demands of scientific objectivism and cultural/personal particularism to share her academic analyses and insights. A progressive

educator at heart, Hayhoe's mastery of the progressive concepts at work in China and the Western world is a double-edged sword, which surfaces the fundamental differences in ideas; and through mutual understanding and respect, unite in diversity and strengthen in local capability.

Ruth Hayhoe's legacy is rooted in her mastery and her passion to mediate differences in comparative education, to advocate unity through understanding and respect, which she modelled by spending many years studying Chinese culture and education to the extent that she lived many years in China. Her works reflect her dedication, humility and passion to appreciate cultural diversities and the meaning of human existence.

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