

# MULTICULTURAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE OF BEING AN INTERNATIONAL CHINESE STUDENT

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**ABSTRACT:** This reflection is a narrative autoethnography that explores the transformative multicultural learning experiences of an international Chinese graduate student. The experiences encompass the journey from a master's to a doctoral degree, spanning approximately six years of study in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. The purpose of this reflection is to comprehend the roles of being an international student and academic researcher, while also delving into approaches for enhancing intercultural competence. Through an individual perspective, this narrative autoethnography presents an inter-/multi-cultural integration model known as the ME–WE–OUR–ME model, which provides a deeper understanding of the multicultural transformative learning experiences and complements the transformative learning theory. The insights gained from this reflection have the potential to optimize international adult education and programs.

**Keywords:** transformative learning experience, Chinese graduate student, autoethnographic narrative, international adult education

*“AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT AND YOUNG RESEARCH SCHOLAR, I AM TRANSFORMING BY LEARNING.”*

There has been a significant increase in the number of international students (IS) in higher education, leading to a surge in research on international sojourn (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Brown & Jones, 2013; Findlay et al., 2012; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). It appears that the international sojourn directly influences students' learning outcomes (Commander et al., 2016). Learning in an international setting is a process that is described as "difficult to describe, interpret, and conceptualize" (Erichsen, 2011, p. 111) and is characterized by a high level of uncertainty, both in terms of the process itself and the outcome (Schrittesser et al., 2014, p. 152). According to Kolb (1984), "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). Ritz (2010) argues that adults are better equipped than children to evaluate the validity of their understandings, beliefs, and ways of constructing meaning from new experiences. On one hand, the transformative learning process involves self-critical reflective thinking that focuses on learners' beliefs, values, and understanding of various learning concepts (Brookfield, 1986, 1995; Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 2000). On the other hand, it involves adult learners making sense of their experiences (Cranton, 1994; King, 1997b, 2005; Mezirow, 1991a, 1995, 2000). Therefore, it is necessary for experts to investigate the trends and factors that facilitate transformative learning among adult learners, specifically international adult learners (Taylor, 2008).

Moreover, Taylor (1994) highlights that existing research focuses heavily on participants' characteristics that contribute to the success of intercultural experiences, but there is a lack of research from a learning perspective that examines participants' ability to develop intercultural competency. According to Spencer-Oatey (2018), universities worldwide are striving to enhance the cultural diversity of their students; however, research indicates that successful integration remains challenging. While students may value the resources, engagement opportunities, and other initiatives implemented by institutions to create a diverse and multicultural campus environment, adapting to new academic, social, and cultural surroundings can still be stressful

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(Bastien et al., 2018; Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Moreover, the previous reviews on transformative learning, culture, and/or difference have demonstrated a limited understanding, with minimal research exploring how culture, diversity, and difference act as catalysts for transformation in IS (Taylor, 2007). Consequently, this study concentrates on exploring the international learning experience from the personal perspective of an international student.

Above all, the aims of this study are twofold. Firstly, it seeks to reflect upon my personal intercultural experience with the intention of fostering transformative growth. Secondly, it aims to utilize my personal experience as a means to enhance the understanding of the significance of international adult education among scholars, universities, and international education policymakers. This study adopts a cross-sectional approach through narrative autoethnography, in line with the definition of international adult education, which encompasses learning experiences in both home and host countries, including participation in international academic events, as well as short-term and long-term programs abroad. My reflection on the international experience revolves around three main questions: Why did I decide to participate in international programs? What have I learned from these international programs? How have they influenced me as a researcher and an international student?

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

The stress-adaptation-growth process of transition contributes to the development of an intercultural identity that is described as "open-ended, adaptive, and transformative" by Kim (2008, p. 364). Hviid and Zittoun (2008) propose that "every transition in which a person is engaged demands or provokes some responsiveness from the environment, which feeds further transitional processes" (p. 125). Several empirical studies indicate that IS are highly motivated to adapt and actively make significant efforts to do so (Amiot et al., 2010; Chirkov et al., 2007; Tian & Lowe, 2009; Zhou & Todman, 2009). While cultural differences may increase the challenges of adaptation (e.g., Suanet & Van de Vijver, 2009), there is extensive empirical evidence demonstrating that the majority of students adapt and achieve despite these challenges (Chirkov et al., 2007; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006; Gu et al., 2010). Moreover, studies focusing on binary adaptation highlight personal transformation. For instance, a two-year study examining the transitions and intercultural adaptations of first-year IS in the United Kingdom revealed that intercultural learning experiences are both transitional and transformational. The authors concluded that this process is interconnected with the growth of students' maturity and interculturality (Gu et al., 2010, p. 20).

Transformative learning occurs during the international sojourn (Jones, 2013). Mezirow (2000) regards intercultural learning as a form of transformative learning. According to Mezirow (1996), transformative learning is well grounded in human communication, learning is seen as the process of utilizing prior interpretations to construct new or revised interpretations of one's experiences, which then guide future actions. Hoggan (2016) presents a typology of transformative learning outcomes that encompasses worldviews, self, epistemology, ontology, behavior, and capacity. Transformative learning involves cultivating greater reflection, critical thinking, and openness to others' perspectives (Mezirow, 1994), ultimately altering "the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live" (Merriam et al., 2007). However, in the book "Thinking, Fast and Slow," psychologist Kahneman (2011) suggests that individuals often have a flawed understanding of themselves, stating, "You think you know yourself well, but you're actually wrong." Consequently, personal changes or transformations may go unnoticed. Due to the busy lives and academic pursuits of many IS, we may not prioritize or engage in self-reflection regarding our intercultural learning experiences. Thus, this study aligns with the principles of transformative learning theory, as well as the purpose, questions, and methodology conducted.

### **Methodology: Scholarly Personal Narrative But Autoethnography**

In November 2022, I was invited by Dr. Amy Pickard, an Assistant Professor in the Adult Education Program at Indiana University School of Education, to deliver a presentation titled "International Chinese Doctoral Students' Intercultural Learning Experiences." Following the presentation, I received some valuable feedback from the students, for instance:

I think a major conclusion for me following the presentation is that globalization makes for more educational opportunities and helps bring people and cultures together, however, without the additional elements of awareness and kindness and empathy, the individual experience can be a lonely one. These thoughts and questions made me appreciate Ruoyi's use of narrative inquiry - what are the stories people tell about themselves and their decision to pursue an education, particularly one abroad? As I am figuring out the best approach/study design for my dissertation research, this was especially timely and clarifying!

I was pleasantly surprised by the feedback I received from the students at Indiana University who attended my presentation. It made me realize the profound impact of sharing a personal narrative about individual experiences. However, it also underscored the need for greater visibility and recognition of international adult education.

Moreover, storytelling is a powerful and effective method that deeply resonates with readers or listeners. It serves as a means of communication between the storyteller and the audience. Scholarly personal narratives (SPN) employ personal storytelling to construct knowledge and meaning within scholarly research (Heidelberger & Uecker, 2009). In this study, as the researcher, I share narrative accounts of my own experiences with outbound or out-of-country study and exchange programs, allowing for in-depth and insightful reflections. Furthermore, this process of reflection serves as a transformative self-learning journey, fostering personal growth and understanding through the examination of these experiences. Additionally, narrative, by its very nature, possesses transformative qualities. Adult educators recognize autoethnography as a potent and imaginative approach for exploring narratives associated with transformative learning (Mc Cormack et al., 2020). Therefore, this study utilizes narrative autoethnography to reflect on two primary aspects of my international experience: participation in international events, and engagement in international short- and long-term exchange programs.

### **My Story: Overview of Six-Years International Learning Experience**

It has been six years since I commenced my graduate studies in 2017. Throughout this period, I have studied or am currently studying on four different continents, namely Asia, America, Europe, and Australia. There were moments when I woke up in the morning or walked the streets of a foreign country, and I was astounded by the reality of living and studying in such an unfamiliar environment. I cannot help but question myself, "Is this real? Am I truly experiencing life and education here?" Each time this inquiry arises, I was reminded of the philosophical ponderings on origins and destinations encapsulated by the questions, "Where do I come from? Where am I going?" These inquiries were initially posed by Plato, as fundamental philosophical propositions. When contemplating and addressing these philosophical inquiries, it becomes even more crucial to reflect on one's own experiences and seek answers through introspection of personal intercultural learning experiences. As an international researcher, these reflections align with the realm of international adult education.

Due to disparities in education systems, only a limited number of students in China have the opportunity to participate in short-term or long-term study abroad programs. Factors such as motivation, preparation, and the duration of the trip can influence individuals' ability to experience transformative learning during their time abroad (Falk et al., 2012). Throughout my six years of study and learning, my international experiences have been limited, with only four instances. I commenced my graduate studies at Guangzhou University in China, in 2017. Firstly, in terms of international events, I attended a seven-day conference in Hong Kong in July 2018 and July 2019, a four-day conference in United Kingdom, and a four-day conference in the United States. Out of these events, only two were geographically distant from mainland China. Secondly, regarding short-term exchange programs, I participated in a fourteen-day program at the University of Western Australia in Perth, Australia, in 2018; a month-long program at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, in August 2019; and a five-month program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas, in September 2022. Lastly, for long-term international programs, I am currently pursuing a three-year doctoral degree at the University of Padova in Padova, Italy, starting from October 2020. This is my first and only experience of studying abroad for a degree-seeking program thus far.

Everyone's experiences are unique, and the acquired sense of experience varies among individuals. Based on my personal experiences, I have categorized them into four aspects: "Frog in a well" and the support of international education policy; Informal learning: Going out and building my international social network; Experiencing different education systems in formal learning; The identity transformation: from individual to global citizenship.

### **"Frog in a Well" and the Support of International Education Policy**

"You are the second female doctoral student in our village!" My mom sometimes brings it up in our conversations. From my parents' generation to mine, educational resources were not abundant in some rural areas of China. Very few students had the opportunity to attend college or university, and studying abroad was almost unheard of. Growing up in such an environment, on the one hand, my vision was limited, and on the other hand, it sparked my curiosity about the world. Postgraduate study, under international education policies, has completely opened the door to the world for me. I believed that I was a "frog in a well," who had a limited perspective and narrow understanding of the world due to my limited experiences and exposure. In Chinese, there is an idiom "Ignorant of the world; to be living under a rock" (*zuò jǐng guān tiān*), which comes from *Yuan Dao* by Han Yu of the *Tang* Dynasty. The idiom serves as a metaphor for having limited vision and insight. I was confined within my own small world and lacked awareness of the greater world beyond my immediate surroundings. Moreover, I did not have the opportunity to venture outside my home country or local community. However, everything has changed with the international education policies at the university in Guangzhou, China, which is about 480 km from my hometown.

The international education policies in my mater university have provided me with opportunities to study abroad, which include provisions for scholarships and financial support. These scholarships can cover tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs, making studying abroad more affordable and accessible for me. For instance, I had the chance to participate in a summer cooperative exchange program between universities, which allowed me to go to Australia and Canada. Attending international academic conferences in Hong Kong on two occasions also broadened my international perspective. The short-term programs helped me overcome the limitations of being a "Frog in a well" by providing them with a broader perspective, intercultural competence, and a deeper appreciation for the diversity and interconnectedness of the world. These experiences planted the seed of a desire to "go abroad" in my heart. Consequently, I had

the opportunity to live in Italy and the United States for an extended period of time. Short-term and long-term programs offer different experiences and have varying impacts on my personal growth. Short-term programs tend to be driven by curiosity and a thirst for new experiences, without much consideration for the challenges of studying and living in a foreign country, resulting in a "pure experiential" mode. On the other hand, long-term programs involve not only "pure experience" but also "pure life." In other words, a long-term program focuses on learning how to integrate into a new environment and navigate the challenges of living and studying in a foreign country.

However, the visa policies of Western developed countries are not particularly accommodating for Chinese students, given the relatively lower value of the Chinese passport. Obtaining a visa for the destination country is the initial step in studying abroad. However, visa-related issues pose significant challenges for many international students, as they often involve extensive document certifications and various processes, with the potential for rejection. Whether it is Australia, the UK, Canada, the US, or Italy, obtaining visas can be a demanding and time-consuming process that requires substantial effort. If study abroad policies were more streamlined and convenient, I would be able to allocate more time and energy to my studies or research. The visa application and waiting period can be lengthy, arduous, and burdensome, placing significant restrictions on international students.

There were challenges and opportunities faced by me, a female doctoral student from a rural area in China, with limited educational resources. International education policies at my university have opened doors for me to study abroad, but visa policies in Western developed countries pose significant challenges for Chinese students. Obtaining a VISA required the expenditure of significant time, energy, economic, and social capital (Fong, 2011, p. 77). Despite obstacles, I have benefited from international programs, enhancing my perspective and fueling my desire to explore the world. However, visa-related issues continue to hinder my academic pursuits abroad.

### **Informal Learning: Going Out and Building My International Social Network**

One of the valuable aspects of my international experience has been the opportunity to engage in informal learning by actively participating in social activities and building my international social network. Through interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, I have gained insights, perspectives, and knowledge that extend beyond formal classroom settings. By immersing myself in the local community and actively seeking out social opportunities, I have been able to engage in informal learning that goes beyond textbooks and lectures. These informal learning experiences have allowed me to deepen my understanding of different cultures, enhance my intercultural communication skills, and broaden my worldview.

First, whether I go to Hong Kong, the UK, or the US to attend academic conferences, I feel the importance of "going out". However, while in China, I felt a sense of control and active participation. On the contrary, engaging in academic exchange activities abroad can be unfamiliar and somewhat insecure, despite maintaining a strong curiosity for everything. Furthermore, scholarly communication serves as a means of constructing social networks. Whether attending academic conferences or engaging in short-term or long-term learning experiences, these activities allow for the expansion and development of social connections. Initially, there may be certain constraints, but as I attended more events and established new connections, my understanding of the world deepened. These interactions not only provided insights into the field of international education but also exposed me to a community of scholars within the discipline. As a result, I gained exposure to new ideas, customs, and perspectives, enabling the development of a more nuanced understanding of the world. Overall, participating in academic conferences

and engaging in scholarly communication offers an opportunity to overcome limited perspectives, broaden horizons, and establish meaningful connections within the academic community. It is through these interactions that I have been able to expand my knowledge and gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity of the world.

In fact, mentorship plays a crucial role in establishing valuable social networks. Mentorship in short-term programs is relatively straightforward as it follows an academic schedule and involves collaboration with mentors. However, long-term degree-seeking programs differ in nature. As they involve a long-term commitment, they require a deeper understanding of each other's personalities, research areas, interests, and collaborative integration. Communication and cooperation are essential for progress and development in this context. As an international student, additional barriers arise due to cultural and language differences. Language barriers, particularly in countries where English is not widely spoken, hinder effective communication. For instance, coming from China, a non-English speaking country, to another non-English speaking country Italy, understanding the culture and thoughts of individuals becomes even more challenging when there are difficulties in perceiving, hearing, and speaking. This obstacle hampers the establishment of an international social network in a new environment and contributes to misunderstandings of roles and situations. Developing a strong relationship with mentors and other scholars is a stepping stone to academic success. I am continuously learning how to effectively communicate with my mentors and colleagues, as well as how to comprehend their ideas and respond appropriately. Overcoming language and cultural barriers is an ongoing process that requires active effort and a willingness to bridge gaps in understanding. By striving to improve my communication skills and deepen my cross-cultural understanding, I aim to foster meaningful connections and cultivate a supportive academic network. Through persistence and a commitment to effective communication, I believe that I can enhance my academic journey and contribute to collaborative success.

### **Experiencing Different Education Systems in Formal Learning**

The formal learning experiences of different educational systems were gained in Italy and the US. During my studying abroad experiences, which spanned several years or months in a foreign country, I actively immersed myself in the pursuit of knowledge and acquired a plethora of valuable skills. The process involved delving deep into the art of conducting research, honing my abilities to integrate seamlessly into diverse academic courses, and engaging wholeheartedly in a myriad of extracurricular activities.

Firstly, upon my arrival in the United States, I initially perceived five months as a long period of time. However, in reality, the process from completing CITI program training to obtaining research plan approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) took a total of four months due to various meetings and other factors. During times when I needed assistance and guidance, my advisor helped me overcome feelings of being overwhelmed. Gradually, I realized that I did not need to excessively worry, but rather, I needed to carefully plan and manage my time to progress with my research plan. The psychological pressure turned out to be stronger than I had anticipated, leading to excessive concern and fear, which, in turn, impacted the execution of the study. Conducting empirical research in the United States involves a more intricate procedure compared to China and Italy.

Secondly, in terms of the curriculum, the PhD program, for instance, incorporates relevant foundational research courses. In terms of format, classes primarily consist of a combination of lectures and open discussions. This relatively flexible and systematic learning approach differs significantly from the lecture-based approach in Italy and China. In terms of content, both China

and the United States have a more structured framework of required and elective courses, while Italy's approach is more generalized and diffuse. Regarding composition, China and Italy tend to have relatively younger students and a more direct progression, whereas the United States includes both active and retired PhD students.

Lastly, in terms of participation in activities, the initiative ranking would be US > China > Italy, which is largely influenced by the language used in the activities. In the US, activity information is transparent and typically communicated via email to each student, with content that is meaningful, interesting, and selectively chosen. In China, there is no language barrier, fostering active and positive engagement. However, the information is not always transparent and may require deliberate searching as it may not be sent to everyone's inbox. In Italy, due to the language barrier, even though many activities are sent via email, there is a tendency to resist or develop a habit of not reading Italian emails, leading to a psychological attitude of "It is not my business."

Overall, the experiences in Italy and the US have provided me with valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of different educational systems, shaping my understanding of research, curriculum structure, and student engagement in diverse cultural contexts.

### **The Identity Transformation: From Individual to Global Citizenship**

The transformation of identity from an individual to a global citizen is a significant process that involves a shift in perspective and a broadening of one's sense of integration and belonging. This transformation occurs as individuals engage with diverse cultures, societies, and global issues, expanding their awareness beyond their immediate surroundings. It involves recognizing the interconnectedness of people and communities worldwide and embracing a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the planet and its inhabitants. This transformation of identity reflects a deeper understanding of the complexities and interdependencies of our increasingly interconnected world.

Adult education provides an opportunity to discover oneself by interacting with people in different stages of life. Short-term exchanges are driven by curiosity and the desire to explore new experiences, without attachments to one's home country or feelings of anxiety. While long-term learning necessitates the ability to adapt and integrate into a new environment. Long-term communication in a foreign setting often carries with it a sense of stress, anxiety, or even melancholy. Having lived and studied in the Chinese educational system for over 25 years, I have become keenly aware of the differences between the Chinese and Western educational systems. Initially, when I experienced the Italian and American education systems, I felt a sense of ignorance. This lack of knowledge led me to adopt a passive approach to living and studying in these new environments. However, through various international adult education exchanges, a remarkable and unexpected transformation in my self-identity occurred. I began to realize that I was undergoing a change, or had already changed, in how I identified myself. Previously, I saw myself solely as a Chinese individual yearning for a broader understanding of the world. Now, I not only see myself as Chinese but also as a global citizen. The most surprising aspect of this transformation is the shift in my worldview, which gradually unfolded and became visible to me. This realization of a transformed worldview has left a profound impact on me, highlighting the power of international adult education in broadening perspectives and uncovering previously unseen aspects of oneself.

China has long placed great importance on the study of ancient texts left behind by scholars. One notable example is the "Four Books and Five Classics," which are considered the foundational

texts of Chinese Confucianism, spanning from ancient times to the present. These texts have shaped various aspects of Chinese society, from the historical imperial examination system to the modern-day college entrance examination. Since my childhood, I have been exposed to these books and have been influenced by these ideas, both passively and actively. Consequently, when encountering information from abroad or engaging in daily or academic exchanges in an international context, cultural differences and clashes can give rise to certain misunderstandings. These misunderstandings may involve how to think, communicate, and respond effectively. After experiencing cultural disequilibrium, individuals may encounter an unexplained sense of loss. However, this experience has also fostered greater tolerance and understanding towards the diversity and differences present in the world. The transition from being a Chinese citizen to becoming a global citizen is a subtle and gradual process that unfolds over a period of six years. Nevertheless, it is the transformation in one's consciousness that truly signifies a profound change.

### **Discussion**

Through reflecting on my experiences, I have come to realize that the oscillation between my identities as an educational researcher and an international student has highlighted the profound impact of various factors such as policies, culture, society, and academia. However, ultimately, it is my own growth and transformation that are influenced, leading to either personal benefits or challenges.

International adult education policies have a direct or indirect impact on the mobility and learning experiences of IS, thereby influencing the sustainable development of higher education internationalization, which encompasses diversity and inclusion within higher education. Adult education at the higher education level serves not only to impart knowledge but also to cultivate individuals as human beings. It should prioritize human well-being rather than being solely student-centered or teacher-centered. National policies in international adult education should be more accommodating and supportive of IS. As an academic doctoral student, research plays a significant role in my life. However, encountering a different education and research system can lead to a lack of understanding and uncertainty, contributing to feelings of fear. The mental health of IS should be given serious consideration, as they are more susceptible to depression, nervousness, anxiety, and fear compared to local students in an unfamiliar country. This vulnerability is particularly pronounced for IS who are experiencing life away from home for the first time, making them psychologically fragile.

IS from various countries encounter difficulties and challenges upon entering a new environment, which stem from cultural disequilibrium. The cultural differences serve as the potential for idea clashes and the initiation of cultural innovation. Cultural disparities extend beyond traditional culture itself and encompass the environment, language, thinking, and expression. The ability to see, hear, and speak serves as the foundation for communication, interaction, and integration into the new environment. As an international researcher, I have the opportunity to not only gain diverse experiences but also to deepen my exploration and understanding of international adult education research. In my role as a student, I experience and perceive the myriad differences and collisions present in the world. Simultaneously, as an international adult education researcher, I observe and contemplate the causes, outcomes, and impacts of these phenomena. Most importantly, the focus lies on the process of self-growth through learning. The ultimate aim is to integrate oneself with the values and beliefs of the world. Indeed, when IS contemplate how to adapt to their surroundings, they engage in transformative learning, enabling them to gain new perspectives, understandings, and ideas, thus transforming their worldview. In any case, it is crucial for international students to "learn new ways to bring balance back into their lives"



(Taylor, 1994, p. 169). Through transformative learning experiences, particularly in past and present international learning and living encounters, IS continuously seek opportunities to enhance their life circumstances.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

This narrative autoethnography delves into the potential of narratives shared by IS from non-English speaking countries, focusing on intercultural adaptation and self-transformative issues. These reflections hold significance within the context of a globalized educational landscape. The author articulates the study abroad experience through a first-person narrative, which is overtly personal and collective. Throughout the process of storytelling and summarization, the author discovers that exposure to diverse cultures and the experience of living and studying in different countries contribute to transformative personal growth, despite encountering various cultural dilemmas during the transition and integration phases.

For IS, studying abroad entails the reception and integration of new information and cultures. It not only enhances IS' intercultural competence but also fosters social and cultural effects in the destination country. IS should step out of their comfort zones (Lilley et al., 2015). According to Confucian philosophy, Mencius states,

When heaven is about to place a great responsibility on a great man, it always first frustrates his spirit and will, exhausts his muscles and bones, exposes him to starvation and poverty, harasses him by troubles and setbacks so as to stimulate his spirit, toughen his nature and enhance his abilities.

IS bring certain benefits to both their home and destination countries. The cultural backgrounds of IS are diverse, contributing to the diversity and inclusiveness of universities. Improving the student experience is an important strategic priority for universities (Baranova et al., 2011; Shah & Richardson, 2016). Furthermore, understanding and exploring IS' experiences in international education support policy development and implementation. However, more exploration and understanding in this field are necessary.

Moreover, improving diversity and inclusiveness in higher education is a crucial aspect of international adult education. Cultural differences and their impacts lead to global integration through a series of interactions. Additionally, time plays a significant role, especially for IS. Education is a gradual process, and students' personal growth takes time to be achieved. Assisting students in their growth is the primary goal of education. Therefore, providing specific guidance is of utmost importance, particularly for IS. Another way universities can support IS is by guiding and assisting them in establishing better relationships with foreign professors and teachers. This involves understanding communication and interaction styles, etiquette, and content, among other factors. Developing a harmonious relationship with their mentors is essential as they provide significant academic support and guidance to IS.

Above all, an inter-/multi- cultural integration model was created according to the multicultural transformative learning experiences to better explain and understand variable multicultural transformative learning experiences to improve the intercultural competence, that is ME–WE–OUR–ME model (abbreviated MWOM model), which is an intercultural learning process: Me is the learning experience before I went abroad; We is the learning process where I start to interact with the people around me; Our is the process of integration to the community and the world; while the last Me is the process of transforming and becoming a better me. Thus, this could be a model to help reflect the inter-/multi- cultural integration process, focusing on the individual

perspective. Meanwhile, this model is the support and complement of the transformative learning theory. Such a model can facilitate an understanding of how individuals engage with diverse cultures, navigate cultural differences, and develop intercultural competence. By focusing on the individual experience, this model can contribute to the transformative learning process by encouraging self-reflection, critical thinking, and the reevaluation of existing beliefs and assumptions. It can also promote empathy, open-mindedness, and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills necessary for effective intercultural communication and collaboration. This study fully affirms the applicability of transformative learning theory in the field of reflection related research in terms of theoretical perspective.

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