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Experiential philanthropy in China

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ABSTRACT

Experiential philanthropy is a form of service-learning where students are provided with money (generally from a foundation) to distribute to nonprofit organizations. The pedagogy is intended to teach students not only about philanthropy but also about how to evaluate philanthropic responses to social issues. In recent years, scholars have begun to explore how an experiential approach to the philanthropic process could result in a more philanthropically engaged and committed citizenry. This research has provided promising evidence of the efficacy of experiential philanthropy as a pedagogic strategy – particularly within higher education. Despite its effectiveness, research on experiential philanthropy has focused primarily on the US. As such, we have no knowledge of the effectiveness of this pedagogic strategy in other regions of the world – especially in emerging philanthropic regions such as China. Therefore, using three semesters of original pre- and post-course survey data (including quantitative and qualitative responses) obtained from students enrolled in an *Introduction to Nonprofit Management* course at a university in northeast China, this study addresses the following question: *To what extent does experiential philanthropy enhance Chinese students' understanding of, and commitment to, philanthropy?*

KEYWORDS

Experiential philanthropy;
service learning;
philanthropic education

Introduction

In recent years, several colleges and universities in the United States (US) have invested resources into an innovative pedagogy known as experiential philanthropy. The pedagogy, which is considered to be a form of service-learning, is a teaching approach that “provides students with opportunities to study social problems and nonprofit organizations and then make decisions about investing funds in them” (McDougale, McDonald, Li, McIntyre Miller, & Xu, 2017, p. 331). By integrating academic learning with philanthropic engagement, the goal of experiential philanthropy is to teach students not only about the practice of philanthropy and its importance in society, but also about how to evaluate philanthropic responses to social issues (McDougale et al., 2017).

To date, research on experiential philanthropy has provided promising evidence of its efficacy as a pedagogic strategy within higher education (McDonald & Olberding, 2012; McDougale et al., 2017; Xu, Li, & McDougale, 2018). Ahmed

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and Olberding (2007), for instance, analyzed survey data from students who participated in a course with an experiential philanthropy component. They found the majority of students in the course reported that the experiential philanthropy component made them more aware of social problems in their community as well as nonprofit organizations that were working to address these problems. The experiential philanthropy component of the course, they found, also increased students' sense of responsibility to help others in need and enhanced their intentions to donate money to charity in the future. In another study, Olberding (2009) found that students participating in experiential philanthropy courses reported enhanced understanding of course material; and Olberding (2012) also provided evidence of long-term effects.

As a result of these findings, several scholars and philanthropic practitioners have begun to think about experiential philanthropy as possibly one of the most promising ways of engaging and developing a new generation of philanthropists (Benenson, Campbell, & McDougale, 2017; Benenson, Moldow, & Hahn, 2014; Benenson & Moldow, 2017). A recent report on experiential philanthropy initiatives in higher education even suggests that the purpose of these initiatives is “not only to introduce college and university students to the practice of philanthropy, but also to encourage students to remain philanthropic throughout their lives” (Benenson, Moldow, & Hahn, 2014; Benenson & Moldow, 2017).

Despite this aim and potential, research on experiential philanthropy has focused solely on the US; and, as such, we have no knowledge of its effectiveness as a pedagogic strategy in other regions of the world – particularly in rising philanthropic regions such as China. Indeed, charitable giving in China is rapidly growing. Between 2009 and 2014 total charitable giving in China increased 66% (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015); and, by 2017, charitable giving in the country had reached over 20 Billion Yuan (China Development Brief, 2018). Moreover, volunteering in China increased from a low of approximately 3% in 2004 (Xu, 2013) to a high of approximately 10% by 2011 (Hustinx, Handy, & Cnaan, 2012).

Although these increases in charitable giving and volunteering in China have occurred rapidly, the percentage of the Chinese population that actually engages in these philanthropic acts still lags far behind what it does in other philanthropically engaged regions of the world – especially the US. In 2014, for instance, charitable giving as a percentage of China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was only 0.1%, compared to 2% in the US (Harvard Kennedy School of Government: Ash Center, n.d.); and, compared to the US where more than a quarter of the population volunteers annually (Do Good Institute, 2018), volunteering in China does not represent a large part of many citizen's lives.

This leads us to question whether experiential philanthropy, which has shown to be an effective means of cultivating future philanthropists in the US, can be used as a way to broaden the scope of philanthropy in China – ultimately engaging and developing a new generation of Chinese philanthropists. Thus,

in this study, we provide preliminary evidence on the effectiveness of experiential philanthropy in China. Specifically, using original pre- and post- course data (both quantitative and qualitative) collected from three semesters of students enrolled in an *Introduction to Nonprofit Management* course that included an experiential philanthropy component ($n = 82$) at a university in northeast China, this study addresses the following question: *To what extent does experiential philanthropy enhance Chinese students' understanding of, and commitment to, philanthropy?*

Review of relevant literature

To explore the research question in this study, we begin by reviewing the literature on philanthropy in China. In particular, we focus on literature that provides an overview of the development of Chinese philanthropy and looks at the current philanthropic landscape in the country. We then explore how education has been used as means to enhance philanthropic attitudes and behaviors of students primarily in the US. Combined this literature provides the foundation for exploring the research question posed in this study.

Philanthropy in China

The concept of philanthropy has long been a part of Chinese culture (UNDP, 2015). Confucian tradition (originating during the years 551–479 BC), in particular, has long emphasized social harmony through our care for one another (Guardian, 2017). Indeed, reciprocity is perhaps the most important maxim in the *Analects*, the foundational text of Confucianism (Confucius, 2012, p. 207); and, philanthropy in ancient China was often manifested through the “Golden Rule”: do unto others, as you would have others do unto you. With this emphasis, clan-based lineage organizations became important in “offering services like care for widows and orphans, distribution of grain and construction of schools for boys in the clan” (UNDP, 2015, p. 8).

Despite this cultural history of philanthropy, with the Communist Party's rise to power in 1949 (UNDP, 2015), organized philanthropy in China (whereby citizens provide support to organizations that work to fulfill needs not met by government) was viewed as a sign of the state's failure (Marquis, Zhou, & Yang, 2016). Indeed, even though the state expanded its role as a provider of public services after the communist revolution, these services were not always provided at a level that sufficiently met the needs of citizens. Outside efforts (including charitable and philanthropic efforts) to meet these needs were considered a threat to government's legitimacy (Jacobs & Buckley, 2015; Tian, 2004). As a result, charitable and philanthropic organizations were almost entirely extinguished during the time of the communist revolution (Qin, 2017).

In recent years, though, an explosion of wealth and increased concerns about public welfare in China has resulted in greater public emphasis on individual social responsibility (Block, 2018). This has led to a new culture of Chinese philanthropy, which has been spearheaded (in many instances) by wealthy Chinese elites. According to Forbes, China has the second highest number of Billionaires in the world – second only to the US (Ambler, 2017); and, often following in the footsteps of ultra-wealthy philanthropists in the US (such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, Gates, and Buffet), wealthy Chinese philanthropists have increasingly expressed an interest in donating to socially-oriented causes that government either fails to address or has addressed, but has done so poorly. As described by Marquis et al. (2016), “Pernicious environmental pollution, food safety scandals, and migrant worker suicides have shaken public trust and are daily reminders of the public sector’s shortcomings” (p. 42).

Not surprisingly perhaps, then, to address these concerns the number of organizations operating as charitable nonprofits in China has more than doubled over the past decade (Von Hippel & Pissler, 2010). In 1988, for instance, there were fewer than 5,000 nonprofit organizations operating in China (Von Hippel & Pissler, 2010). Today, there are well over 500,000 nonprofits that operate in the country (Duke, 2014; Von Hippel & Pissler, 2010). Despite this growth, few Chinese citizens actually engage in formal volunteer activities (Hustinx et al., 2012) and the majority of charitable giving in China is fueled by this new tide of Chinese Billionaires and wealthy elites (Ambler, 2017). These elites have tended to set the agenda for what Chinese nonprofits focus on and how these organizations go about achieving their missions. Thus, there have been several well-documented challenges facing the sector (Leaders, 2018; Lu, 2017).

Two of the biggest challenges (if not the biggest challenges) have been insufficient talent to lead charitable organizations and limited public understanding of the ins-and-outs of philanthropy (UNDP, 2015). As recently detailed in an overview of Chinese philanthropy by the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, “The rapid growth of Chinese philanthropic giving has also led to significant levels of mistrust, misinformation, and misunderstanding that have already seemed to hamper the development of the sector” (Harvard University: Kennedy School of Government, n.d.). As such, even though the nonprofit and philanthropic sector in China is growing rapidly, most Chinese citizens still have limited understanding of the role (and value) of charity and philanthropy and they tend approach these ideas with a fair deal of skepticism. This skepticism has resulted in many Chinese citizens not actively engaging in philanthropic activities. Thus, the question becomes: *How can the scope of philanthropy in China be broadened?*

Using education to broaden philanthropic attitudes and behaviors

In the US, one approach that has long been used to develop and expand philanthropic attitudes and behaviors as well as build general awareness of philanthropy has been to establish educational programs (Dolan, 2002; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Mirabella, 2007; O'Neil & Fletcher, 1998; Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988). The goal of many nonprofit and philanthropic educational programs in the US has been to strengthen the capacity of leaders (and, future leaders) to carry out the mission of the nonprofits that they serve (or, will serve) as well as to develop the next generation of civic- and philanthropically-minded citizens. Given this goal, perhaps it is not surprising that Mirabella (2007) found that between 1996 and 2006, the number of graduate courses in nonprofit management in the US increased by 25%. Undergraduate programs in the US during 1996 to 2002 increased by about 30%; and, between 2002 to 2006, US-based nonprofit management undergraduate programs increased by an additional 36%.

Service learning

Within these educational programs, service learning has provided an important opportunity to “integrate information about the nonprofit sector more intentionally into the curriculum” (Hatcher & Studer, 2015, p. 13). The National Service Learning Clearinghouse has defined service-learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection in order to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (<https://gsn.nylc.org/clearinghouse>; see Xu et al., 2018 for more about service-learning). A key component of service learning is its hands-on experiential focus. This focus provides a process whereby knowledge is created through a transformative experience (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). Over the years research on service-learning has consistently shown that by connecting learners and communities there are a number of positive impacts that can occur on both student learning and personal development – including the extent to which students express a commitment to philanthropic values (Conway, Amel, & Gerwien, 2009; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993).

Experiential philanthropy

As a pedagogical technique that is rooted in service-learning, scholars have begun to explore how an experiential approach to the philanthropic process could result in a more philanthropically engaged and committed citizenry (Ahmed & Olberding, 2007; Campbell, 2014; Li, Xu, & McDougle, 2019; McDougle et al., 2017; McDonald, Miller, & McDougle, 2017; Olberding, 2009, 2012). Experiential philanthropy teaches students not only about philanthropy and its importance in society, but also about how to evaluate philanthropic responses to social issues. One early estimate has predicted that there are

likely more than 100 experiential philanthropy initiatives at colleges and universities across the US (Stuart, 2012); and, research on these initiatives has shown that the use of experiential philanthropy in the classroom – particularly in college and university settings – has a number of positive outcomes.

Ahmed and Olberding (2007), for instance, surveyed nearly 1,000 university students who had participated in a course with an experiential philanthropy component. They found that the majority of the students in the course believed that the experiential philanthropy component made them more aware of social problems and nonprofit organizations in their community, increased their sense of responsibility to help others in need, and enhanced their desire to give to charity in the future. Similarly, McDonald and Olberding (2012) in their quasi-experimental study on experiential philanthropy found that students who had taken a course with an experiential philanthropy component had greater awareness of social problems and nonprofit organizations. These students also expressed stronger intentions to participate in community service activities in the future.

Despite these positive findings, experiential philanthropy has not become a major component of nonprofit and philanthropic education in China. In fact, although nonprofit university-based education focusing on the nonprofit sector and philanthropy has steadily been on the rise in China (similar to the rise of the nonprofit sector itself in the country) (Zhang & Guo, 2015), there have been limited attempts to integrate hands-on philanthropic learning experiences into the nonprofit curriculum in China. In this study, then, we seek to explore whether experiential philanthropy, which is a hands-on approach to the practice of philanthropy, could potentially be used as a way to broaden the scope of Chinese philanthropy by increasing students' understanding of, and commitment to, the philanthropic process.

Data and methods

The data for this study were collected from pre- and post-course online surveys of students who had taken an experiential philanthropy course over three different academic semesters (from 2016 to 2018) at Northeast Normal University (NENU) in Changchun, China. All of the courses were the same *Introduction to Nonprofit Management* class. The courses were taught by the same instructor. The courses were taught in English and all of the surveys were in English. All students during the three semesters were majoring in public administration.^{1,2} Pre-surveys were administered on the first day of class and post-course surveys were administered on the last day of class. [Appendix A](#) provides the description of the class that was presented to students in the course syllabus.³

In 2016, there were 28 students enrolled in the course; in 2017, there were 40 students enrolled in the course; and, in 2018, there were 20 students

enrolled in the course. In total, then, there were 88 students who took this course from 2016 to 2018. Among these students, 76 of them completed the pre-course survey (a response rate of 83.36%) and 62 of them completed post-course survey (a response rate of 70.45%). The responses from these completed surveys were included in the final analysis. Qualitative data, which included students' responses to open-ended questions on the post-course survey, were also included in the analysis. These open-ended questions asked students to:

- (1) Please discuss the most significant things you learned this semester about social problems or needs, nonprofit organizations, or the philanthropy process. (In the analysis that follows, we labeled this question *learn*.)
- (2) As a result of this course, do you plan to make any changes related to your level of involvement in campus life or community life? (We labeled this question *plan*.)
- (3) What did you most like or appreciate about the project experience? (We labeled this question *like*.)
- (4) Is there anything you would like to change or bring to our attention about the project? (We labeled this question *others*.)

For detailed descriptions of both the pre- and post-course surveys, see Li et al. (2019) as well as McDougle et al. (2017).

We used a mixed method approach to investigate the effect of experiential philanthropy on a number of students' philanthropic learning and development outcomes. To begin, we examined change scores for the first 18 questions on both the pre- and post-course surveys. These questions were intended to capture students' awareness of nonprofit organizations and social issues, their interest in the course material, and their intentions to participate in future philanthropic activities (for the full list of questions, see Table 1). For each of the 18 questions, students were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed with each item on a 0 to 100 scale (with 0 being "strongly disagree" and 100 being "strongly agree"). We used a continuous rating scale (i.e., 1 to 100) to provide greater variation in responses – particularly given our sample size. Previous studies have shown that use of a continuous rating scale can solve issues related to information loss and allows for more robust statistical analysis (Treiblmaier & Filzmoser, 2009). After students provided their rating, we compared mean scores between the pre- and post-course surveys for all 18 questions and tested whether there were significant differences between students' first response (on the pre-course survey) and their final response (on the post-course survey).

To validate the findings from our quantitative analysis, we conducted a qualitative analysis by undertaking computer-assisted text analysis of

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of agreement scores between pre- and post-course surveys.

	Pre-Course Survey Responses					Post-Course Survey Responses					t-test
	n	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	n	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	
I am aware of the needs and problems of people living in the world (whether in my own community or elsewhere in the world). (<i>awneed</i>)	76	71.54	17.70	0	100	62	78.15	20.13	9	100	-2.05**
In general, I have an awareness of nonprofit organizations (whether in my own community or elsewhere in the world). (<i>awnpo</i>)	76	61.35	19.56	0	100	62	76.85	21.59	0	100	-4.41***
I am interested in this course. (<i>incourse</i>)	76	75.71	21.50	0	100	62	84.60	17.90	6	100	-2.60**
I am interested in experiential philanthropy. (<i>inexp</i>)	76	75.71	19.46	4	100	62	83.13	16.56	11	100	-2.38**
I am interested in service learning. (<i>insl</i>)	76	76.92	19.03	15	100	62	85.74	16.63	6	100	-2.87***
I want to stay in college. (<i>stay</i>)	76	73.11	25.99	2	100	62	81.89	22.81	7	100	-2.08**
I want to complete my degree. (<i>degree</i>)	76	90.25	18.01	0	100	62	93.65	15.24	0	100	-1.18
I am interested in belonging to and participating actively in a group or association. (<i>part</i>)	76	77.42	18.31	13	100	62	85.27	15.39	30	100	-2.69***
I plan to work with someone to solve problems in my community. (<i>onesolve</i>)	76	72.13	18.63	12	100	62	83.21	17.57	26	100	-3.56***
I plan to work with some groups to solve problems in my community. (<i>groupsolve</i>)	76	75.38	16.95	15	100	62	85.45	15.86	26	100	-3.57***
I have a responsibility to help others in need. (<i>rspothers</i>)	76	81.74	16.39	21	100	62	89.44	11.23	60	100	-3.14***
I have a personal responsibility to the community in which I live. (<i>rspcmnty</i>)	76	78.49	18.88	10	100	62	87.11	13.71	50	100	-3.01***
I believe that I can make a difference in the world. (<i>mkdifff</i>)	76	75.14	21.88	10	100	62	83.94	16.35	40	100	-2.62***
I intend to volunteer in the future. (<i>volunteer</i>)	76	81.92	19.07	16	100	62	85.44	18.54	0	100	-1.09
I plan to seek a career in a nonprofit organization. (<i>npowork</i>)	76	67.22	19.92	19	100	62	78.60	18.55	40	100	-3.44***
I will personally walk, run or bicycle for a charitable cause. (<i>activity</i>)	76	69.94	21.27	15	100	62	78.95	20.90	12	100	-2.58**
I plan to help raise money for a charitable cause. (<i>fundraising</i>)	76	70.43	18.09	25	99	62	81.13	19.01	10	100	-3.38***
I intend to donate money to charity in the future. (<i>donate</i>)	76	77.67	20.47	9	100	62	86.76	13.51	50	100	-3.00***

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

Note: 0 = strongly disagree, 100 = strongly agree.

student responses to the four open-ended questions on the post-course survey. Although few studies in public administration have relied on computer assisted text analysis methods to analyze qualitative data, this type of analysis has been shown to be a highly effective way to add contextual depth to quantitative findings (Anastasopoulos & Whitford, 2018; Li & Van Ryzin, 2017; Li et al., 2019). In this study, we used special packages in the software program R (Silge & Robinson, 2018) to calculate the frequencies of words in students' responses to each of the open-ended questions. In our results we present the most frequently appearing words along with representative responses.⁴

Results

In this section we provide an overview of our results. Our results are presented in two sections. First, we provide an overview of our quantitative (pre- and post-course) analysis. Following this, we present the results of our qualitative (computer-assisted text) analysis.

Quantitative analysis

At the beginning of the pre-course survey, students were presented with the following statement: "Although there is no agreed upon definition as to what a 'nonprofit organization' is in China (Nala, 2014), a 'nonprofit organization' in the Chinese context can generally be thought of as a non-governmental, not-for-profit social organization." Students were then asked whether they had donated to, or volunteered with, a nonprofit organization in the previous year. Twenty nine percent of students ($n = 22$) indicated that they had donated to a nonprofit organization in the previous year, while twenty-five percent of students indicated that they had volunteered with a nonprofit organization in the previous year. Only thirteen percent of students ($n = 10$) indicated that they had engaged in both forms of philanthropic engagement in the previous year.

It is important to note, that while relatively few students indicated having actually engaged in philanthropic activities on the pre-course survey, *intentions* to volunteer and donate at this time were generally high. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, which presents descriptive statistics of the agreement scores for the 18 items on the pre- and post-course surveys measuring students' philanthropic learning and development outcomes, the mean score for the question "I intend to donate money to charity in the future" (*donate*) at the pre-course period was 77.67 (out of 100), while the mean score for the question "I intend to volunteer in the future" (*volunteer*) at the pre-course period was 81.92 (out of 100). Intentions, however, do not always become reality. Interestingly, though,

the minimum score for the *donate* question at the pre-course period was only 9 (out of 100), while at the post-course period the minimum score for this question was 50 (out of 100). This difference between the pre-course and post-course minimum scores for the *donate* question is the largest difference among all of the eighteen change scores.

At the pre-course period, the mean score for the survey question assessing students' awareness of nonprofit organizations (*awnpo*) was 61.35 (out of 100). This was the lowest mean score out of all eighteen questions included on the survey. The mean score for the survey question assessing whether students wanted to complete their degree (*degree*) was 90.25 (out of 100). This was the highest mean score out of all questions included on the survey. At the post-course period, the mean score for these two questions increased to 76.85 and 93.65, respectively. However, these scores (even at the post-course period) were still the lowest and highest scores out of all questions included on the survey. It is worth noting, though, that the change in mean score for *awnpo* (i.e., the question assessing students' awareness of nonprofit organizations) is the largest change score among all eighteen change scores. Although this change score is statistically significant, the change score for *degree* (i.e., the question assessing whether students wanted to complete their degree) is not.

To test whether the differences between the pre- and post-course surveys were significant, we conducted a series of T-tests (results presented in the last column of Table 1) and we validated the results of these tests through a series ordinary least square regressions (results presented in Figure 1). These results show that for 16 of the 18 variables, the mean value at the post-course period was significantly higher than the mean value at the pre-course period. For example, at the post-course period students were significantly more likely to have an awareness of nonprofit organizations; be interested in the course, experiential philanthropy, and service learning; believe that they could make a difference in the world; and have intentions to donate money to charity in the future. The differences between the pre- and post-course periods for the two questions: *degree* and *volunteer* were the only nonsignificant results (see Table B1 in the Appendix B, models 7 and 14). One potential explanation for these nonsignificant results could be that at the pre-course period student responses to these questions were already quite high.

Qualitative analysis

To further validate our findings from the quantitative analysis, we conducted a content analysis of student responses to the four open-ended questions included on the post-course survey. We used an R program (Silge & Robinson, 2018) to calculate the frequencies of the words used by students in their responses. Figure 2 presents the most frequently used words in students' responses to the *learn* question, the *plan* question, the *like* question, and the *others* question (see Figure 2).⁵

Figure 1. Effects of experiential philanthropy courses on various student learning outcomes. Note: Each dot represents an observation. The numbers atop the bars in each chart are the mean values of the degree of agreement (on a 0 to 100 point scale). The red lines represent standard errors. An “*” indicates that the difference between student responses on the pre-course survey and the post-course survey is statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Student responses to the “learn” question

As shown in Figure 2, the eight most frequently appearing words in student responses to the *learn* question were: nonprofit, organization, social, volunteer, organizations, learned, people, and society. Thus, we can surmise that at the end of the course, students believed that they had learned more about nonprofit organization(s), society, and volunteering. These results confirm the significant increase in scores from students’ responses to the two awareness questions found in our quantitative analysis: “I am aware of the needs and problems of people living in the world” (*awneed*) and “In general, I have an awareness of nonprofit organizations” (*awnpo*).

In order to gain a better understanding of what students learned about nonprofit organizations, society, and volunteering after taking the course, we searched the raw data for the *learn* question using each of the most frequently appearing words. We then reviewed responses that matched the search terms to identify representative responses. For example, one student (#2) responded that the most significant thing she learned after taking the course was to “*take the responsibility to contribute to the society.*” Another student (#31) indicated that

Figure 2. Most frequently appearing words from student responses. For the *learn* and *plan* questions, words that appeared less than five times were excluded; for the *like* and *others* questions, only the first five most frequently appearing words were included.

after taking the course she learned that the nonprofit sector is “a sector that [is] separated from government and [corporations], thus some specific knowledge should be learned. Nonprofit organizations, as a gap filler, play an important role in our society.” Another student (#45) responded from a comparative approach, “Nonprofit organizations in the United States are relatively mature, and in China [it] is not very good. In the future, I hope I can contribute to China’s nonprofit organizations.”

We also identified representative responses indicating that at the end of the course students increased their awareness of management issues within the nonprofit sector. For example, one student (#3) replied “I learned that nonprofit organizations need to have a double bottom line and make a balance between social and financial. I also learned how to make a strategic plan for nonprofit[s].” Another student (#9) specifically mentioned her awareness of the managerial issues within the sector by responding, “Volunteer[ing] is an important part of society ... different motivations lead nonprofit organizations’ leaders [to] make reasonable use of [their volunteers, which helps to] attract and manage the human resources of the organization.”

Student responses to the “plan” question

The seven most frequently appearing words in student responses to the *plan* question were: volunteer, life, organization, people, join, NPO, and community (see Figure 2). Thus, we can surmise from these results that after taking the course students planned to “volunteer” with and/or “join” nonprofit organizations whether on their campus and within the broader community.

In order to gain a better understanding of what types of philanthropic actions students planned to engage in after taking the course, we followed the same procedure that we relied on for analyzing student responses to the *learn* question. In doing so, we found further evidence to strengthen our argument that after taking the course students planned to participate more in various philanthropic activities. For example, one student (#5) responded *“I want to do some volunteer work in the future.”* Another student (#17) specified the type of volunteer work that she planned to participate in by writing, *“I want to join an organization to be a volunteer to teach in rural areas.”*

Earlier we suggested that the nonsignificant change between the pre-course survey and the post-course survey for student responses to the *volunteer* question could be a result of the already high levels of pre-course volunteer experience that students indicated they had. In the qualitative data we were able to identify at least one student response that supports this finding. This student (#11) responded, *“I have ... join[ed] a volunteer organization in our collage, and I want to organize some small activities to help others. For example, I [want to] take care [of] autistic child[ren] on the 1st of June.”*

In response to the *plan* question students also indicated that after taking the course they planned to donate money to nonprofit organizations in the future and some even indicated that after taking the course they planned to work in the nonprofit sector or start their own nonprofit in the future. For example, one student (#23) responded *“I decide[d] to do some voluntary things in my spare time and donate money to charities.”* Another student (#45) wrote, *“I will work for nonprofit organizations in the future, because it can not only help others, but also [helped] me learn a lot.”* Additionally, another student (#1) responded, *“I decide[d] to donate [to] NPOs, and if it is possible, I hope I can run my own NPO in the future.”*

Student responses to the “like” question

The five most frequently appearing words to student responses to the *like* question were: project, experience, team, nonprofit, and organization (see Figure 2). From these words, we can surmise that what students liked and/or appreciated most about the course and the opportunity to engage in experiential philanthropy was “team” work and increasing their knowledge about “nonprofit organizations.”

In order to gain a better understanding of what students most liked and/or appreciated about the course and the project experience, we applied the same

analytic procedure used in analyzing the two previous questions. Several students (#12, #25, #52, #55, #56, and #59) responded that the “teamwork” or “group work” allowed them to learn from one another (both within and between teams). Students also appreciated the opportunity to learn more about nonprofit organizations. For example, one student (#1) responded that what she liked most about the project experience was *“to know more about the status quo of NPOs.”* Another student (#2) responded that she most enjoyed learning about was how *“to be a good leader in nonprofit organization[s] and what nonprofits should be.”*

Student responses to the “others” question

Finally, shown in Figure 2 are the five most frequently appearing words to student responses to the *others* question. These words are: project, people, organization, nonprofit, and learn. These responses provide further evidence of the positive effects of experiential philanthropy on students’ interest in the course, the project experience, and nonprofit organizations.

For example, one student (19) responded that she *“hope[s] to have more opportunities to take part in the project.”* Another student (#45) responded, *“I want people to know more about the mission of this project, so that they can see that their money is being spent in the right place.”* Furthermore, one student (#12) called for *“more people to join the nonprofit sector”* and another (#58) called for *“strengthen[ing] college students’ attention to nonprofit organizations.”*

Besides increasing student interest in the course, in experiential philanthropy, and in nonprofit organizations, students also emphasized the importance of increasing publicity of, and attention to, experiential philanthropy. One student (#3), for example, wrote that the university should *“do more publicity and let more people know about it.”* Collectively, these results from the four open-ended questions on the post-course survey not only reinforce the findings from our quantitative analysis presented earlier, but they also reinforce previous findings showing that experiential philanthropy can be used a way to effectively increase awareness of social needs, enhance understanding of the role that nonprofit organizations play in society, and further intentions to volunteer and donate in the future (Ahmed & Olberding, 2007; Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Li et al., 2019; McDougle et al., 2017; Olberding, 2012).

Discussion

In this study, we used a mixed methods approach to answer the question: *To what extent does experiential philanthropy enhance Chinese students’ understanding of, and commitment to, philanthropy?* Our findings indicate that, similar to in the US, taking a course with an experiential philanthropy component increases Chinese students’ awareness of social issues and provides them with a greater understanding of the role that nonprofit organizations can play in addressing these issues. Moreover, we found that experiential philanthropy

courses can also increase Chinese students' interest in philanthropic education, their intentions to participate in future philanthropic activities, and even their desire to choose a career in the nonprofit sector.

These findings are important for several reasons. As indicated earlier, although a new culture of philanthropy in China has emerged, charitable giving and volunteering in the country still lags far behind what it does in other philanthropically engaged regions of the world – particularly the US. And, two of the biggest challenges facing the nonprofit sector in China are lack of awareness of nonprofit organizations (and the philanthropic process) as well as insufficient capacity to lead charitable organizations. As such, our findings should provide promising evidence that students in China can be taught to, both, think and act philanthropically. Ultimately, then, our findings suggest that experiential philanthropy could be used as a way to develop a new generation of philanthropically-minded Chinese citizens who place value on giving back to society and who understand the importance of philanthropic responses to social issues. Furthermore, our findings suggest that, similar to the US, after engaging in a hands-on philanthropic experience Chinese students tend to say that they learned more about their course material and they also tend to express long-term desires to remain philanthropically-engaged.

From a pedagogical perspective, this study provides insight into how instructors can teach sensitive and/or challenging topics – particularly in non-western cultural contexts. For years following the communist revolution organized philanthropy in China was viewed as a direct threat to the state's legitimacy and although this view has changed in recent years, organized philanthropy in China is still not recognized as a fundamental aspect of Chinese society (Qin, 2017). As such, teaching philanthropic principles in China can pose a number of inherent challenges (Zhang & Guo, 2015). However, using a hands-on experiential learning activity that directly relates to the topic of the course (as done in this study) can allow instructors opportunities to delve into the importance and value of sensitive and/or challenging issues from a global perspective. For schools of public policy, affairs, and administration this will be particularly important given National Association of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration's (NASPAA) increasing global emphasis and growing interest in nonprofit education.

Despite these positive outcomes, though, we should note that there are a number of limitations associated with this study. First, in China the authoritarian government and the one-party system espouses a socialist ideology that shapes how philanthropic activity in the country is carried out – which is often different from philanthropy in the US. For example, the Chinese government heavily regulates philanthropic and nonprofit organizations. This regulation limits the access that these organizations have to certain services, such as legal services for the disadvantaged (Li & Chen, 2018; Ma, Wang, Dong, & Li, 2017). In the US, however, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations operate more autonomously. As such, even though we found that experiential philanthropy

can be used a way to enhance philanthropic values, whether or not students actually engage in (or, are able to engage in) philanthropic acts after taking an experiential philanthropy course is unknown.

Relatedly, it should be noted that in this study we did not examine any long-term effects of experiential philanthropy in China. Therefore, future research should consider exploring whether the beneficial effects of experiential philanthropy, as found in this study, are evident beyond the immediate class experience. Moreover, our sample size in this study is quite limited. We focused only on students at one university who were all enrolled in the same course. It could be the case that students majoring in public administration and taking an *Introduction to Nonprofit Management* course are inherently inclined to increase their philanthropic intentions after learning more about philanthropy. Thus, future studies should consider expanding this research by focusing on different institutions as well as different academic majors.

Finally, our qualitative analysis relied on students' answers to open-ended survey questions; and, these questions only assessed the perceived short-term effects of experiential philanthropy on students' learning and development. Although there has been some research exploring long-term effects of experiential philanthropy on students' interest in civic engagement (see Olberding, 2012), understanding these short-term effects are important for making formative and summative assessments. For instance, these findings provide us with information about how to improve pedagogical practice from year-to-year or how assignments may or may not facilitate learning. Still, in addition to evidence of short-term effects, future research should explore long-term effects of experiential philanthropy – particularly for students in China.

Notes

1. The *Introduction to Nonprofit Management* course that students were enrolled in is a required course for the undergraduate degree in Public and Nonprofit Administration in the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) at Rutgers University-Newark (RUN). In 2015, RUN established a dual degree program with NENU. The program (Rutgers University Newark Institute at Northeast Normal University (RUNIN)) requires students at NENU to take the same courses offered on the RUN campus. As such, all program components are in English.
2. Although not all degree programs at NENU are English-taught, there are a large number of English-taught programs at the university. As such, the students enrolled in this course tend to be similar (in terms of English speaking ability) to a large portion of the NENU student body.
3. All students were Chinese. All students were also aged in the same category (18 to 25). In the post-course survey, 70.45% of the student respondents were female. This percentage is not particularly high given that 72.48% of the student body at Northeast Normal University in 2017 was also female (http://www.sohu.com/a/163894450_500229). Given that this course is a required course in the undergraduate degree program in Public and Nonprofit Administration, all students were enrolled in

this major. Although the demographics of the students (including the student body of NENU) is fairly homogenous, this provides us with an opportunity to rule out demographic factors that could have influenced our results. Thus, for this reason, we consider the homogeneity of the sample to be a benefit.

4. Word frequencies were analyzed aggregately. Given that the total number of post-course respondents was limited to 62 and that it was rare for a student to use a particular word multiple times in the answer to a specific question, we treated students as a whole to investigate the overall effectiveness of the experiential philanthropy course instead of examining the heterogeneous effect of the course on individual students.
5. We excluded words that appeared less than five times for the *learn* and *plan* questions. Additionally, we only included the first five most frequently appearing words for the *like* and *others* questions.

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Appendix A

Introduction to Nonprofit Management

Rutgers University – Newark | Northeast Normal University
School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

(Chang Chun, China)

Course Overview

This is an introductory short course in nonprofit management. This course is designed to provide you with a better understanding of nonprofit organizations and the distinct challenges often faced by nonprofit leaders. Although, only some of you will pursue a professional career in nonprofit management, each of you will interact with the nonprofit sector throughout your lifetime—whether as a public manager, a board member, a volunteer, or a service recipient.

This course is, therefore, anchored in practical application of theory (and related frameworks). The course covers both general management practices that apply to all organizations (such as marketing, strategic planning, human resources management, ethics, and financial accountability) as well as practices unique to nonprofit organizations (such as board governance, volunteer management, and fundraising).

Throughout the course, we will use group discussions, exercises, and writing assignments to explore and illustrate abstract principles and ideas. Our readings will come from a variety of disciplinary perspectives and should provide you with a rich overview of the fundamentals for leading and managing nonprofit organizations.

This course relies on the use of multiple learning methods including lectures, case studies, group exercises, and out-of-class assignments. Each of these learning methods is intended to assist you in exploring the relationship between theories and practices of nonprofit management. You will have several opportunities to put your knowledge into practice by completing homework and case assignments. The overall goal of this course is to provide you with a framework to practice your leadership and management skills in *as* realistic and practical a way as is possible within the confines of a classroom setting.

Experiential Learning Activity

This class involves an experiential philanthropy component—that is, you (as a class) will be making an award to a nonprofit organization of your choosing. Each group will be responsible for researching a nonprofit organization and from an analysis of organizational operations, your group will make a **20-minute presentation** to the class (with 5-minutes after the presentation reserved for Q&A) detailing why the organization that you selected should receive the funding award.

In your group's presentation, you should address (at a minimum):

- What is the organization? (*i.e., name, location, focus*)
- What is the mission of the organization?
- Why should this organization receive the funding award?
 - You should provide an analysis based off of concepts that we have covered in class, *e.g., What evidence do you have that the organization operates effectively? Are there processes in place to ensure accountability/transparency? How financially sound is the organization? What impact is the funding award likely to have?*

- You must also provide evidence that the organization is, in fact, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization if US-based, or a nonprofit organization able to receive charitable contributions in China.

Your analysis should be *thorough* and your presentation should be *persuasive*. After all group presentations have been made, each of you (individually and anonymously) will vote on which nonprofit organization you believe should receive the award. The nonprofit organization that receives the most votes will be awarded the funds.

Appendix B

Table B1. Effects of experiential philanthropy classes on student learning outcomes (OLS results).

	Dependent Variables:																	
	<i>awneed</i> (1)	<i>awnpo</i> (2)	<i>incourse</i> (3)	<i>inep</i> (4)	<i>insl</i> (5)	<i>stay</i> (6)	<i>degree</i> (7)	<i>part</i> (8)	<i>onesolve</i> (9)	<i>groupsolve</i> (10)	<i>rspothers</i> (11)	<i>rspcmnty</i> (12)	<i>mkdiff</i> (13)	<i>volunteer</i> (14)	<i>npowork</i> (15)	<i>activity</i> (16)	<i>fundraising</i> (17)	<i>donate</i> (18)
Post	6.61** (3.22)	15.51*** (3.52)	8.89** (3.42)	7.42** (3.12)	8.82*** (3.08)	8.78** (4.21)	3.40 (2.88)	7.85*** (2.92)	11.08*** (3.11)	10.07*** (2.82)	7.70*** (2.45)	8.63*** (2.87)	8.79*** (3.35)	3.51 (3.22)	11.37*** (3.31)	9.31** (3.61)	10.69*** (3.17)	9.09*** (3.03)
Constant	71.54*** (2.16)	61.35*** (2.37)	75.71*** (2.29)	75.71*** (2.09)	76.92*** (2.06)	73.11*** (2.82)	90.25*** (1.93)	77.42*** (1.96)	72.13*** (2.08)	75.38*** (1.89)	81.74*** (1.64)	78.49*** (1.92)	75.14*** (2.25)	81.92*** (2.16)	67.22*** (2.22)	69.64*** (2.42)	70.43*** (2.12)	77.67*** (2.03)
Observations	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138	138
R ²	0.03	0.13	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.06

p* < .1; *p* < .05; ****p* < .01
Note: See Table 1 for variable descriptions.