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Transitioning beliefs in teachers of Chinese as a foreign language: An Australian case study

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Abstract: With the economic rise of China, there is global demand for effective teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL). There has been limited sustained success in Chinese language learning in Australian schools, however, and this has been attributed, amongst other factors, to pedagogy employed by teachers. Today, it is commonplace to understand that educational background influences teacher beliefs which in turn impact pedagogical transition in overseas teaching environments. This exploratory case study reports qualitative analysis of interviews with nine school teachers of CFL in New South Wales, Australia. The study mapped three groups of beliefs within the Chinese teacher group, namely, beliefs which align with principles of traditional Chinese education, beliefs which align with constructivist learning principles and beliefs in transition between. All teachers in the CFL teacher community of practice could be said to be in a fluid process of transition, to find new pedagogical identities and best practice. This study's findings as to transitioning beliefs, and the study's recommendations, are of significance in the design of more effective teacher training suitable to achieve successful learning outcomes in Chinese foreign language classrooms.

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The research in this paper reflects their ongoing shared commitment to the development of Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools and universities. They are co-editing a volume for Springer Publishing "Exploring Innovative Pedagogies for Chinese as a Foreign Language" (2015).

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

It is recognised that despite the global spread of Chinese language teaching and learning, there are challenges for teachers trained in Chinese education systems in adapting their teaching to suit international educational environments. It is known that teacher beliefs as to the nature of learning, and role of teacher and student, shape teachers' classroom practice. In a new context, these beliefs may be challenged by local expectations, and may have to engage in a process of transition. This exploratory case study reports qualitative analysis of interviews with nine school teachers of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in New South Wales, Australia. The study mapped the emergence of three identifiable alignments of beliefs within the Chinese teacher group. This study's findings as to transitioning beliefs and recommendations are of significance in the design of effective teacher training suitable urgently needed to achieve successful learning outcomes in Chinese foreign language classrooms.

1. Introduction

There is currently strategic national political support to see greater numbers of Australian secondary students exiting school equipped with linguistic and cultural competence in Chinese. The growth in the learning of Chinese in Australian schools has created challenges in providing Chinese pedagogy which shares values and approach with prevailing Australian syllabus and pedagogies.

A National Report on the Teaching of Chinese in Australian Schools (Orton, 2008) has established that over 90% of teachers teaching Chinese in Australia have been educated in Chinese tertiary institutions. It also identified that there is a 94% attrition rate from compulsory programmes (such as in primary or junior secondary years) into elective years of study. An analysis of factors in this attrition has pointed to pedagogical weakness as an issue. A key recommendation has been that there needs to be "concerted, sound and innovative development in pedagogy for Chinese and in education of teachers of Chinese" (Orton, 2008, p. 6).

This article posits, however, that preceding this pedagogical development lies the issue of teacher beliefs, which impacts teacher adaptation to Australian educational schema. Our study explores a mapping of the teacher beliefs which may variously impact their ability to adapt to the challenges of their teaching context. While comparative studies of the role of education schema and beliefs have been carried out in other specific contexts (e.g. in early Mathematics education, Ng & Rao, 2008; in Science education, Aldridge, Fraser, Taylor & Chen, 2000; and in Chinese overseas learners, Gu & Schweisfurth, 2006), there has been limited attention to the role of teacher beliefs in Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) education (Wang & Du, 2014). We acknowledge the cultural and linguistic diversity within the teacher group, and wish to avoid the essentialising which has been a feature of some studies of students and teachers with Chinese origins (Dervin, 2011). This study sheds light on the transitions which CFL teachers are undergoing, investigates the reason for those transitions and points to what is needed for future pedagogical development and learner success.

Pedagogy and educational schema are complex cultural constructions, grounded in social and historical culture and beliefs. In order to interpret this case study group of CFL teachers' interactions with the beliefs of Australian language pedagogy, we investigate what may be factors shaping individual teachers' beliefs and subsequent practice. Following a consideration of the role of teacher beliefs in general, we discuss what has been suggested may be the beliefs about the role of teacher, learner and knowledge emerging from a traditional Chinese education schema. We wish to balance this culture-related approach with the broader complex picture of individual teacher knowledge, to avoid making assumptions and conclusions based on fixed ideas of norms and values. Gu and Schweisfurth (2006, p. 75) point out that culture is not the only determinant of teaching and learning preferences and experiences.

2. Literature review

2.1. Teacher beliefs

It is known that teachers' beliefs directly affect their approaches to teaching (An, Kulm, & Wu, 2004; Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Chiang, 2010; Wang & Du, 2014; Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011). Teachers from different educational backgrounds may have diverse beliefs about themselves as teachers, and their students as learners. The delivery of curriculum is grounded in personally evolved theories or sets of beliefs about teaching and learning, and teachers' classroom behaviour may reflect their underlying attitudes towards the students, towards themselves and towards the entire

educational enterprise (Burns, 1992). For this reason, an understanding of the personal dimension of teacher beliefs and knowledge is essential in improving educational practice (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997, p. 674). Teachers do not just apply subject matter knowledge; they shape their own personal-practical knowledge of teaching (Ben-Peretz, 2011) which affects every aspect of their classroom teaching: it affects teachers' discourse and relationship with students; teachers' treatment of ideas whether as fixed textbook truths or as matters of inquiry and reflection; teachers' curriculum planning and evaluation of student progress, (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 666). Education researchers have, thus, argued for the recognition of teacher pre-existing beliefs and knowledge as a component of teacher education programmes (Sun, 2011), as teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills; they are individuals who enter teaching with prior experiences, personal values and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in the classroom (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 401).

Resilient core teacher beliefs are most commonly formed on the basis of teachers' own schooling (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001) and are situated within a broader system of beliefs about education, society and even human nature (Richards et al., 2001, p. 2), implicit assumptions about how learning occurs and about the role of the teacher in enabling this learning (Wu et al., 2011, p. 48). Raths (2001), for example, has noted that the more deeply felt and personal the belief is, the more difficult it is to change. This is echoed in Hu's study (2002), which found that whether (Chinese) teachers are willing to accept and implement educational innovation, such as those of foreign origin, is largely dependent on their cultural beliefs and values associated with learning and teaching. In other words, teachers' conceptions of the educational process may be at least partly rooted in their cultural tradition and can constitute a constraint in transition to new ways of teaching in a new cultural environment.

Wang and Du's (2014) qualitative study of immigrant Chinese teachers' professional identity and beliefs highlights the transformation of their beliefs in a new context. While teacher transition to new environments and pedagogies can be slow, it has been shown that teacher beliefs can be changed, and may involve both external and internal factors. Factors can include "their own experiences as L2 learners, teacher training, teaching experiences, official policies, and through exposure to the views and beliefs of colleagues and superiors" (Wong, 2010, p. 5). For example, peer influence through professional contact, at in-service courses, seminars/conferences has been identified as the most frequently reported cause of change in teachers' beliefs (Richards et al., 2001, p. 9).

It has been suggested that beliefs aligning with a Chinese education schema, appear to retain their influence on teachers, in overseas contexts, even after a teacher has resided for many years out of China (Chiang, 2010). We briefly overview what has been claimed about a traditional Chinese education schema, in order to understand principles which may have shaped beliefs and expectations of teaching and learning.

2.2. China education schema principles

CFL teachers educated through traditional pedagogy may experience problems with learners of a western educational background. It is common today to attribute Chinese beliefs about education to its tradition of Confucian thinking and teaching. The word for education in Chinese is "jiaoshu yu ren" (see Leng, 2005) which literally means "teach the books and cultivate the person". Hu (2002, pp. 96–97) claims that the Chinese educational schema may be characterised by five features: reverence for education, cultivation of moral qualities, constructing and using knowledge for immediate purposes, hierarchical harmonious relationship between teacher and student, and perseverance in students. The teacher is treated with formal deference and is conceptualised as the authority of knowledge. This typically results in a teacher-centred classroom where teachers are authorities in the classroom and give answers according to "correct knowledge" (Ho, 1994) from a set curriculum and textbook. Sinophone identity has been seen to be aligned both with education schema and pride in the language, and thence expressed in teachers' pedagogical choices (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012).

If teachers of Chinese from mainland China or with Chinese background have been educated under the core beliefs of such a traditional educational schema, they may retain an alignment with this in their approach to CFL in overseas contexts. This retention of beliefs has been shown to have endurance, despite some modernisation and change in CFL teacher training (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013).

While contrastive studies may perpetuate essentialization through oversimplification, they nevertheless offer some interesting paradoxes. In a contrastive study between US and Chinese beliefs of learning (Li, 2003), for example, it was found that the US participants surveyed perceive knowledge as not intimately connected with their emotional, spiritual or moral lives. This contrasts with Chinese individuals surveyed, who regard knowledge as including social and moral knowing, something that is "indispensable to their personal lives" (Li, 2003, p. 265). According to Li (2003), this contrasting construct means that learners' perception of learning is also different. Western learners, represented as the US participants, elaborate the learning process, and learner characteristics such as ability and intelligence, and their perceptions of learning including such terms as "active learning", "cognitive skills", "open mind creativity" and "tools of learning". The Chinese beliefs, on the other hand, emphasise effort and diligence and the conceptions of learning include terms such as "humility", "teacher student relationship" and "learning as end in itself" (Li, 2003, p. 260). Thus, "Learning in Chinese tradition is rarely seen as a fun activity but rather as a disciplined activity …" (Li, 2003, p. 265). In the school context, we may expect therefore that teachers may have high expectation that students will work hard on the subject matter, conform to the teacher's standard and be humble. Such expectations may clash with western educational context and learner characteristics.

In the Australian classroom context, as noted above, we observe similar challenges in this paradox, in the teaching of CFL (Moloney, 2013a, 2013b; Orton, 2008, 2011). Differences in conceptualisation of teacher role, student role and nature of knowledge and learning can be suggested by briefly sketching the notions and assumptions of classrooms in contexts such as Australia, which can be loosely referred to as constructivist in nature.

2.3. Constructivist education schema

Education in many national contexts has undergone a paradigm shift in the last 30 years, with pedagogy influenced by a constructivist approach to learning. This posits that learning occurs when a student constructs knowledge him/herself through being personally engaged in experiential learning with peers. It is meaningful authentic activity that helps the learners to construct understanding and to develop skills relevant to solving problems (Wilson, 1996, p. 3). Goals include the embedding of learning in realistic contexts and in social experience. The role and responsibility of the learner are to be active, questioning, self-directed, creative and innovative. Learners should not simply mirror and reflect what they are taught (Von Glasersfeld, 1989). The educator's role becomes more of a facilitator, who encourages the learner to arrive at his or her interpretation of the truth of the subject, influenced by his or her background. This schema particularly emphasises intrinsic student motivation, and links with Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) where learners are challenged with learning slightly beyond their current level of development. Such an approach also aligns well with the notion of "externally existing bodies of knowledge" which is out there for people to acquire (Li, 2003).

Possible differences and necessary transitions for teachers of CFL become apparent, then, in their diverse understandings of teacher, student, knowledge and learning, and these differences have been highlighted, if polarised, in a limited range of comparative studies (Hu, 2004; Rao, Ng, & Pearson, 2010).

How have these two sets of beliefs shaped differences in language pedagogy? We review the tensions in teachers' experience when working across or between two schemas of language pedagogy.

2.4 Chinese teachers in transition between two schemas in language education

We have seen that a traditional Chinese education schema values, and requires, language strategies of memorisation, recall, exclusive focus on linguistic elements/forms and acquisition through oral and written repetition and exercises. Assessment practice is typically formal, summative and highly accountable. There have been, however, three major shifts in language pedagogy in contexts such as Europe and North America.

Pedagogy for modern languages has moved away from grammar translation, to a focus on communicative skills and tasks. Three constructivist assumptions underlie communicative language teaching (CLT): that activities which involve real communication promote learning; that activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning; and that language which is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process (Hu, 2002, p. 95). The communicative approach is regarded in China as a western language teaching method (Burnaby & Sun, 1989) and has been perceived as being in conflict with a traditional Chinese culture of learning (Hu, 2002). Despite the effort in China to implant CLT, Zhan (2008) has observed that it has made only limited impact, and change in teacher practice. In addition, while scholars like Kramsch (1998) have identified that the native speaker can no longer be the target norm in foreign language learning (Kramsch, 1998), Chinese teachers have believed that the goal of CFL students should be to "become native Chinese speakers" (Wong, 2010, p. 27).

Secondly, since the 1960s, the introduction of cultural content into language pedagogy has been considered essential (Byram, 1989). The movement to introduce this in China has been similarly challenging and confusing for teachers. Chao (1991) notes that Chinese teachers are untrained in the western areas of culture and sociology because their own school years were dominated by translating English literature. Moloney's recent study (2013a) found that although Australian–Chinese teachers were keen to introduce culture into lessons in both primary and secondary contexts, they express a lack of skills and resources, and discomfort. Even though Hanban (Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) has developed overseas training in the International Curriculum for Chinese, its representation of culture is as an "additional optional component … separated from communication and conceptualised mainly as knowledge of cultural artefacts" (Scrimgeour & Wilson, 2009, p. 36).

Thirdly, a sociocultural theoretical understanding of language and culture has shifted western language pedagogy to the inclusion of intercultural enquiry within language learning (Byram, 1989; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003). For this third shift, language teachers need meta-awareness of their own culture and how it is explicitly displayed in language use. This pedagogical shift, grounded in constructivist assumptions, positions knowledge as contestable and open to interpretation. This may be a challenging expectation for teachers holding beliefs from a Chinese education schema.

This review has highlighted some key areas of difference and how those differences are represented in language pedagogy. For teachers teaching CFL, it demonstrates the fundamental tensions which confront them in transitional processes to adapt to local curriculum. This background has shaped our inductive analysis and interpretation of the interview data, and the themes which emerged in our discussion of data below.

3. Methodology

This study chose to utilise a qualitative methodological approach, to enable an open and emergent form of enquiry, for comprehensive in-depth understanding. The aim of qualitative research approach is to inductively understand events through the eyes of the participants, in this case, teachers, in a natural setting. The study acknowledges the backgrounds and assumptions of the researchers, one an Australian teacher trainer, one a tertiary Chinese language educator, as a possible factor impacting their "seeing" (Russell & Kelly, 2002) and interpretation of data. The nature of

the engagement in dialogue, necessary for interview data, has involved the two researchers, negotiating the balance of their different cultural perspectives, in "co-responsible inquiry" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Wardekker, 2000).

We conducted nine interviews, each of 30-minutes duration between December 2011 and May 2012, which were audio recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in English. It is acknowledged that mother tongue for these teachers was Chinese, and that it is possible that more in-depth reflection may have been accessed in Chinese. However, English was chosen for the following reasons: the participants' level of English was uniformly high; they had lived in Australia for many years; this study was positioned in their professional roles; and interview questions dealt largely with their school practice. The interview questions explored teacher educational background, beliefs about their role, their practice, identity, perceptions of tension between western and Chinese education, if any, and their development within the Australian classroom environment. Interview questions are attached as Appendix A. Interview transcripts were read and reread for emergent themes, these themes were coded and the incidence of those themes noted and analysed (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

4. Participants

As field-based research, purposeful sampling was conducted to identify and invite participants in the Chinese teacher community. Recruitment of volunteers was carried out to collect perspectives representing different regions of New South Wales, age range, school employment sector, country of origin and educational background. The sample is heavily skewed female/male, reflecting the female-dominated language teaching profession. Participants were nine native speaker teachers of Chinese, teaching in New South Wales, Australia. The age range was 23–55 years old. They are referred to as Teacher 1–9 in the analysis of data below. Table 1 indicates the demographic diversity in these teachers, occurring in their country of origin, (and, within the PRC, the area of origin), age at which they emigrated, location of tertiary education and expressed identification.

5. Analysis of data

The transcripts of the nine interviews were read and reread, and examined for emerging coded themes. Table 2 indicates the emergent themes and the incidence of those themes in teacher interviews.

Acknowledging the individual nature of teacher development, Table 2 shows that there was no one belief that was constant across the whole group of participants. Although the sample is small, the data suggest that teachers may align into three smaller groups which may share certain beliefs and attitudes. We stress that there is some overlap between these groups and some teachers appear to have characteristics of more than one group. Although not discrete groups, they may however be characterised as:

Table 1. Demographic information about participants						
Participants	Gender	Age	Place of birth; migration to Australia	Tertiary education received	Teaching context	Self-identifies as
1	F	36	Born South China; migrated via NZ	China	Primary	Chinese
2	M	23	Born US; migrated in 1993	Australia	Secondary	Australian Chinese
3	F	25	Born Australia	Australia	Secondary	Australian Chinese
4	F	30–35	Born China; migrated in 1988	China	Secondary	Chinese
5	F	37	Born China; migrated in 2003	China	Secondary	Australian Chinese
6	F	35–40	Born Taiwan; migrated via NZ in 2009	Taiwan	Primary	Taiwanese
7	F	40–45	Born China; moved to HK at 3; migrated in 2000	Hong Kong	Secondary	Australian Chinese
8	F	40–45	Born Taiwan; migrated in 1990	Taiwan	Primary	Chinese Australian
9	F	30–35	Born China; migrated in 2006	China	Secondary	Chinese

Table 2. Number of teachers who mentioned coded theme (beliefs)		
Code	**Coded theme (Teachers' beliefs)**	***N* = 9**
1	Teacher expectation from students: respect, model the teacher	3
2	Teacher has the moral responsibility to achieve substantial learning in students	5
3	Students are responsible for working hard	3
4	Personal adaptation in Australian school: learn from Australian teachers	7
5	Include culture and try intercultural activities as pedagogic adaption	6
6	Searching for best ways; need resources; expert help in transition process	4
7	Innovative pedagogy with new technology	3
8	Motivation of students as number one priority, before language learning	4
9	Frustration/impatience with "Old" China culture and China context	2

(a) teachers who appear to identify with and retain traditional Chinese education schema in their teaching and expectations

(b) teachers who identify completely with Australian pedagogic beliefs

(c) teachers in transition between the two sets of beliefs and practices

(d) Each group, as represented by themes emerging from their interview data, will be examined in turn.

5.1. Evidence of traditional pedagogical beliefs

As shown in Table 2, in Codes 1, 2 and 3, a number of teachers retain strong feelings of responsibility for achieving substantial language content knowledge base in their students, through hard work both on their part and in reciprocal student effort.

Teachers 4 and 1 both used the phrase *comfort zone* to describe working within their Chinese schema. Teacher 4 expanded this notion:

> In China we really focus on language; we don't care about culture …. We like to do something we are good at, something we are familiar with, and we have lots of resources for. (T4)

Teacher 5 echoed the traditional schema of teacher responsibility:

> Teachers must have high expectations of themselves as well as students; they won't let kids down … They must impart lot of knowledge. (T5)

Teacher 9 also retains what she perceives as a traditional attitude and responsibility for disciplined learning:

> I always feel like I still communicate with students in a traditional way, like in discipline. I feel very upset if I see the kids don't do their work and they talk too much. … I feel like, if you keep doing that you'll learn nothing … I want you to really learn something and I feel that is good. (T9)

Teachers in this group express their frustration and self-criticism if they fail to achieve substantial learning in their students. When asked to identify what she saw to be the main tension transitioning from Chinese pedagogy, Teacher 1 positioned Australian learning culture as juxtaposed with her belief in perseverance and hard work, as the main barrier to success:

> I think it is the kids, they don't really enjoy the way of teaching; Year 6 kids say "I can't learn Chinese, … I give up". … for them learning should be fun without any hard work. (T1)

The teachers reflect the tension expressed by Hu (2002), in noting that education is regarded by Chinese teachers as a "serious undertaking that is least likely to be associated with light-heartedness but requires deep commitment and painstaking effort" (p. 99).

There is a sense of loss expressed in these teachers, suggesting the loss of the respect status of special roles they fulfilled in their China education roles. As Teacher 9 says:

> I had a very important role as class teacher. … I was always very proud to be the class teacher and teach them … My goal was to get them to the graduate class … The teacher's role in China is, you are the person who pass on the knowledge you have, to your students, and also including moral values, the things that are important for their growing up. The teacher has absolute authority. (T9)

To some teachers, the inability to transition to more Australian way of teaching has led to some frustration and despair. As one teacher said:

> I feel like I'm kind of lost … what am I going to do with my Chinese teaching? (T9)

5.2. Evidence of adoption of local pedagogical beliefs

A number of teachers had either, as younger teachers, trained in Australian universities (T2, T3), or experienced early exposure to a more western style teaching (e.g. T6 from Taiwan, T7 from Hong Kong). We see the tenets of western constructivist thinking described above, strongly influencing their attitudes and pedagogical choices. They are familiar with the notions, for example, of the Quality Teaching Framework (Department of Education and Training, 2003), one element of which is "significance", that is, that learning must be relevant to students' lives. As Teacher 3 said:

> it's much easier to learn information that you deem useful and relevant to you, as opposed to something that doesn't seem very applicable to you. (T3)

To exemplify this relevance, Teachers 2, 3 and 7 were dedicated to innovation in their teaching, in particular using new technologies. Teacher 7 is expert in the use of the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) for teaching Chinese, and frequently presents her IWB pedagogy at Chinese teacher workshops. She is frustrated that there are not more teachers who share her approach and values:

> at conferences, a lot of teachers, they don't use much technology; I have to tone my presentations down. (T7)

This group's positive attitude towards the use of technology corroborates with research findings that there is a positive correlation between the appropriate use of technology and effective teaching of languages in general, and Chinese in particular (Gray, Hagger-Vaughan, Pilkington, & Tomkins, 2005; Xu & Moloney, 2011).

These teachers also believe in the importance of motivation in engaging student learning and part of this motivation is making the study engaging, or fun. Teacher 2 demonstrates his most important goal in teaching is:

> To instil passion for language in kids … Most important thing, you have to get that enthusiasm, comes from your teaching. … I want my students to have fun, instil that passion, motivation for learning. I've got to motivate, that's all I want to do, keep them in my class, as much as I can, with that passion, then they'll continue with the learning. Technology? Yes, whatever interests the kids, games, whatever is available to motivate. (T2)

Teachers 3 and 5 were very clear that Chinese pedagogy will not work in Australia:

> Chinese pedagogy assumes that the teacher is the fountain of all knowledge and that students will sit down quietly and listen to the teacher for the entire lesson … This pedagogical approach is a bit too ideological to work in a real life classroom in Australia. (T3)

While acknowledging the difficulty in teaching Chinese due to tones and a different writing system, Teacher 5 emphasised the need to cater to the Australian students:

> But if you teach Australian students a traditional way, it will not work in Australian classes. Have to use Western way, motivate students, and make students learning go from passive to active. When I teach Chinese in Australia, if I ask students to sit and write characters, they won't do it, not necessary, boring, not meaningful. So, I don't ask them to write a lot. (T5)

Teacher 3 raised the need for differentiation, in the Australian Chinese classroom, due to the significant number of heritage speakers. To accommodate multi-level classes, she fosters constructivist autonomous learning, through project-based learning and many interactive activities, *to keep things moving in the classroom*, as she puts it.

Teacher 7 summed up her approach, from her western schema viewpoint: "I just want them to really love Chinese and enjoy the class, leave every single class with big smile". For Teacher 7, "old China" is holding back development, and she is uncompromisingly critical of other teachers of Chinese:

> Many of them, they still think they have to teach traditional way. Teacher gets really angry, if students are talking. They have very old-fashioned way to teach characters, not using the vast resources of Internet. Sometimes I feel, is that all they can give? A lot of very old fashioned culture, shallow. Like, they are still teaching calligraphy. Chinese culture is not calligraphy any more! I don't teach old culture. It's so much more …. The pedagogy must change. (T7)

5.3. Evidence of transition between pedagogical beliefs

The need for transition to the Australian school environment was a common theme in the interviews and is well put by Teacher 5:

> In order to survive teaching in Australia, all Chinese teachers have to adapt, adapt new style, otherwise they will feel frustrated their teaching is not effective, despite effort. (T5)

Codes 4, 5 and 6 above indicate that this group of teachers is exerting effort in their personal and professional transition to Australian school culture and pedagogy, and that they are aware of the conflicts between the two sets of beliefs. The teachers appear to be in various stages of transition in three areas: in personal convictions, teaching methodology and expectations.

Change in identity and personal orientation is expressed by Teacher 6:

> (I am) adjusting myself; although I am influenced by my authority based education. I am adjusting into this freedom. In my background we were trained to be good, avoid errors. Here they take risks, especially for language learning, they need to take risk. (T6)

Teacher 9 identified that unlike in China, in Australia, she must independently understand and interpret the local syllabus, and create a new teaching methodology, and resource materials to carry it out:

> In China we have a textbook, and the textbook followed the syllabus, so we don't have to think about syllabus. For me, to use the syllabus, it's a new thing; it's more creative and more innovative. So I had to get used to that … you have to think how to get your students there. (T9)

Methodology transition is expressed also by Teachers 5, 1 and 9, reporting they are experimenting with initiatives in intercultural learning and critical thinking reflected in the Australian syllabus:

> Along with language skills, I teach values. For example, I introduce Chinese people's belief in education, belief in family respect, people respect each other. When I teach, I introduce Chinese education system, totally different to Australia, give opportunity compare, contract; they realise how lucky they are; have more freedom, more creative. They can compare how

much harder Asian kids work, compared to them, academically. Ask them to think, this is Australian system, but there are other systems, with some better/worse aspects. Every country does not do what Australia does. (T5)

Teacher 5's intercultural teaching places her also with the teachers (Section 5.2) who have adopted local pedagogical beliefs, in that the critical thinking she elicits is a strong feature of a constructivist model of language learning, as seen in Section 2.4 above.

Teachers must also cope with transition in expectations. While they believe they should teach in order for students to progressively master Chinese, even their colleagues' expectations may be much less. Teachers 6 and 8 both found it curious, perhaps even offensive, that they were both directed by their schools *not* to teach too much language content at the primary school level:

They (*the school board*) want them (*the students*) to have fun; they said to not focus on how much language they have. They want the students to have good attitude so they will continue in high school. (T6) We were told not to teach too much language, just keep them happy and doing lots of activity ... learning language I just found so hard to teach through playing all the time. (T8)

This confirms Hu's (2002) identification of the disjunct between Chinese schema belief in serious application to learning and what appears to be a western notion of "entertainment" education. This is a misunderstanding of the serious view of structured linguistic play as an engaging meaningful learning activity (Bruner, 1975). It seems that there is tension for them in expectations, between the Australian values placed on prioritising motivation, to retain students' interest and continued elective study and the disciplined hard work which they believe will deliver content knowledge:

There will always be two conflicts: one thing is you try to make your class as fun as possible so the students will be motivated. ... but lots of other (Chinese) teachers don't agree with it, they said "but they learn nothing, they learn nothing, they have fun but they learn nothing". (T9)

While transition processes are embraced by some with more ease, teachers expressed they feel unsupported, misunderstood and neglected professionally in their struggle towards adaptation. The dismay from their perceived lack of access to training support can be keenly felt in T8's words:

Being a teacher here is the most difficult thing ... I'm not equipped with enough knowledge to deliver the outcomes. (T8)

Change and transition are inherent to the idea of a professional teaching community (Lave & Wenger, 1999). It has been suggested that the process of Chinese modernisation "is inevitably associated with confrontations and competitions ... education systems have to undergo a process of modification, adaptation and transformation in a particular sociocultural context, creating hybrid kinds of pedagogy" (Deng, 2011, p. 561). It seems that in contexts beyond the borders of China, where the international teaching of Chinese is being negotiated, some of these same confrontations are taking place. The outcome of CFL teachers' transitioning beliefs is a community struggling with complex, multiple and shifting identities, an interesting hybridity, often seen as "a site of innovation" (Ang, 2003). This hybrid practice embraces, on the one hand, the need to teach particular characteristics of Chinese language, but on the other hand, the search for innovative ways to deliver that learning, in line with current pedagogies.

6. Discussion

This section identifies three contributing factors to transition in CFL teacher beliefs. The factors which appear to be salient in the transition process are firstly the age of the teacher, secondly, the status or positioning of the teacher in the professional community of practice and thirdly, the type and amount of professional development to which the teachers have had access.

Teacher 5 believed that the older immigrant teachers have more difficulty in transition to the Australian context. For the older group of Chinese teachers who emigrated in 1980s:

> they came out of a different China, and brought different mindset, and have more difficult transition. (T5)

In regard to teacher capacity to achieve transition, Teacher 5 claimed an analogy between the "critical age" idea of language acquisition, (involving the young language learner's flexibility and rapid adaptation), and teacher adaptation ability:

> The younger the children learn language, the more than can get used to the new language system. Well, teachers too, the younger they came, the quicker they change, they are more flexible mentally. (T5)

Age also intersects with the second factor, status. The younger teachers are critical of the older teachers who retain the authority represented by a Chinese tertiary training, and an historical/cultural imperative of how Chinese "should be taught" traditional pedagogies. Teacher 9 had this to say about this conflict between the younger group and the older group:

> There are groups: some younger ones, they go ahead, they want to do more ... The older group, they feel "we are the best person to teach Chinese because we are the Chinese teachers in university, we are the Chinese teachers in school, we are properly trained as a Chinese teacher, and that's how Chinese should be taught" .... The other guys say "you are the old ways, it doesn't work in Australian context". (T9).

Teachers noted that the Chinese respect for seniority and greater experience operates strongly within the teacher group. Apparent authority and status issues have led to the formation of subgroups, and for some, feelings of exclusion from the community. Invisible agendas are drawn by the authority of the older community members, in determining membership of the CFL community of practice (Wenger, 1998), that is, in following the traditional or "right way" to teach Chinese. Younger teachers promoting different values (e.g. prioritising motivation) and teaching practice (e.g. use of games) may be positioned as peripheral, or excluded. We have seen above the condemnation, where traditional teachers consider that students of younger teachers "learn nothing". Teacher 3, as a heritage speaker of Chinese born and educated in Australia, felt excluded from the Chinese teacher network due to her practice and noted also her feeling of linguistic exclusion from teacher conferences conducted exclusively in native speaker-level Mandarin.

Yet, it is clear from other current studies (Singh & Han, 2014; Wang & Du, 2014) that the CFL teacher community of practice is changing. A hybrid practice in CFL is being recognised and positive value attributed to it, in the search for contextual relevance and learner success. For example, Singh and Han (2014) describe the development of a unique Australian pedagogy for Chinese where choices in language sequence are developed according to sociocultural aspects of learners' lives.

The third factor supporting transition processes in teachers is the amount of professional development support available. Moloney (2013a) has noted that national languages professional development opportunities of the past 10 years in Australia (e.g. Scarino & Crichton, 2007) have failed to impact the CFL teacher community. This is being currently addressed by professional development available, for example, through the Chinese Teacher Training Centre, at the University of Melbourne (Orton, 2014). Importantly, the teachers of this study unanimously nominated that the most effective pathway to transition was through observation and modelling of peer Australia-trained classroom teachers, recognised as the most powerful agent of professional development (Richards et al., 2001).

Finally, it is encouraging that, while transition in beliefs is difficult for many, most teachers expressed a positive desire and motivation to achieve transition successfully. They noted that they need expert input and resources to achieve this hybrid or compromise practice in a "middle ground". The metaphor of a "middle ground" (zhongjian didai) [中間地帶] refers to the space in which East meets West (顾泠沅, 1999). While the implied cultural polarisation may not be helpful, it provides a useful notion for the space in which compromise and transition occurs.

This study's overview suggests that an inclusive and respectful approach to developing the "Middle Ground" is needed. A respectful approach is vital, to retain and activate essential cultural knowledge of both Groups 1 and 3 above, to maximise the potential for successful learning in students. The findings support Orton's (2011) observation that Australian students need knowledge of Confucian teachings, to understand factors which have shaped contemporary Chinese society, and thus, people's language and behaviour. Chinese teachers from traditional backgrounds are challenged to activate and value an explicit metacognitive awareness of their own cultural background as an essential teaching asset, and as a resource to share with younger teachers of Group 2. This will not be a simple or one-dimensional transition, but an "organic process to influence the implementer's thinking and behavioural change" (Zhan, 2008, p. 67). Nevertheless, there is some imperative to see this transition occurring as soon, and as effectively, as possible. Our concluding remarks address how this transition can be best accelerated.

7. Concluding remarks

This exploratory qualitative study has reported the investigation of transitioning beliefs in nine teachers of Chinese, working in schools in New South Wales, Australia. It recognises its limitations in its small sample, and scope, as a case study, and we do not claim its findings are generalisable. We believe that our research analysis, however, has "generative power" (Wardekker, 2000, p. 270) in identifying how teachers are dealing with tensions between Chinese perspectives in the Australian language classroom. The study found differentiated alignments in the teachers to beliefs and practices. Although the majority of teachers had received their secondary and tertiary education in China, some of them retain stronger alignment with aspects of traditional Chinese education schema, experiencing conflict with the local pedagogy, causing reluctance and difficulty in adaptation. Other teachers see the need to change as inevitable and they are trying hard to adopt innovative ways of teaching to suit the western context. Finally, for a small group of teachers, mainly young ones, who either were educated in Asia with western influence, or received tertiary education in Australia, a western education schema has shaped their beliefs and priorities for teaching practice.

Regardless of which group the teachers belonged to, our study found a trend similar to that in the US (see Chiang, 2010) in that the teachers of Chinese see the need to transition in a foreign context, and show the willingness to learn and change. As teachers who "are not teaching Chinese kids in Chinese context", they stressed the importance of developing a pedagogy for Chinese in the Australian environment. To accelerate this process, they confirmed their need for professional development designed for their needs, and at the personal level, the need for peer advice, help and administrative support. Accelerated progress is being made on three fronts: in the development of curriculum and pedagogy for CFL in the Australian context (Scrimgeour, Foster, & Mao, 2014), provision of specialised teacher training (Orton, 2014) and the writing of new CFL language textbooks and teaching materials which reflect local pedagogy (e.g. Goonan, 2011).

This study demonstrates that it remains imperative that further professional development be provided for CFL teachers, to bridge the gap between teacher beliefs and practice and to support more successful student learning. The design of future professional training needs to be grounded in research-based understanding of teacher needs, and to be interculturally informed by knowledge of education schema, and the transitions in beliefs which can be necessary in a new context.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

(1) Where were you born and educated? Where do you currently teach? Would you identify as Chinese or Australia? Or both?

(2) What can you identify as important in your Chinese identity?

(3) What influence can you identify from your own schooling in China, as important values in education, and your teaching?

(4) How do you see your role as teacher?

(5) What do you believe to be the best way to teach Chinese?

(6) What are the tensions, if any, between Chinese pedagogy and western pedagogy?

(7) Do you need to teach Chinese in a traditional way, for it to be authentic Chinese teaching? Or—do you feel less Chinese, if you teach in a western way?

(8) How have you negotiated the difference in school cultures, how have you adapted? What kind of attitudes, values, or difficulties, if any, do you see within the group of Chinese teachers in Sydney?

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