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A Transdisciplinary Approach to Examining and Confidence-Boosting the Experiences of Chinese Teachers of Chinese in Finland

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With the current rise of China as a political, cultural, and economic superpower, Chinese as a foreign and second language has gained popularity worldwide. Finland is also responding to this global wave, as is reflected by the increasing number of Chinese courses in formal and informal settings in the Nordic country. Yet not all actors involved in the promotion of Chinese seem to experience instruction in the language in the same way. This study investigates how Chinese teachers of the Chinese language, who represent the majority of the 'workforce' for instruction in this language in Finland, perceive Chinese language education and their role in it.

We argue that there is a need for a paradigm shift in evaluating the teachers' experiences. Specifically, we support a move away from perspectives that see culture as static and identity as singular. Using the "analysis of multivoicedness," which was developed from dialogism (Aveling, Gillespie, & Cornish, 2014), the authors of this article identify a number of positions assumed/taken up by the teachers and others in their discourses. Finally, we propose a critical intercultural approach to Chinese teacher education or professional development based on transdisciplinarity, which relies on problem-solving that recognizes an important triad: *educational contexts—teachers' experiences—society* (McGregor & Volckmann, 2011).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexities brought about by the current and past waves of socio-economic, intercultural, and (neo-)liberal globalization and internationalization have placed new demands on teachers of foreign and second languages—be they so-called 'native' or 'non-native' speakers of the language(s) they teach, in their 'own' country or not. It is generally agreed that today's language education should move beyond teaching linguistic codes or merely presenting learners with static facts and information about the culture of the target language to preparing them to be interculturally competent (Byram, Holmes, & Savvides, 2013; Harbon & Moloney, 2013; Kramsch, 2014). This shift in objectives has had some influence on both teaching-learning contents and the experiences of different kinds of teachers in their classrooms and beyond.

This article examines the specific position of Chinese teachers of Chinese as a foreign and second language in the Nordic country of Finland. Compared to that of other foreign languages (i.e., English, German, and French), the scale of Chinese language education in Finland is rather small, with instruction in the language still at an early development stage (Palomäki, 2015). While Chinese is a 'small' language in the country, it is increasingly seen as attractive and valuable in Finland. Yet there is, to our knowledge, no published research on Chinese language education at any level of the curriculum in Finland. Furthermore, accurate information about students and teachers of Chinese is scarce. According to Yanzu (2014), there could be between one to two thousand students of the language (with approximately 300 in upper secondary schools) and about 50 teachers of Chinese (of Finnish, Chinese, or other nationalities) in Finland. Many Chinese teachers of Chinese arrive in Finland through the 'Volunteer Chinese Teacher Program,' organized by Hanban (The Office of Chinese Language Council International, a non-governmental organization under the Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China) to respond to the shortage of teachers of Chinese in other countries (Hanban, 2016). The rest of the teachers consist of a small number of certified teachers who are educated in Finland (most of whom are Finnish nationals) and a larger number of uncertified, part-time teachers (most of whom are Chinese nationals).

The Finnish National Board of Education, like many other Finnish institutions, has understood the benefits of investing in Chinese language education, funding several initiatives in basic and upper secondary education. For instance, the Yanzu (言祖) national education project was established in 2011 to promote Chinese language in Finnish upper secondary schools, to unify and standardize Chinese language education, to write the Chinese subject syllabus, and also to map out available teaching material for Chinese (Yanzu, 2014). The project's long-term aim is to include Chinese in the Finnish matriculation examination (*ylioppilaskirjoitukset* in Finnish) at the end of upper secondary school and to ensure that teachers of Chinese in Finland possess formal qualifications. However, at the moment, due to budget restrictions at Finnish universities, such endeavours seem to have stalled.

The authors of this article have collaborated with the Confucius Institute at a Finnish university to provide professional development to Chinese teachers based in the country. Through our discussions with and observations of teachers, we noted, like Moloney and Xu (2015) in Australia, that Chinese language teaching in Finland is still dominated by a 'traditional' pedagogic approach, with an overemphasis on teacher-centredness, grammar, and 'textbook language.' We also noted that culture in its rigid, somewhat essentialistic form tends to be the norm. The emphasis is often on "Chinese products and their origins, such as moon cakes, red envelopes, and festivals" (Zhang, 2011, p. 204).

This study investigates how Chinese teachers of the Chinese language perceive Chinese language education and their role in it. In the 'fertile' yet 'barren' context of Chinese learning and teaching in Finland, we ask the following questions: How do Chinese teachers depict and construct their experiences teaching Chinese in Finnish institutions? How do these teachers perceive their position as Chinese instructors of Chinese in Finland? What do they say about how others perceive them? And how much of what they say seems to reflect a critical intercultural position?

2. A CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE FOR EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE TEACHERS

2.1. The Need for a Paradigm Shift That Privileges Transdisciplinarity

When Fred Dervin started working in the fields of language and intercultural education, his Ph.D. supervisor told him that he should 'read' everything—not only research in education and applied linguistics. Although Fred was confused about the meaning of 'everything,' he read books and articles related to the intercultural, regardless of the field (e.g., in communication, business, health, etc.), but, most importantly, he became interested in different branches of other fields that had considered the intercultural 'at a distance' (e.g., anthropology, sociology, philosophy, etc.). Through this important long-term engagement with different (often contradictory and/or complementary) voices, he was able to contribute to an approach to language and intercultural education that sheds/rejects a singular 'disciplinary straightjacket' (Hottola, 1999, p. 4). Such an approach was transdisciplinarilly and ethically coherent and consistent, careful to avoid 'patching together' scholars and ideas that clash ideologically. Archeological work was consequently necessary.

The notion of *interculturality* has been omnipresent in recent decades in language education and has led to 'intercultural talk,' in which the term 'intercultural' is often used uncritically (Dervin, 2010). The essentialist understandings of culture, which see "culture as a static, internally homogeneous entity different from other such entities," remain predominant (Piller, 2011). Piller (ibid.) quotes Hinnenkamp (1987, p. 176), who describes the cultural ways of seeing in cross-cultural and intercultural communication as follows:

> Culture as adapted in most linguistic subdisciplines has unfortunately become a *passe-partout* notion: whenever there is a need for a global explanation of differences between members of different speech communities the culture-card is played – the more 'distant' in geographic and linguistic origin, the more 'cultural difference'!

This approach to culture can easily promote the creation of dichotomies, which may emphasize the fact that some people are 'good' while others are 'bad'; some are 'civilised,' others 'uncivilised'; some are late, others are respectful of schedules; some uphold/esteem democracy, others do not (Dervin, 2012). There is a danger of committing symbolic violence when taking a culturalist and essentialist perspective on culture and identity. Symbolic violence is described by Bourdieu (1990) as a "gentle, invisible violence, unrecognised as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, of all the virtue honored by the ethnic of honor" (p. 127). The concept accounts for the silent, almost unconscious, modes of cultural or social domination that occur as daily social habits and contribute to the dynamics of power relations in social life (Nicolaescu, 2010).

Another important concept relating to interculturality is identity. Identity, especially as understood from an open, processual, and co-constructivist viewpoint, has often taken precedence over culture in examinations of interculturality. Although our world still conceives of identities—in intercultural contexts—as quite stable and constant, a new approach to interculturality claims that what we experience when we meet other people is often inconstant and unpredictable (Lifton, 1993). As Sen (2005) reminds us:

> The same person can be of Indian origin, a Parsee, a French citizen, a US resident, a woman, a poet, a vegetarian, an anthropologist, a university professor, a Christian, a bird watcher, and an avid believer in extra-terrestrial life and of the propensity of alien creatures to ride around the cosmos in multicoloured UFOs. (p. 350)

In many cases, people may wish to reduce who they (and others) are to a solid/rigid/fixed identity (Bauman, 2004) due to their reluctance to open up about some aspects of their identity (ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) in specific contexts. In other cases, a lack of symbolic power may prevent individuals from advancing a self-representation of multiplicity.

National, cultural, and group identities are often at the center of discussions about interculturality. For many thinkers and researchers, these constructs/notions are problematic. First of all, they tend to create artificial and politically motivated differentiation, and they can lead to discrimination, ethnocentrism, and toxic treatment. Secondly, as Pieterse (2004) explains, "National identities are *mélange* identities, combinations of people that have been conventionally amalgamated under a political heading (such as Celts, Franks, and others in 'France')" (p. 33). These identities are neither 'natural' nor 'God-given' (Said, 1993, p. 33). Understandably, this approach also remains within the realm of single and isolated disciplines, which disregard the benefits of interacting with other fields. From a trandisciplinary perspective, as adopted in this paper, disentangling the *mélange* of such identities should be our priority in examining the experiences of Chinese teachers of Chinese in Finland.

The intercultural ideologies that are shared about China in the 'West' have rarely been discussed in language and intercultural education, although the latter often contributes to this creed (Díaz, 2015). Detours via Sinology, philosophy, and post-colonial studies are thus necessary. In Finland, China is often represented as a heterotopia—"a place of otherness and deviation" (Jullien, 2012, p. 17). In popular discourses, politics, and even research, China has often been described as a "monocultural" country, in spite of its very large and diverse population (Dervin & Gao, 2012, p. 555). Many of the discourses on China are still based on centuries-old differentialist and essentialist discourses, especially in relation to the philosopher Confucius (*K'ung-fu-tzu*, 'Master K'ung'; Cheng, 2007; Dervin, 2011, p. 42). These discourses derive from both the 'West' and the 'East,' as is seen in 'reverse orientalism,' whereby "cultural producers with Eastern affiliations come to terms with an orientalised East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of Western readers, by playing (along) with them or by discarding them altogether" (Lau & Mendes, 2011, p. 1).

Such perspectives, if they remain unnoticed, can contribute haphazardly to the spread, reproduction, and acceptance of stereotypes about and prejudice against China and the Chinese. These ideas can have an impact on how Chinese teachers of Chinese experience their time abroad and on how their interlocutors perceived them (van Dijk, 1987). Many scholars, including van Dijk, have demonstrated that culture-centered and essentialistic approaches create hierarchies and promote the "hidden concept-pair of superiority and inferiority" (p. 386).

Thus, in our attempt to look into the experiences of Chinese teachers of Chinese, we tried to move away from perspectives that emphasize facts about a 'target culture,' present 'grammars of culture' (i.e., do's and don'ts), concentrate on cultural difference, and confront cultures and civilizations (Valette, 1986). We maintain that interculturality can only take

shape through interactions with another person in a given environment, with local context influencing how people think, behave, perform, present themselves, etc. For Gallagher (2011, p. 488), there is no way we can think of a social being without considering the dynamics that s/he experiences all the time. He reminds us that when we meet someone, 'self-in-the-other' and the 'other-in-the-self' occur (p. 492). Shi-Xu (2001, p. 280) makes a similar claim when he criticizes the frequent 'individual-knowledge-minded approach' to interculturality, which completely ignores the fact that interaction is jointly constructed. These observations make clear that our participation in and examination of intercultural dynamics require a political-laden, transdisciplinary approach—an approach that places a strong emphasis on power (e.g., How does *homo hierarchicus* position herself and the other?), unstable identification, and 'facework' (i.e., How do we protect ourselves and the other in interaction? See Bensa, 2010; Lakoff, 1990).

2.2. A Critical Intercultural Approach

New ways of conceptualizing interculturality have been discussed in different fields over the past decade (e.g., Piller, 2010). These understandings have benefited from critical input from fields such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. The starting point of most critical approaches to interculturality is that the very notion itself is ideological and needs to be deconstructed (Holliday, 2010). Certain scholars have also pushed for a perspective that looks into the 'diverse diversities' of the people involved (i.e., the idea that everybody is diverse regardless of their origins, skin color, social background, etc.), instead of relying solely on culture or cultural difference. They pay attention to the dangers of essentialistic, culturalist ideas and, inspired by work in, for example, postcolonial and queer studies, highlight how discourses of discrimination, power, and superiority promote these views. These researchers also recognize that such discourses can easily serve as 'excuses' and 'alibis' (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Breidenbach & Nyiri, 2009; Dervin & Machart, 2015). For instance, violence against women in the name of culture still exists in most parts of the world. Yet some of these approaches acknowledge, unpretentiously, that essentialism is a 'universal sin' to which no one is completely immune (Dervin, 2016; Machart, 2015).

Our approach to the experiences of Chinese teachers of Chinese is first and foremost based on the notion of 'interculturality,' which is defined here as the (unstable and power-laden) construction and negotiation of encounters, identities, and ideologies between different persons (Dervin, 2016; Piller, 2010). This perspective does not treat interculturality as neutral transactional encounters; instead, we assert the need to acknowledge that interculturality encompasses and contributes to unbalanced power relations, differential treatment, and different kinds of –*isms*, such as *racism, ethnocentrism, culturalism, linguism*, etc. (see Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986; Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2010; Hoskins & Sallah, 2011). In this way, we move well beyond the usual description of interculturality as behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately across cultures (Deardorff, 2016; Spitzberg & Changon, 2009).

In this perspective, culture is seen as plural, changing, adaptable, and constructed (Clifford and Marcus, 1986); it is related to power relationships and composed of conflicting relationships (Bhatia, 2007, p. 49). Abdallah-Pretceille (2003, 2006) has put forward the concept of 'culturality' to capture these vital aspects of culture. As we process along with culturality, our identity is plural. Many postmodern thinkers share our understanding that

there is no such thing as a singular identity (Dervin, 2012). This view of identity recognizes that people cross various collective and individual positions and voices on a daily basis, which may be apposed or seem contradictory (Hermans, 2001, referenced in Dervin, 2012).

The concepts of 'voice' and 'multivoicedness' are used by many researchers from different fields to analyse the 'hybridity' of identities (Aveling et al., 2014; Bhatia, 2002; Hermans, 2001). For example, in Bhatia's (2002) study of the experiences of non-European, diasporic communities in the 'first world,' the use of a dialogic model allows him to show how the diasporic identity is shaped by, and linked to, cultural and political issues of race, gender, colonization, and power in the 'host country' and the 'homeland.' Bakhtin's reflections on dialogism demonstrate how voices can gain authority as they are transformed along chains of discourse, and how they shape and are shaped by previous or anticipated voices (Blackledge, 2005). In other words, our voice is never purely our own; it is created through wrestling with the voice(s) of others. Whatever is said always responds to things that have been said before and in anticipation of things that will be said in response. In this paper, we are interested in how the instructors in our study construct their experiences as Chinese teachers in Finland, bearing in mind that many factors—such as the wider social context, the social-economical status of the speaker, and the interlocutor—that can influence what the teachers say and how they say it.

This leads to another important aspect of a critical intercultural approach: reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Reflexivity includes two components: On the one hand, it represents a shift away from the "researcher's naïve belief in her/his subjects' honesty," because there can be a lack of reliability between acts and discourse/discourse and acts (Dervin, 2012). On the other hand, it prompts us to reflect on the influence of the researcher(s) during both the collection and the interpretation of data.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Collection

The Confucius Institute of University A, in cooperation with the authors' department of teacher education, organized a free professional development session for all the teachers of Chinese based in Finland in the autumn of 2015. Interestingly, of the 20 teachers of Chinese (19 female and 1 male) who attended, all were native Chinese speakers born and educated through university in China. One teacher from the Confucius Institute commented, "We don't know why, but the Finnish Chinese teachers are not very active in our training, even though it is open to all Chinese teachers."

Participants included seven volunteer teachers hired by the Chinese Ministry of Education, a full-time teacher employed by a Finnish high school, a private Chinese language tutor, and a Chinese language instructor working for a social organization. The other participants were working as part-time Chinese teachers paid hourly for teaching in schools. The teachers worked in different cities in Finland, teaching various levels of Chinese in different types of schools or organizations. They also differed greatly in their educational background, teaching qualifications, and proficiency in Finnish. This diversity attests to the complex situation of Chinese language teaching and learning in Finland.

One of the authors led the session, discussing topics such as learner autonomy and

learner motivation; translanguaging as a tool for empowerment; task-based teaching-learning; and intercultural language education. Examples taken from the field of Chinese language education were also provided to illustrate the concepts and methods. At the end of the talk, a 30-minute group discussion was organized amongst the Chinese teachers who were divided randomly into groups to discuss their familiarity with the concepts presented and how they had used and/or planned to incorporate them in their teaching. In the afternoon, group discussions were organized to discuss more generally how Chinese teaching and learning could be made more innovative and rewarding. The teachers were again randomly divided into groups and asked to give examples of good teaching practices or successful teaching/learning from their own experience, to share information about recent teaching developments, such as the use of integrated co-teaching in Chinese, and to voice their concerns as teachers of Chinese in Finland.

Both group discussion sessions were carried out in Chinese Mandarin. The teachers were very active and eager to share their stories, experiences, and concerns related to teaching Chinese in Finland. Throughout the one-day session, one of the researchers observed and communicated with the teachers, and took notes about what they said. The discussions were also videotaped, with participant consent. In what follows, we explore the teachers' experience from a critical intercultural perspective.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data include three half-hour audio recordings from the morning group discussions, three one-hour audio recordings from the afternoon group discussions, and notes taken by the researchers. The recorded data were transcribed into Chinese by the Chinese-speaking author. After several careful readings and discussions by both authors, relevant parts of the transcribed data were selected and translated into English. A qualitative method for exploring multivoicedness (Aveling et al., 2014) was employed in the data analysis, which was also informed by transdisciplinary ideas related to the intercultural discussed in the previous sections. The 'analysis of multivoicedness,' originating in Bakhtin's dialogism, recognizes the multivoiced nature of the Self and argues that the Self is not single or unitary (Aveling et al., 2014); rather, it is always infused with and directed at the voices of others. The analysis of multivoicedness is a systematic methodological approach for extracting the voices of the Self and Other and analyzing the relations between them. It complements the perspective on interculturality that is put forward in this article, as it allows us to identify positioning (i.e., 'diverse diversities'), potential contradictions about cultures and identities, and previously mentioned '-isms.'

The data analysis included a three-step analysis of multivoicedness as proposed by the social psychologists Aveling et al. (2014). This approach allows us to go below the surface of narrative descriptions or of perspectives that ignore the role of power imbalances in intercultural relations. First, the multiplicity of I-positions from which the Self speaks were identified. This step aims to identify the various I-positions from which the participating teachers speak. The coding moved beyond Self/Other identifications to include attitudes, values, aspirations, and reported practices that constituted expressions of these identity positions (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008). During this step, the first-person pronouns were coded, and related utterances were grouped into three voices speaking from three distinct I-positions. Considering the objective of the discussions, it is perhaps not surprising that the

most prominent voice in the data is the teachers' 'I-as-a-Chinese-Teacher-in Finland' voice. Second most frequent is the "I-as-an-uncertified-Chinese-teacher" voice, and third most recurrent is the "I-as-a-native-Chinese" voice. The voices serve as the basis for examining the teachers' discourses and experiences of intercultural aspects involved in their work and positions as migrants.

Next, the voices of the inner-Others that can be heard within the speakers' utterances were identified. This analysis coded all the reported speech and echoes in the teachers' utterances. Reported speech refers to utterances that are attributed to either a specific or a generalized other, while echoes refer to utterances that are not attributed to others, but which nonetheless seem to have a distinct origin beyond the speaker (Aveling & Gillespie, 2008). The aim is to identify the origins of the voices identified in the previous step. The first two steps answer the question 'Who is doing the talking?' (Aveling et al., 2014) in the narrated experiences of Chinese teachers in Finland.

Finally, the nature of the autodialogue – dialogue between the voices within the Self (Josephs and Valsiner, 1998, as cited in Aveling et al., 2014) and relationships between voices within the Self – were examined. This step answers the question 'What are the interactions between the voices in the Self?' (Aveling et al., 2014). It aims to reveal the contradictions within and between what the teachers said about their intercultural experiences in Finland.

4. EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE TEACHERS IN FINLAND

4.1. 'I-as-a-Chinese-in-Finland': An Altruistic Attitude to Supplement a Marginalized Position?

The first voice identified in the teachers' talk was the voice of 'I-as-a-Chinese-in Finland'. When taking this position, some teachers seemed to imply a Chinese 'I' (and 'we,' by extension), which contrasted with a Finnish 'they.' When talking about the classroom atmosphere, one teacher commented, "I am Chinese, I am talkative… Finns are very silent." This type of generalization echoes an essentialist view on national identity, which can lead to stereotypes. The discourse of Finns being silent is very much recurrent in daily discourses and in the intercultural literature.

In their discussions, the teachers expressed mixed feelings about their position as a Chinese in Finland. On the one hand, the teachers perceived their status as inferior in comparison to the Finns. As many of these teachers were employed part-time, they received a minimum salary and had an unstable job, yet there was no way for them to obtain Finnish teachers' qualification to improve this situation: the qualifying program is taught essentially in Finnish, and only accepts applicants who speak Chinese as a second language. The instability of their career and income gave them a strong sense of insecurity. These instructors felt powerless given their economic and social status, and lack of a sense of belonging to Finnish society. Many of the teachers had been in Finland for several years, more than 10 years in some cases. Nevertheless, they struggled to fit into Finnish society and were constantly reminded of their status as Others. Several teachers believed that Finnish society marginalized foreigners in general:

Excerpt 1

Participant A:	In the new term orientation at our university, there was a doctoral student from the UK. He was studying here. A new student asked him: "Is the Finnish language going to be a problem for getting a job here?" You see, he had been her for five, six years. He was married with a Finnish wife, and they had children together. But he said, "Even if your Finnish is as good as that you are able to write your thesis in Finnish, when you tell your employer that you can speak Finnish in an interview, he/she knows that you are not a Finn, he thinks that…"
Participant B:	that you are not as valuable?
Participant A:	"…that is, no matter what, you cannot speak as well as we native Finns who grow up and live here." So, yes, language will be a big obstacle. There is discrimination. So we foreign teachers working here are….

On the other hand, many of the instructors felt proud because of their knowledge of what they call 'real' China. Further, they saw it as their responsibility to let the students know about the 'real' China of today through Chinese language teaching. Some teachers commented that many Finns had never been to China and tended to believe that China was still very poor and under-developed. This view appeared to correspond to the essentialistic, typically backwards discourses about China, identified, for instance, by many Sinologists (see Section 1.1; Cheng, 2007). For these instructors, the 'real' China of today is becoming stronger both economically and politically. One teacher used an economic argument about the benefits of promoting Chinese language education in Finland:

Excerpt 2

[Promoting Chinese teaching] is not only [important] for the Chinese teachers. It will be probably very helpful to boost Finland's economy to some extent. Then it is very possible that Finland can attract more Chinese tourists. The business cooperation between the two countries can be greatly increased too.

In the excerpt, the teacher depicted China as an economically advanced county that could help Finland boost its economy by sending more Chinese tourists. Indirectly, the teacher positions China in a very positive way here, in a counter-narrative to the usual belief that China 'lives in the past' (Cheng, 2007). One could question the use of 'real' here, as any representation of a country or culture cannot but be based on one's own ideologies and imaginaries (Dervin, 2016; Holliday, 2010). Further, there were dialogical dynamics (Aveling et al., 2014) within the teacher's voice of 'I-as-a-Chinese-in-Finland.' Overall, the teachers' construction of their positions and experiences in general was not isolated from the wider social context; instead, it involved a process of negotiating and mediating between notions in the current context. The perceived acceptance of the society, power imbalance, and social economical status of the teachers contributed to how they framed/described their intercultural experiences during the discussions.

In addition to the counter-narratives discussed above, many teachers emphasized that 'we' Chinese teachers in Finland should help each other to form a stronger voice in Finnish society. Consequently, some teachers built a Wechat (a mobile chatting application which is very popular in China) group so that they could share information and teaching resources, and help each other. This 'we' also seemed to include the Confucius Institute, the organization that they viewed as having the power and resources to promote Chinese language education in Finland and improve the situation of Chinese teachers in the country.

4.2. 'I-as-an-uncertified-Chinese-teacher-in-Finland': Experiencing Social Injustice

The second I-position identified in the data is the 'I-as-an-uncertified-Chinese-teacher-in-Finland' voice. When taking the position of an uncertified Chinese teacher in Finland, many of the instructors perceived themselves as inferior in comparison to the Finnish teachers of Chinese. The Chinese participants in this study were born and educated in China, moved to Finland, and became Chinese teachers for different reasons. On the one hand, many had the confidence that, as native Chinese speakers with sufficient quality education, they would be good Chinese teachers. One could, however, question whether being a native speaker qualifies one to be language teacher. On the other hand, they felt disadvantaged because their qualifications and education were not recognized by the Finnish educational system and were somewhat relegated to an inferior position. Many of the teachers reported the extreme difficulty they experienced in trying to obtain a teaching certificate as a Chinese instructor in Finland without speaking very good Finnish.

Excerpt 3

You are Chinese. You speak Chinese as your mother tongue, you know? ... Firstly your Finnish has to be good enough to write your Master's thesis in Finnish. You have to be this good to learn and earn your required credits in Finnish, right? You have to overcome this before you can study for a teaching certificate. After the teachers' certificate comes the certificate for teaching the language...

Being in a lower social economical position as uncertified Chinese teachers in Finland, participants seemed to feel powerless about their role in the society, subjected to the symbolically powerful discourses of 'incompetence' (see Section 1.1). They were asked by the training organizer to talk about their wishes and needs. As seen in the following excerpts, the teachers' comments reflected clear symbolic violence against their role as (part-time) Chinese teachers in Finland. According to them, it was acceptable and natural that they remained in this position, and they should be thankful for having any income at all:

Excerpt 4

Career development needs?! We should be happy if we have porridge to eat!…

Excerpt 5

You should be happy if you have a job, have income. We should be considerate, now. Finland needs us to stay together through the economic crisis…we have to be thankful.

In the last sentence, one could well be listening to a Finnish government official speak. These comments can be seen to reflect the influences of the wider (political, media) discourses on individuals. When taking the 'I-as-an-uncertified-Chinese-teacher-in-Finland' position, the teachers were constantly comparing themselves to the Finnish teachers of Chinese and referring to power imbalances (Dervin, 2016). The Finnish teachers appeared to be in a more advantaged position:

Excerpt 6

Chinese teachers should be provided with teachers' certification training in the Finnish education system. Otherwise as a teacher from China, it is useless even if you have a doctoral degree … What would happen? For example, if we have a doctoral degree in teaching Chinese as foreign language from a Chinese university and very good teaching experiences in China, then we have a Finn who has a fresh degree of Chinese studies from a Finnish university… I am not saying that he cannot teach well… but the truth is, he can teach, and you are not qualified to teach.

In many Finnish universities, Chinese language courses are taught by volunteer teachers sent by the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, which pays them a minimum salary during a maximum of three years while the local host universities organize their teaching. After three years, the teachers either go back to China or are hired by a Finnish institution. Some teachers believed that a main motivation behind Chinese courses was free labor; the universities did not have to hire teachers, as the Chinese authorities provided them. One teacher mentioned a comment that she had overheard on this topic:

Excerpt 7

Someone from the Department of East Asian Studies of the University of XXX said: "China sends us some teachers? Great! It does not cost us anything!"

It is easy to see here how the economic argument can influence interculturality and representations of Self/Other (Holliday, 2010).
    One teacher had worked in a Finnish university for almost three years as a volunteer. When discussing her future plan, she was frustrated because it was unlikely that the university would hire her:

Excerpt 8

Of course they say they do not wish to change the teachers too often. Because changing teachers means they have a new teacher when they have just adapted to the ways of teaching of the previous teacher. Then the new teachers come, and everything is not familiar and he/she has to adapt. Both the teacher and the students have to adapt to each

other. So our university does not wish to change teachers often. But the teachers sent by Hanban can only work here for a maximum of 3 years, and there is little possibility that the university is hiring you. I don't know… because if they hire you to be a full time teacher, for one thing you have to be qualified according to the requirements, then if they hire you… because they are not paying the salary now.

Such power imbalances and economically-oriented discussions about the presence of Chinese teachers of Chinese not only have an influence on how interculturality is constructed between these different actors, but also on their levels of satisfaction and trust (Gorski, 2008). Many teachers shared the same frustration and uncertainty about their future in Finland.

4.3. 'I-as-a-Chinese-Teacher-in-Finland': The Other as a Problem

The 'I-as-a-Chinese-Teacher-in-Finland' voice is the dominant voice in the teachers' utterances. As mentioned earlier, the situation of the teachers varies greatly. Nevertheless, the most frequent position that they took in the group discussions was that of a Chinese teacher in Finland. This is where most discourses of interculturality, many based on culturalist and essentialist perspectives (Holliday, 2010), appeared. The ways in which some teachers talked about their students and the teaching of Chinese language did not reflect the kind of critical intercultural position discussed earlier (see Section 2.2).

4.3.1. Finnish Students are too Shy

When the teachers talked about their teaching experiences and practices, many mentioned the importance of knowing the characteristics of their learners. Several teachers' comments about Finnish learners echoed stereotypes about Finns: They are quiet, shy perfectionists (Layne & Alemanji, 2015). These characteristics were regarded as obstacles for effective, fun intercultural teaching of Chinese. Several teachers used the silence of the Finnish students to explain how challenging it was to have teacher-student interactions in the class:

Excerpt 9

Participant C:	Finnish kids really don't like to talk, right?
Participant E:	Yeah, they wanna make sure that what they are going to say is perfect before they speak. Perfectionists!
Participant C:	Yeah… so now there is no good solution…
Participant E:	They blush when they talk.
Participant C:	Yes, yes, yes. Some even shiver…
All:	Ha ha ha…

Excerpt 10

Participant D:	They have very pale skin, so it is very obvious when they blush.
Participant F:	I am in a better situation this term. There are students from Vietnam, India, and Australia in my class. When we do group activities, I ask them to sit beside the Finns… yeah, I can't stand that kind of… no

one gives any answer three minutes after I ask a question.
Participant D: It feels like not being respected, right?

Interestingly, while China and the Chinese are often viewed as "a place of otherness and deviation" (Jullien, 2012, p. 17), in Finland (see Section 1.1.), the way the teachers describe Finnish students also corresponds to a similar narrative about Finns. Further, it is worth noting that the teachers were somewhat unable to reexamine, modify, or critique their own responsibility.

The teachers often appeared frustrated, or even offended, by the silence of their students. Some even claimed that these strong feelings (see Excerpt 9) affected their attitudes towards the students and their choice of teaching methods. Yet the instructors did not try to question the widespread stereotypes about Finnish students that they used, nor did they discuss the influence of power relations on class behavior. In fact, silence could be a mark of fear of the native. As native speakers of Chinese, the teachers represented the voice of authority for most learners. In Excerpt 10, the comparison of Finnish students with learners from other countries (i.e., Australia, India and Vietnam) seemed to indicate a strong and unjustified bias against Finnish students, based on nationality. A few teachers expressed a different opinion about Finnish students, however. The following two excerpts certainly show that Finns are not all that quiet and shy.

Excerpt 11

Participant H: Probably it depends on the personality. I feel that the native Finns in
                        my class are very active.
Participant C: Which city are you from?
Participant H: Kuopio.
Participant C: People from Kuopio are nice.

Excerpt 12

It depends on individual students, really! Some… you have to talk to them first. If they do not want to answer questions alone, then I will not ask them to in the future. Some students are very active. I have students like that in my class. He would give his answers even before you finish your questions. Even though most of the time the answers are not correct, you have to encourage him if he likes to talk.

The above excerpts demonstrate that descriptions of all Finnish students as "silent" and "not talkative" are in fact overgeneralized stereotypes. But what happens in Excerpt 12 represents a sub-categorizing of Finnish students based on regional difference. This could indicate a revision of the aforementioned national stereotypes but, in reality, this is not the case, as the new subdivision also leads to stereotypes. What appears clearly in our data is that the teachers who have these stereotypes of the learners in mind are more likely to use them as 'excuses' to argue against the use of innovative and creative teaching (see Section 2.1)

4.3.2 Chinese is Difficult to Learn

In the teachers' utterances about their teaching experiences, different ways to encourage

the students can be found. Some teachers tried to relate learning Chinese to the students' future career:

Excerpt 13

So I did a survey with them in the first lesson. In the survey I asked them, "Why do you learn Chinese? Why do you come here to learn?" Some kids I feel just come and have a look, and others are just… I think usually those who choose the course… these students… they should have a basic idea of 'international' in their mind. If they are not… like they are in high school now, going to college… I told them in class that if you are interested in international business… you are outgoing and interested in international business… Chinese is an advantage for you… because China has the biggest market and resources. Just put it simply like this.

The current circulating voice that Chinese is an advantage today is used once again both to boost the position of the teachers and to motivate the students (see MacDonald, 2011).

The difficulty of learning Chinese was used by some teachers as an excuse for students' apparent lack of motivation and low learning outcomes. In Excerpt 14, Chinese was depicted as a difficult language that required strong motivation and effort to learn. This type of discourse again reflected an essentialist ideology towards the Chinese language, which could have a negative impact on student learning:

Excerpt 14

Yeah, it is only a hobby for them… I feel that these students… Firstly, they do not have much time; secondly, Chinese is really difficult for them; and thirdly, because it is really difficult, they have to learn how to pronounce and how to write the characters. They don't have very strong motivation both in and after class. I think.

Another teacher who taught advanced-level Chinese at a university expressed a different attitude. He recommended a popular Chinese television show, which invited young people from different countries to discuss current events in the world in Chinese. He commented that, as all the invited guests were speaking fluent Chinese, this television show could set a good example for the students and show them that they, too, can learn Chinese well. Whether a language is difficult to learn depends on many factors, such as the first language, the purpose of learning, and the methods of teaching and learning. The teachers' ideology towards Chinese cannot but have an impact on the shape that pedagogical practices and student learning outcomes take (Hall, 2005).

Although some teachers depicted Chinese as a difficult language, different ways to improve learning were discussed and many suggestions were made. Communicative teaching and task-based teaching-learning were debated during the session. Interestingly, some teachers who taught beginner-level Chinese believed that this method was not suitable for early learners, given that their main goal at this stage is to inspire student interest in Chinese. They believed that task-based teaching-learning was more suitable for advanced level learners who could already speak good Chinese:

Excerpt 15

Participant A:	I think what she talked about, this…
Participant B:	Task-based teaching.
Participant A:	Right. What she talked about is more suitable for advanced-level teaching. But I am now mainly teaching basic levels…
Participant B:	Yeah, me too…
Participant A:	The method, the idea are both very good, but they have limited use in my class.

Teachers of advanced level learners, on the contrary, believed that the only purpose of task-based teaching learning was to create a fun lesson, which was not so necessary for university level students, for example. They argued that university-level students were studying Chinese for practical use, thus fun activities could be seen as a time-consuming distraction.

Excerpt 16

I think one difference between university (Chinese courses) and theirs is that the university emphasizes practical use more than fun. To organize so many games is actually… well, you can do some games but really not to… I think practical use is more important, for university students.

Excerpt 17

… then I think the task-teaching is very good. We feel that we try to make sure they have enough regular drills… that is, drills and practice through repetition are very necessary, but I think it is still possible to add some fun activities in between.

In the above two excerpts, the use of innovative teaching methods seemed to depend on the level of the learners. The use of less innovative approaches could also be understood in light of the teachers' limited exposure to theory or a possible lack of motivation to use the suggested methods.

Although most of the suggestions that the teachers made fell into the canonical representations of Chinese culture (Zhang, 2011, p. 204), treating language teaching as merely the teaching of linguistic codes and facts, some teachers offered examples of intercultural Chinese teaching and learning:

Excerpt 18

I teach media Chinese to students of advanced level Chinese. These students speak very good Chinese already. I think through media… the reports and articles from Chinese media, [students can learn] about what is happening now in China and how China is communicating with the outside world. Through media, to talk about the language… the media image of China… language is the main goal. Students learn lots of words, words that are popular now… and different idioms… words appear on the media now, hot words...

Using the media as a source of teaching and learning, this teacher believed that she not only helped the students to learn a great number of new Chinese words and expressions that are popular among young Chinese 'netizens,' but also enabled them to learn about what is happening in today's China, how China is communicating with the world, and how the world sees China.

Language socialization was discussed as another way to help students learn Chinese. One teacher mentioned that she regularly organized a Chinese activity night for her students. At these gatherings, native Chinese students studying at the same university were invited to chat with the students learning Chinese language.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: TOWARDS INTERCULTURALITY AND TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN THE EXPERIENCES OF (CHINESE) TEACHERS OF CHINESE?

The main limitation of this study concerns the data sample. Due to our limited group of participants, our analysis cannot generalize the experiences of Chinese teachers of Chinese in Finland. However, we do hope that by adopting a critical intercultural perspective to understand the experiences and positions of some Chinese teachers of Chinese, we can offer insights into how these teachers construct their experiences and how these constructions are influenced by a number of factors—that go far beyond mere teaching tasks. We are also aware that our role as researchers and teachers – a professor, a native Chinese speaker, etc. – can have an impact on the data collection and interpretation, which is perhaps impossible to avoid in any qualitative study.

Two main aspects of the experiences of Chinese teachers of Chinese in Finland, which may be seen as going hand-in-hand, emerged from the data. They both relate to interculturality and show a certain 'unbearable heaviness' of being a Chinese teacher of Chinese in Finland: *First*, the teachers are generally implicitly treated as inferiors because of their unqualified status or simply because of their (economically advantageous) position as teachers sent by a Chinese institution to Finland. This attitude was often reflected negatively in the intercultural discourses the teachers had on Finns and Finland. *Second*, the way some of the teachers see their students and the teaching of language and culture deserves to be revised, on the basis of a critical intercultural perspective as suggested in this article. The philosopher Bernstein's (2005) pragmatic fallibilism, an important epistemological doctrine that rejects the grand Either/Or between relativism and foundationalism, could be a source of intercultural inspiration for these teachers. Bernstein defines fallibilism as "the belief that any knowledge claim or, more generally, any validity claim—including moral and political claims—is open to ongoing examination, modification, and critique" (p. 43). In other words, it could be rewarding for these teachers to be trained to question their 'habits of mind' by exercising 'self-corrective enterprise' (p. 43).

As in many other countries, there is a need for a more organic perspective in Chinese language teaching in Finland. This organic perspective needs to touch upon both the content of teaching (beyond solely linguistic and 'cultural' approaches) but also, and maybe more importantly here, upon teachers' preparation and support as 'strangers' in Finland. The personal and political characteristics of interculturality should also be considered, as they have a clear influence on Chinese language education in this context.

We feel the need to defend an intercultural approach to Chinese teacher education and professional development based on transdisciplinarity, which relies on a problem-solving method related to an important triad: *educational contexts—teachers' experiences—society* (McGregor & Volckmann, 2011). Transdisciplinarity is best seen as bringing together distinctive components of two or more disciplines (Nissani, 1997). We believe that by pulling together and intersecting insights and methodologies from a variety of disciplines, such as anthropology, cultural studies, sociology of postmodernity and postcolonialism, we can offer a more holistic, critical, and confidence-boosting perspective for instructors that promotes *Chinese intercultural language education*. The link to Finnish society is also central. We see the current over-specialization of Chinese language teaching, where grammar, 'culture' and rote learning are often privileged (Moloney & Hiu, 2015), as tunnel vision, which can be counterproductive to efforts to stimulate both teachers and students and help them move both beyond century-old visions of not only China and the Chinese, but also beyond the hierarchy between 'local' and 'foreign' teachers. A shift towards more 'existentialist' input rather than an overreliance on questionable cultural knowledge and representations of Self and Other could help overcome these problems (Holliday, 2010).

This requires the cooperation and transparency of all partners: teacher educators/trainers, educational institutions, and all types of teachers. There is a clear hierarchy between Finnish and Chinese teachers of Chinese, based on qualifications and 'origins,' that merits questioning. The gatekeeping that derives from it is neither sustainable nor socially just. Chinese teachers of Chinese can bring in fresh and fruitful insights and methodologies to 'tend the garden' of Chinese education, and, benefit Finnish education and society at large in the process.

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