

# What do Teachers of Chinese as a Foreign Language Believe about Teaching Chinese Literacy to English Speakers?

By

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## Abstract

This study was motivated by a recognition of the difficulties of teaching literacy in Chinese as a foreign language (CFL). CFL teachers deliberate over pedagogy, content sequencing, goals for literacy learning, and the use of authentic materials. These issues are complicated by the long history of Chinese literacy practices and the cultural significance of the writing system. The teachers bring rich personal histories and expertise, shaped by this cultural background, to their teaching. The study aims to gain a better understanding of teacher cognition on teaching Chinese literacy, to inform the discussion on improving CFL literacy instruction.

The participants are five teachers raised and educated in China who are currently teaching in U.S. K-12 schools. This qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews, triangulated with lesson plans and classroom observations. The conceptual framework is based on Borg's model (2003) of four sources of language teacher cognition—schooling, professional coursework, classroom practice, and school contexts—extended to incorporate the role of surrounding cultures of learning, as conceptualized by Jin and Cortazzi (2006). The analysis of the data foregrounds the stories told by the participants, examined using a modification of Labov's scheme. VAB (Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs) Coding is used to identify common themes among the participants. The themes are then examined within the wider perspective of CFL literacy teaching in the United States. The findings are further examined through the lens of "Sponsors of Literacy" (Brandt, 1998), to view CFL teaching from a socio-economic perspective.

The data in this study suggest that CFL teachers believe in the importance of teaching fundamental, bottom-up skills in Chinese literacy. The teachers are also committed to nurturing an appreciation for Chinese literacy, including the writing system, among their students. They draw on the traditional Chinese model of an expert, caring teacher to meet the needs of their students. This means modifying the traditional Chinese model of bottom-up literacy teaching. These modifications sometimes include student-centered learning and top-down reading strategies.

The findings suggest that future efforts in CFL pedagogy research, teacher training, and curriculum development take into consideration the cultural and personal backgrounds of the teachers.

## Dedication

To all of the dedicated and hardworking Chinese language teachers who patiently teach  
Americans Chinese.

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## **Chapter I Introduction**

As a supervisor of Chinese language teachers for the past ten years, I have observed the efforts of Chinese teachers to help their American students learn to read and write Chinese and the struggles of those students. As a life-long student of Chinese language, linguistics, and culture, I am also deeply familiar with the cultural significance of Chinese characters and the difficulties of learning the complex and opaque writing system. In my efforts to develop more effective curriculum and pedagogy for teaching Chinese literacy, and the many discussions I have engaged in with others making similar efforts in the United States and China, I have become even more keenly aware of the strong, culturally grounded beliefs many Chinese teachers hold regarding the teaching of Chinese literacy. I am convinced that to develop better ways to teach Chinese literacy we must not only consider new scientific findings in second language acquisition, in effective literacy pedagogy, in the neuro-cognitive processing of Chinese characters, and in other related fields, but also the cultural perspective and beliefs of those who teach Chinese as a foreign or heritage language.

### **Purpose and Brief Description of Study**

The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the thinking of native speaker Chinese language teachers on teaching Chinese reading and writing in the United States. The participants are teachers raised and educated in China who are currently teaching in a variety of K-12 schools in different regions in the United States. This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the beliefs of the participants on teaching Chinese literacy. The data collection method is direct interviews, triangulated with additional evidence from lesson plans and classroom observations. The interviews were semi-structured but conducted as co-constructed conversations, to encourage the teachers to express their perspectives. The conversations focused

on the histories of the teachers in acquiring and teaching literacy and their current teaching practices, with questions designed to elicit discussion of beliefs and stories of experiences related to shaping those beliefs. The analysis of the data foregrounds the stories told by the participants, as manifestations of each teacher's unique voice, and identifies themes among the participants. These themes are then examined in light of the wider perspective of Chinese language teaching in the United States and the challenges faced by teachers and learners related to Chinese literacy.

### **Research Questions**

1. What do teachers of Chinese as a foreign language believe about teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers?
2. Where do these beliefs come from?
3. How do the teachers view the relationship between their beliefs and their Chinese literacy classroom practices?

### **Problem Statement**

**The need for Chinese literacy in the United States.** Chinese language programs in the United States have grown rapidly during the past decade, both in K-12 schools and in higher education (Everson & Xiao, 2009, p. 87; M. Zhou, 2011). Motivations cited by students and their parents for studying Chinese include future career opportunities, the importance of linkages between the United States and China, and attraction to Chinese language and culture (Andersen, 2014; Dretzke & Jordan, 2010; A. H. Wang, Kong, & Farren Sr, 2014). The U.S. government has identified Chinese as one of the critical languages in which skills are “fundamental to the economic competitiveness and security interests” of the United States and has funded the teaching of Chinese through several programs under the umbrella of the National Strategic Languages Initiative (NSLI) launched in 2003 (Education, 2008, p. 1). Several state



governments, e.g. Utah, Oregon, North Carolina, have also made Chinese language teaching an educational priority (Asia Society, 2016a, 2016b; Rogers, 2012). While proficiency goals for Chinese language programs vary, it is widely recognized that advanced proficiency must also include advanced literacy. The federally funded Flagship program, for example, is a NSLI program designed to train students to professional level proficiency in strategic languages (National Security Education Program, 2016). The Flagship goals for professional level proficiency include advanced literacy. (See Chapter II for discussion of literacy, including advanced second language literacy and literacy in Chinese.) In the case of Chinese, the pedagogy, educational activities, and assessments used in the Chinese Flagship programs are aimed at producing graduates with advanced literacy in Chinese, including familiarity with traditional literary language and modern formal written Chinese (Spring, 2012). While not all learners aim for the advanced literacy proficiency standards set by the Flagship program, even less ambitious learners need reading and writing skills in Chinese to function, even at lower levels of proficiency.

**Chinese literacy acquisition—A challenge for learners.** Achieving proficiency in Chinese is not an easy proposition for English speakers. The U.S. government includes Chinese in the list of Category IV languages, the most difficult for English speakers to learn (Everson, 2007). The classification is a heuristic that measures difficulty using an estimate of the time needed to acquire proficiency in a foreign language. It is estimated that it would require about four times as much instructional time for an English speaker to learn a Category IV language, such as Chinese, as it would for the same learner to achieve an equivalent proficiency level in a

Category I language, such as Spanish<sup>1</sup> (Jackson & Kaplan, 2001; State). The linguistic distance between Chinese and English is characterized by significant contrasts in morphology and syntax. The challenges cited by English speaking learners as the most daunting, however, are the lexical tones and, above all, the opaque writing system (Duff et al., 2013; Helen H Shen, 2013). The deep orthography of Chinese characters, with no direct mapping of graphic symbols to phonemes, and the number of independent characters that must be learned (2,000 to 3,000) to decipher even the surface level of authentic, everyday text present daunting tasks to learners and their teachers (P. Chen, 1999; H. Li, 2015).

Native speakers undergo years of training and practice to acquire even basic literacy in Chinese. Elementary school literacy education in China, for example, covers about 3,000 characters, as well as many other challenging skills related to reading and writing Chinese. A more detailed description of the skills required for Chinese literacy is offered in Chapter II. The process for non-native speakers of Chinese is even more arduous. While the number of characters introduced is a highly imperfect metric, it can serve as an incomplete heuristic for comparison. Most high school programs in the United States introduce one to three hundred characters per year and students in typical university Chinese language classes are expected to learn around four to six hundred characters per year. These targets do not include all of the word combinations formed by the characters or the other skills required to read Chinese text. Recent research on reading Chinese, particularly studies on the psycholinguistic processing of Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> At some point after 1999, the number of categories used to rank languages by difficulty was expanded from three to four, but the U.S. government characterization of the relative difference in difficulty for English speakers between the least difficult and most difficult did not change.

characters, and on pedagogy based on current theories of second language acquisition may offer teachers of Chinese as a foreign language more effective approaches to teaching literacy.

**Pedagogical dilemmas.** There is much controversy among teachers of Chinese as a foreign language on teaching literacy in Chinese. Teachers and curriculum designers disagree about the appropriate goals of teaching reading and writing in Chinese and the best pedagogical approaches for achieving those goals (e.g. Allen, 2008; Ye, 2011). These controversies have persisted over several decades. A 1992 survey of Chinese language teachers found that “there is a lack of consensus among teachers on what the ideal curriculum should be; on which skills should be emphasized; on the choice of phonetic transcriptions systems; on the type and number of characters that students should learn...” (Moore, Walton, & Lambert, 1992). The national and state standards developed under the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Board, 2015) and other frameworks now offer some guidance on Chinese curriculum in K-12 schools, but there is still much disagreement among Chinese teachers on what to teach and how to teach it. These controversies are particularly evident when it comes to discussions of reading and writing instruction. Chinese language teachers still report frustration and confusion on which characters to teach, how many and at what pace, how to use authentic materials, and what are the best ways to help students acquire literacy in Chinese (Everson, 2009).

**The Role of Beliefs and Culture.** Studies of teacher cognition have suggested that beliefs, both tacit and explicit, serve to filter information, frame problems, and guide practice, especially when teachers are confronted by poorly defined problems (see discussion in Fives & Buehl (2012)). Given the lack of common agreement on best practices in teaching Chinese literacy, it would not be surprising to find that Chinese language teachers follow their own deeply held, often implicit beliefs on the Chinese writing system and how it should be learned.

Research on the sources of teacher beliefs have pointed toward personal experiences as learners and as teachers, as well as training, as sources of beliefs (Borg, 2003; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Richardson, 1996). The literature also suggests that beliefs are shaped by cultural background (Borg, 2006). In the case of teaching Chinese literacy, the cultural heritage of the writing system and the Chinese traditions of teaching and learning reading and writing may play a powerful role in the beliefs and attitudes of teachers. The writing system is often presented in Chinese contexts as an essential signifier of Chinese identity (Yen, 2005). Popularized national narratives often credit the writing system as a powerful binding force contributing to several thousand years of cultural continuity and the perception of a unified cultural identity across a broad geographic region (F. Wang, Tsai, & Wang, 2009).

The writing system also figures prominently in traditional Chinese cultural ideals of teaching and learning. In the Chinese “cultural theory of learning,” a good teacher is expected to serve as a parental figure, providing virtuoso expertise, caring discipline, and moral guidance to students (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008). A model teacher successfully guides students in the time-honored traditions of acquiring literacy, as noted by Jin and Cortazzi (2008):

...literacy in Chinese—widely considered a badge of identity by Chinese—is acquired with well defined practices of learning, including demonstration, modeling, tracing, repeated copying and subsequent memorization of the precise movement, direction, and order of strokes to comprise the skill of writing several thousand characters of the Chinese script with associated aesthetic awareness and socio-cultural knowledge (p. 178).

**Defining literacy goals.** In addition to the complexity of the Chinese writing system and the layers of cultural nuance associated with that system, teachers must also contend with defining appropriate goals for Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) literacy education.

Traditional literacy education, in Chinese as well as in other languages, has tended to focus on academic language and a prescribed canon. In recent years, language educators have started broadening literacy education to include a wide range of texts and tasks related to those texts. Literacy may be defined broadly as the ability to “respond appropriately to written language” (Bormuth, 1973, p. 9). In recent decades, scholars have reexamined both what it means to “respond appropriately” and what is meant by “written language.” Some scholars have reframed literacy as social practices in which writers and readers share discourse worlds. “Literacy redefined must encompass complex interactions among language, cognition, society, and culture” (Kern & Schultz, 2005, p. 382). Literacy practices create cultural narratives expressed in a wide variety of forms, including both traditional cultural products and new media, that may arise from a diverse range of cultural groups within a society (Geisler et al., 2007). This perspective, sometimes called a multiliteracies approach, challenges traditional literacy pedagogy.

Foreign/second language educators in recent years have reconceptualized the goals of language pedagogy as less defined in imitation of educated native speakers and more connected to developing “translingual and transcultural competence” (Geisler et al., 2007, p. 237). Students who have achieved translingual and transcultural competence have the “ability to function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language” and “to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture” (p. 237). Transcultural competence entails comprehending the cultural references in a wide variety of textual modes and forms of expression in the target culture. To achieve translingual and transcultural competence in Chinese, learners must therefore not only learn to recognize a large

number of characters, but also to grasp the cultural narratives embedded within a wide variety of texts, from classical literary Chinese to modern multimodal messaging.

Given the multiple layers of challenges and ill-defined goals for teaching literacy in Chinese, it is not surprising that teachers of Chinese as a foreign language struggle to develop best practices in this area (e.g. Gao, 2010; Ye, 2011).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study explores the thinking of teachers on a specific domain of teaching—literacy. There is an extensive body of research on the thinking of teachers and how their thinking shapes teaching. Researchers have used terms such as “beliefs,” “attitudes,” “knowledge,” “personal practical knowledge” and other constructs in an attempt to describe teacher thinking and investigate the ways that teacher cognitions, particularly tacit, inexplicit cognitions, have an impact on teaching (e.g. D. J. Clandinin, 1985; Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Elbaz, 1983; Fives & Buehl, 2008; J. Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). In the title of this study, I have used the term “beliefs.” It is perhaps a risky choice, in that established researchers have found it difficult to define. Indeed, researchers have described the construct of teacher beliefs as “messy” (Pajares, 1992) or “slippery” (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Simon Borg, in his research on the thinking of language teachers, chose not to attempt to disentangle beliefs, knowledge, values, and other overlapping constructs related to teacher thinking but to adopt instead an inclusive term—“teacher cognition”—which he defined as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think” (2003, p. 81).

In this study, I look at teacher cognition, in the inclusive sense used by Simon Borg, with a focus on “beliefs.” Because my interest in beliefs arises from a desire to understand the choices teachers make in their teaching, I use the term “beliefs” in a sense that is close to the definition

offered by psychologist Milton Rokeach, who defined “belief” as a type of value that “guides and determines action” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 25). For the purposes of this study, I am not attempting to draw a bright line around the concept of “beliefs” but to look at beliefs as those aspects of cognition that appear to be deeply held and seem to have a strong impact upon teacher decision-making.

The conceptual framework is built upon the model developed by researcher Simon Borg (2003) to illustrate the types and sources of cognitions of second and foreign language teachers. Borg’s model includes four categories of experiences that contribute to or are impacted by language teacher cognition. These include “schooling,” “professional coursework,” “classroom practice,” and “contextual factors” (Borg, 2003, p. 82). Borg defines “schooling” as “experiences of classrooms” as learners, especially in language learning (p. 82). For this study, I expand the construct of schooling to extend to out-of-school experiences with literacy, as well as experiences in the classroom. “Professional coursework” in this study may have occurred in China or in the United States. “Classroom practice” in Borg’s model includes practice teaching and “influences cognitions unconsciously and/or through conscious reflection” (p. 82). In “contextual factors,” Borg refers primarily to the institutional and social environments of schools, including requirements and policies imposed by school systems, administrators, governments, parents, colleagues, budgets and other external factors that may impact upon teacher decision-making. In Borg’s model, each of these categories of experiences both impact upon and are impacted by teacher cognition. Each of the categories may also impact other categories, such as in the ways that contextual factors may shape classroom practice, particularly when contextual factors prevent teachers from acting in accordance with their cognitions, thereby creating “incongruence between cognition and practice” (p. 82).

Borg's model accounts for the impact of institutional and social factors of school contexts but not for the role of the surrounding cultural environment that shapes the learning and teaching experiences of teachers. To address this, I have extended the model to incorporate the role of the Chinese "cultures of learning" and the cultural significance of the writing system into a composite lens through which to view the beliefs of Chinese language teachers on teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers.

The conceptual framework of this study emphasizes the role of culture in shaping formative experiences of the participants but is not intended to problematize culture as a barrier to improved pedagogy or to essentialize or stereotype the participants. On the contrary, I hope that the insights co-constructed by the interviewer and the participants will be viewed as an initial step toward developing a better understanding of the perspective of CFL teachers on teaching Chinese literacy. That understanding could be useful in developing better training, curriculum, and institutional support for CFL teachers. Part of the long-term goal is to help CFL teachers create classrooms that embody what Claire Kramsch has christened a "third culture" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 243), in which teachers and students create a flexible space where both Chinese culture and the local culture are appreciated.

The conceptual framework used to design and implement this study focuses on sources of teacher cognition as shaped by culture. It has been very useful in exploring the beliefs of a group of teachers who are charged with imparting their language and culture to students in a cultural environment foreign to the teachers, one with different values and different models of learning. Borg's model, extended to include culture, has been a helpful lens in examining the puzzle addressed in this study. I found, however, that the story needed another page. It seemed that the analysis did not adequately address the importance of individual agency, not only as highlighted



in the teachers' stories of childhood interaction with literacy outside of school but also as a persistent note in their accounts of teaching. As an alternate perspective on this picture, then, I have added an analysis of this puzzle using a construct—"sponsors of literacy"—that views literacy not just as a component of language but as an economic value for which teachers and students must negotiate with and navigate among powerful "sponsors." Textbook publishers, businesses engaged in U.S.-China trade, educational testing companies, government agencies, and universities, as a few examples, may all serve as "sponsors" who promote or govern access to Chinese literacy. I have found this added page offers a fuller understanding of the puzzle, particularly within the politically and economically charged international context of this story.

What do CFL teachers believe about teaching CFL literacy? Here are a few of the types of questions that I discussed with participating teachers. What do they see as the best ways to teach Chinese characters? How does a "good" student best learn to read Chinese? What role do they believe the teacher should play in this process? Is it important to follow traditional Chinese practices in learning to read Chinese? What role does the cultural significance of Chinese characters play in the thinking of CFL teachers with regard to teaching literacy? Do CFL teachers, for example, feel an obligation to teach their students not only how to read Chinese characters but also to appreciate the cultural significance of the writing system? What experiences have CFL teachers had, both as learners and as teachers, that have helped shape their beliefs? For example, did they learn Chinese characters primarily through rote memorization and extensive copying? What role has reading played in their personal development? Did they learn English as a foreign language primarily through grammar-translation instruction or by other methods? What type of literacy pedagogy did they learn about in pre-service professional

training? Have they had specific experiences in teaching Chinese that they view as illustrative of their views on teaching literacy?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

The puzzle of CFL teachers' beliefs and practices regarding Chinese literacy is not one that lends itself well to a quantitative study. An attempt to set up statistical contrasts to correlate specific, delimited beliefs with contributing demographic or personal background factors may not result in useful generalizations. I have chosen, therefore, a qualitative approach, in this effort to yield insights into the tacit beliefs of teachers. These beliefs may be overtly articulated by the teachers but may also be implicit and unexpressed. Teaching is a highly personal, social act that takes place in a rich variety of contexts with specific, unique individuals, and beliefs about teaching are intimately connected to these complex social contexts. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain understanding of the experiences of individuals in specific contexts. In light of the need to look backward, as well as to the present, I have employed a primary strategy of in-depth, direct personal interviews, triangulated with lesson plans and observations of teaching. I included five teachers in the study, selected to allow for the incorporation of different, thoughtful voices and to gather glimpses of the multiple facets of teacher perspectives on teaching Chinese literacy.

The goal of this study is not to generate generalizations that would apply to all teachers within the demographic categories of the participants. I hope, instead, that the stories of individual teachers illuminate the dilemmas faced by CFL teachers in teaching literacy. I also aim for what Lincoln and Guba (1985) term "transferability," or the potential of qualitative research designs and findings to be applicable to other comparable contexts and individuals.

This study focuses on the cognitions of native speaker Chinese teachers who were raised and educated in China. CFL teachers who are not native speakers of Chinese or are heritage speakers educated solely or primarily in the United States are also important members of the CFL teaching community. Their perspectives are also valuable but are not the focus of this study.

### **Significance**

The findings in this study may be valuable to researchers investigating the second language acquisition of Chinese literacy and potential pedagogical interventions. Experiments with innovative classroom pedagogy for second language literacy are likely to be more successful when the cognitions of the teachers are considered. Effective pedagogies are also more likely to be sustainable when the cultural background and belief systems of the teachers are considered within curriculum and pedagogy plans.

The findings of this study may be useful to educators who train teachers. Faculty who teach methods courses that include Chinese language teachers, for example, may wish to consider the findings here in designing content to help pre-service teachers prepare to teach Chinese literacy. The findings may also be helpful to administrators supervising Chinese language teachers. Chinese language teachers themselves who are interested in reflecting on their own literacy teaching practices may find the questions and themes raised here worthy of consideration. These findings may also be useful for curriculum developers working on better materials and pedagogy for teaching Chinese literacy. This may benefit the students who might use those materials to learn Chinese literacy more easily. Finally, the study is a step toward addressing a gap in the literature, as there are few studies of the cognition of CFL teachers and very few focused on beliefs related to teaching Chinese literacy (Lü & Lavadenz, 2014 may be the only recent example). The findings of this study also suggest questions for further study.

## Terminology

Chinese: When used to identify language in this study, “Chinese” refers to the official language used in the People's Republic of China, also known as "Standard Chinese," "Mandarin Chinese" or “Putonghua”(pǔtōnghuà 普通话 [common speech]) and as Guoyu (guóyǔ 国语 [national language]) in Taiwan, as well as by other terms in China and throughout the Chinese diaspora. Although there are some differences between the official "Standard Chinese" of the PRC and the Standard Chinese used in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere in the Chinese-speaking world, most of the characterizations mentioned in this proposal would apply to all of the varieties of Standard Chinese, except where noted. Cantonese, Shanghainese, Taiwanese Hokkien, and other Chinese languages, often referred to as “dialects” or “topolects” of Chinese, are generally not included in the scope of this study. The term “Mandarin Chinese” is largely avoided, in favor of Standard Chinese or Putonghua, to prevent confusion with the term used for the Mandarin group of dialects.

CFL (Chinese as a foreign language): Chinese language taught in an environment such as the United States, where the dominant local language is not Chinese.

CSL (Chinese as a second language): Chinese taught to native speakers of other languages in China or a Chinese-speaking environment.

Foreign language/second language: foreign language usually refers to a language not typically spoken as a dominant language in a society; second language indexes a language learned to conform with the dominant language in a society.

L2: second or foreign language, to be specified when needed.

Chinese literacy: the ability to interact with and produce Chinese text, including the range of skills from the basic decoding process involved in reading Chinese characters through the linguistic and cultural awareness required to comprehend and create a wide range of authentic texts.

Teacher cognition: “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe, and think” (Borg, 2003, p. 81).

Belief: within Borg’s inclusive construct of teacher cognition, values that “guide and determine action” (Rokeach, 1973, p. 25)

Pinyin: The official system for Romanization of Chinese used in China. See discussion under literature review on Chinese literacy.

PRC: People’s Republic of China

## **Overview of Chapters**

Following the current introductory chapter, Chapter II covers a review of relevant literature, including three parts: the first part describes the Chinese writing system, followed by discussion of the definitions of literacy and of literacy in Chinese; the second part is a review of studies of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, including studies of teaching Chinese literacy as a foreign language; finally, part three of Chapter II constructs a conceptual framework for the study, based upon Simon Borg’s model for language teacher cognition, expanded to account for the role of culture, with a review of related literature on teacher cognition, Chinese cultures of learning, and the cultural significance of the Chinese writing system. Chapter III details the methods used in this study. Chapter IV presents the data collected, analyzed for stories and themes and presented as a series of case portraits for the five participants. Chapter V steps back for a wider view of the themes in the data within the broader context of CFL teaching

in the United States. Chapter V also revisits the conceptual framework of the study and then reexamines the findings through the lens of the construct “sponsors of literacy,” which allows us to see the problem also in a socioeconomic context.

## Chapter II Literature Review

### Introduction

This literature review chapter is divided into three parts. Part One offers a description of the Chinese writing system, with enough detail to help the reader understand the degree of complexity of Chinese writing and the features that make it especially challenging for learners. This is followed by a section reflecting upon the term *literacy*, both in general and specifically in Chinese, to situate the research problem addressed in this study within the broad context of literacy. Part Two includes an overview of studies of CFL teachers, followed by a review of studies of the cognition of CFL teachers related to teaching Chinese literacy. The purpose of Part Two is to describe some of the common challenges faced by CFL teachers in English-speaking countries and to review the literature on the cognitions of CFL teachers on teaching literacy, to provide more detail related to the research problem. Part Three constructs a conceptual framework, beginning with a brief overview of the literature on teacher beliefs and teacher cognition, followed by a discussion of second language teacher cognition. This section then describes the Borg Model for Language Teacher Cognition, which provides the basic structure for the conceptual framework of the study. The Borg Model is expanded to account for underlying cultures of learning. The section then reviews literature related to Chinese cultural theories of learning and the cultural significance of the Chinese writing system. Finally, this section describes in brief some of the literature and background information related to the four components of the Borg Model as it pertains to CFL teachers.

### Part One: Introduction to the Chinese Writing System and to Literacy

**Introduction to the Chinese writing system.** To understand the challenges involved in learning to read and write Chinese, it is important to first gain an understanding of the basic

principles of the writing system. What are the unique features of the Chinese writing system? What aspects of the writing system make it especially difficult for learners from alphabetic language backgrounds?

***Typology and controversy: is Chinese “logographic?”*** One way of categorizing writing systems is to consider the segment of language encoded in the basic graphic units of the system. Some typology schema include three general categories of writing systems: alphabetic systems, which typically encode individual phonemes; syllabaries (e.g. Japanese *kana*) which encode syllables; and logographic systems, which directly encode words or phrases, without mediation by phonology (C. Perfetti & Liu, 2005).<sup>2</sup> The iconic gendered figures sometimes found on restroom doors, for example, might qualify as logographic. A purely logographic system, in other words, would offer a “simple visual-to-meaning process that allows the reader to by-pass language” (C. Perfetti & Liu, 2005, p. 194). Recent scholars have argued that there are no purely logographic writing systems, as all writing systems are derived from spoken language. Perfetti distilled this principle into his proposal for the “highest level universal [of writing systems]”: the “Language Constraint on Writing Systems,” which asserts that “writing systems encode spoken language, not meaning” (p. 2).

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century until recently, some scholars have insisted that the Chinese writing system directly accesses meaning, without reference to phonology (DeFrancis, 1989). Yuehping Yeh notes that this belief “is passionately embraced by the Chinese literati” (Yen, 2005, p. 149). (For a case in point, see the TED talk and website of Shao Lan, <http://chineasy.org/>, who uses

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<sup>2</sup> Other scholars have introduced more complex typology proposals, including schemes that recognize abjads (e.g. Hebrew), abugidas (e.g. Sanskrit), and other categories. For a good overview, see (Joyce & Borgwaldt, 2013).



cute graphics to present Chinese characters in a way that perpetuates the ideographic perspective.) Linguist John DeFrancis argued persistently against this assertion, pointing out that the majority of Chinese characters *do* contain phonetic components and clearly reflect encoding of spoken language. While phonetic shifts over time may have obscured the spoken language origins of some characters, the connection of Chinese characters to the phonology of Chinese is still evident (DeFrancis, 1989). A growing body of neurolinguistics research on the mental processing of Chinese characters confirms phonological activation in reading Chinese (examples include Hsiao & Liu, 2010; Kong et al., 2010; Ying Liu & Perfetti, 2003).

DeFrancis rejected the terms “pictographic,” “logographic,” and “ideographic” for Chinese (DeFrancis, 1989). He proposed instead the term “morphosyllabic,” which he defined as a “‘meaning-plus-sound’ syllabic system” (p. 58). This term has gained traction among many scholars of Chinese language (e.g. (Norman, 1988; C. Perfetti & Liu, 2005; Ramsey). The term reflects the morphosyllabic nature of Chinese, in that almost all morphemes are single syllable (P. Chen, 1999). Each Chinese character maps to one syllable, which usually represents a complete morpheme (Norman, 1988).<sup>3</sup>

***Orthographic depth.*** For educators, it may be useful also to consider Chinese in terms of orthographic “depth,” a construct developed for the comparative study of reading in different alphabetic orthographies (Katz & Frost, 1992). In “shallow” orthographies, such as Finnish, the graphemes of the written language map consistently to the phonology of the spoken language (Seymour, 2006). In “deep” systems, the graphic symbols for the language may contain rich

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<sup>3</sup> The rare exceptions are disyllabic (two character) morphemes, sometimes derived from loan words (X. Zhou, Marslen-Wilson, Taft, & Shu, 1999). Some characters are polysemous, that is, they may represent different morphemes and even different syllables in different contexts (Cheung, McBride-Chang, & Chow, 2006).

morphemic or etymologic information but the “correspondences [to sounds] are variable, inconsistent, sometimes arbitrary and subject to lexical and morphological influences” (Seymour, 2006, p. 442, with reference to Katz & Frost, 1992). Chinese has a complex, opaque orthography, with inconsistent phonological components but also rich etymological information. On a continuum of orthographic depth, Chinese would be toward the deepest end of the scale, with Spanish at the shallow end and English somewhere in the middle.

**Chinese characters.** This section describes the structure and subcomponents of Chinese characters.


*The Chinese character as a unit of orthography.* Chinese characters are composed of strokes, used to construct graphic components drawn to fit into an approximately square shape. The strokes are written in a prescribed sequence and directionality, the effects of which are readily apparent when written with a calligraphy brush but less so in characters written with a pen or pencil (Honorof & Feldman, 2006). The number of strokes in each character varies from one to over 50, with an average of six or seven per character in the non-simplified, “traditional” character set, and four to five in the simplified character set<sup>4</sup> (2006). (See description of simplified characters below.)


*The structures of characters.* Based upon degree of graphic complexity, Chinese characters can be categorized as simple (or unitary), with one component (only about 5% of characters), or compound, with two or more components (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999)


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<sup>4</sup> These averages vary, depending upon the corpus used, and the numbers quoted here are offered simply to give a general idea of the degree of difference between traditional and simplified characters.


(based on analysis by D. Li, 1993). In compound characters, the components, often called radicals, can be arranged in several different grids. A few examples include:

left-right columns: 新 *xīn* [new] ;

top-bottom: 家 *jiā* [home/family] ;

enclosure around content: 國 *guó* [country] ;

three stacked layers: 亮 *liàng* [bright] ;

l-shaped frame with content 遠 *yuǎn* [far] ;

Components can be nested within each other to create even more complex characters, e.g.

馨 *xīn* [fragrant]. .

Some of the unitary characters are generally assumed to be the most closely related to the oldest Chinese characters, examples of which have been found on bovine scapular bones and tortoise shells used in the Shang Dynasty (1300 BCE to 1100 BCE) to record divination. These are often described as “oracle bone characters.” A few unitary modern characters retain some pictographic imagery, e.g. 山 *shān* [mountain] or serve as ideographic diagrams, e.g. 上 *shàng* [up/top]; 下 *xià* [down/bottom], 一 *yī* [one]. The majority, however lack iconicity (Xiao & Treiman, 2012).

***Submorphic components.*** Radical components in compound characters may carry a semantic value or a phonetic value (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999).

In some compound characters, each of the radicals carry semantic values that interact to convey a concept, e.g.

日 *rì* [sun] + 月 *yuè* [moon] = 明 *míng* [bright].<sup>5</sup>

The overwhelming majority of compound characters, however, are semantic-phonetic<sup>6</sup> compounds in which one radical carries a semantic value, indicating the semantic category of the morpheme, and another radical serves as a phonetic clue, providing some information on the pronunciation of the compound character. For example, the character 評 *píng* [to comment/critique], consists of a semantic radical 言 *yán* [words] and a phonetic radical 平 *píng* [flat], which is not related to the meaning of the whole character but provides the pronunciation of the character.

*Semantic radicals.* In some cases, the relationship between the semantic radical<sup>7</sup> and the meaning of the compound character is readily apparent, e.g. 銅 *tóng* [copper], composed of the radical form of the character 金 *jīn* [gold or metal], indicating the semantic category of the compound character, and 同 *tóng* [together, used here only for phonetic value]. In other cases, the connection to the semantic radical is no longer evident, e.g. 猜 *cāi* [to guess], composed of the radical form of 犬 *quán* [dog] and 青 *qīng* [dark blue/green/black]. In this case, the semantic radical, meaning “dog,” is not related to the character for “guess.” (In this character, the phonetic

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<sup>5</sup> These are often called compound-indicative characters. Some linguists believe that characters in the ideographic and compound-indicative categories were originally also semantic-phonetic compounds and have been analyzed incorrectly. See discussion on Boodberg’s analysis in (Joyce & Borgwaldt, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Researchers in Chinese linguistics have not arrived at a shared agreement on the terms for classes of characters. Some of the other terms used by scholars for these characters are picto-phonetic characters, phonogram, and phonetic compounds.

<sup>7</sup> The components used as semantic radicals are sometimes derived from independent characters but not always. In the case of 評 *píng* [to comment/critique], the semantic radical 言 *yán* [words] can also function as an independent character. The roof-shaped grapheme in the character 家 *jiā* [family], however, is used strictly as a semantic radical for roof or house but cannot stand alone as an independent character.

radical *qīng*, is also not a good indicator of the pronunciation of the compound character.) The characters in which the semantic radical has a more direct connection to the meaning of the character can be termed “semantically transparent” whereas the others are “semantically opaque” (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999, p. 40). In these cases, such as 猜 *cāi* [to guess], the etymology is often not understood or disputed among linguists.

*Phonetic radicals.* The components used as phonetic radicals are nearly always independent characters repurposed for use as a component within another character (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999).

Semantic-phonetic compounds in which the phonetic radical, when used as an independent character, shares an identical pronunciation with the compound character are often referred to by researchers as “regular” compounds (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999, p. 40). In another third or more of cases, the phonetic radical indexes only partial segmentals (e.g. onset or rhyme) of the whole character (1999). In the remaining cases, the phonetic radical is unrelated to the pronunciation of the whole character.

Example of regular semantic-phonetic compound:

評 *píng* [to comment/critique] = 言 *yán* [words] + 平 *píng* [flat]

The phonetic value of the phonetic radical and the compound character are identical.

Example of rhyming semantic-phonetic compound:

忙 *máng* [busy] = 心 *xīn* [heart] (in vertical form) + 亡 *wáng* [to die]

The phonetic value of the phonetic radical matches the rhyme and tone but not the onset of the compound character.

The examples above illustrate that the submorphemic components, or radicals, in characters, especially semantic-phonetic characters, can provide salient clues of immediate use to readers, e.g. 铜 *tóng* [copper] or 评 *píng* [to comment/critique]. Other characters provide only subtle hints, e.g. 忙 *máng* [busy], and still others, such as 猜 *cāi* [to guess], are quite opaque and often visual information that is either not useful or even misleading.

Semantic-phonetic compounds account for as many as 90% (depending upon the corpus used) of Chinese characters (Feldman & Siok, 1999, p. 20). Historically, this type of character formation has been highly productive. Of the 50,000 characters in the *Hanyu Da Zidian*, or Great Compendium of Chinese Characters, the vast majority are semantic-phonetic compounds (China Academy, 1970). Of those compounds, the majority are left-right compounds, with the semantic radical on the left and the phonetic radical on the right, e.g. 评 (see analysis of components above) (X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999).

Chinese literacy traditions have historically privileged semantic radicals. Until Chinese publishers began producing dictionaries organized alphabetically by Pinyin about forty years ago, dictionaries in China for at least 300 years have typically been organized by semantic radical, followed by number of strokes. Literacy lessons for children in Chinese schools emphasize semantic radicals, with minimal attention to phonetic radicals. Recent scholars have observed, however, that fluent readers in Chinese actually rely more upon phonetic radicals than semantic radicals (Z. Zhang, 2009). It has been noted that, in most semantic-phonetic compounds, the phonetic radical “generally has a larger graphic bulk, a more central spatial location, and more internal structure (Y. Li & Zhang, 2016, p. 158). It has been suggested also that the common position of the phonetic radical, “in the right-hand or lower part of a character” suggests a dominant role for that component (p. 158).

<sup>8</sup>The function of radicals and the role of submorphemic components in the mental processing of Chinese characters is complex and still not well understood, but this is an area of continuing research. Neurolinguistic and psycholinguistic studies of the processing of Chinese characters, including both semantic and phonetic radicals, have already generated new insights relevant to learning and teaching reading in Chinese. For further discussion on this topic, see the section on mental processing of Chinese characters on p. 94.

**Word boundaries** Unlike English, Chinese characters are usually written equidistant from one another, with no visual indication of word boundaries. The Pinyin Romanization system does use spaces to indicate word boundaries, as shown below.

她是我的中文老师。

*Tā shì wǒde zhōngwén lǎoshī.*

She is my Chinese language teacher.

Native speakers of Chinese are not as sensitive to word boundaries as readers of alphabetic languages (W. Li, Gaffney, & Packard, 2002) and both native speakers and linguists often disagree about word length in Chinese. Some even claim that “Chinese readers have only vague ideas about what a word is” (H.-c. Chen, 1999, p. 262). There is general agreement among linguists, however, that the most common word form in Chinese is disyllabic (two characters;

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<sup>8</sup> The number of semantic radicals is estimated at nearly 200 and relevant phonetic radicals from about 800 to over 1,100 (Feldman & Siok, 1999; Shu & Anderson, 1999; X. Zhou & Marslen-Wilson, 1999).

two morphemes) (Arcodia, 2007). Some dictionaries list compounds with up to four morphemes as words. Here are a few examples:<sup>9</sup>

single morpheme: 我 *wǒ* [I/me]

two morphemes: 手机 *shǒujī* [hand-machine=cellphone]

three morphemes: 飞机场 *fēijīchǎng* [fly-machine-field=airport]


four morphemes: 马马虎虎 *mǎmǎhǔhǔ* (pronounced *mámǎhūhū*) [horse-horse-tiger-tiger, an expression meaning “so-so”]

Strings of characters can be written in vertical columns, from top to bottom, or in horizontal rows, either from left-to-right or from right-to-left. Text in the People’s Republic of China today is usually written horizontally, from left-to-right. Classical Chinese traditionally did not use punctuation. Modern Chinese uses punctuation symbols similar to those used in English, with some minor differences (see section on other visual forms in Chinese text on p.40).

**Variant forms.** The forms of Chinese characters have evolved since the oracle bone character phase. Examples of the historical periods of development for the character for horse, pronounced *mǎ*, include:

Oracle Bone [甲骨文 *jiǎgǔwén*] c. 1400 BCE-1200 BCE  (Suarez, 2008)

Standard Characters [楷书 *kǎishū*] c. 100 A.D.-present 

“Modern” or “grass” Script [草书 *cǎoshū*] c. 300 A.D.-present 

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<sup>9</sup> The processes of word formation in Chinese are also debated by linguists and beyond the scope of this study. For examples of discussions of Chinese morphology, see (Arcodia, 2007; J. X.-L. Dai, 1998; Jerome Lee Packard, 2000)



The characters used today are Standard Characters, sometimes called Regular Script, or derivations from that character set. Older forms are still used for decoration or for special purposes, e.g. carved seals.

**Simplified characters.** In the 1950s, the People’s Republic of China launched a program to simplify Chinese characters as part of the government efforts to combat illiteracy<sup>10</sup>. Not all characters were simplified. Text in the People’s Republic of China today typically includes a mix of simplified and non-simplified characters, often referred to as “traditional” characters.

Example of sentence including simplified and traditional characters:

清明時節爲甚麼總要下雨呢？  
清明时节为什么总要下雨呢？

*Qīngmíng shíjié wèishénme zǒngyào xiàyǔ ne?* [Why does it always rain during the Qingming festival?](Y. Zhang, 1998, p. 1)<sup>11</sup>

The top line shows the sentence in traditional characters. The bottom line shows the sentence the way it is printed in the PRC today. The third through eighth characters in the second version of the line above are examples of simplified characters. The remaining characters in the sentence were not simplified.

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<sup>10</sup> Illiteracy in the PRC in the early 1950s was estimated at least 85%. By 1959, the estimated illiteracy rate had fallen to 43% and, by 2000, to 6.72%. Illiteracy rates are highest in rural western China (Ross, Rybakova, & Wakhunga, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The first line of “Fanren Li Tongzhong de Gushi” [The story of Criminal Li Tongzhong], a novella by Zhang Yigong, originally published in the fiction journal *Shouhuo* in 1980 (Y. Zhang, 1998).

The assumption underlying simplification was that characters with fewer strokes would be easier to read and write. The stated policy goal was to reduce all characters to fewer than ten strokes (P. Chen, 1999). The initial lists of simplified characters promulgated in 1956 included 544 simplified characters and 54 simplified radicals (P. Chen, 1999). Most of the simplified characters and radicals were already in popular use, mainly in informal handwriting, in some cases for several hundred years (P. Chen, 1999). The processes for simplification followed those in use for many centuries. Following are two examples of the simplification processes:

1) The use of the “grass script” forms often used for quick writing (P. Chen, 1999)

radical component only:

*qǐng* [please]-- traditional: 請 simplified: 请

entire character:

*dōng* [East]-- traditional: 東 simplified: 东

2) Reduction to only one component of the original character

*shēng* [sound]-- traditional: 聲 simplified: 声

In the above example, the semantic radical form of the character ěr 耳 [ear] has been eliminated.

Most of the simplified characters are also used in Taiwan but primarily for informal handwriting, not for printed text. Traditionalists often object to the elimination of historical etymological information, especially the elimination of semantic radicals, as in the example given above for the second type of simplification.

Although some evidence has shown that simplified characters have facilitated literacy acquisition by both children and adults in China, the ease of writing simplified characters sometimes incurs a loss of distinctiveness and thereby creates difficulty for readers (P. Chen, 1999).

*fèng* [phoenix]-- traditional: 鳳 simplified: 凤

*fēng* [wind]-- traditional: 風 simplified: 风

As shown above, the traditional characters for phoenix and wind are quite distinctive, but the simplified versions, 凤 and 风 are so similar as to create confusion (P. Chen, 1999). Analysis of simplified characters has also shown that the phonetic components are, on average, even less reliable than those for traditional characters (P. Chen, 1999, p. 158).

Although advanced readers educated in either system can decipher the other with only minor difficulties, learning to read both traditional and simplified characters can be quite challenging to learners. These difficulties, along with the political and cultural issues associated with the choice between traditional and simplified characters, have generated controversies and dilemmas for Chinese language teachers, as will be explored in later sections.

### **What is Literacy?**

To consider the challenges of teaching Chinese literacy, it is important to reflect on the construct of literacy. While reading Chinese entails some unique challenges, Chinese literacy can also be situated within the broader discourse of literacy. What does it mean to be literate? Is literacy just learning to read? And, if so, reading what? In what context? And for what purpose? Is the act of reading an autonomous skill that can be separated from sociocultural and individual contexts? What does “literacy” mean in second or foreign languages?

The terms *literacy* and *literate/illiterate* have been used to index a variety of constructs defined by disparate sociocultural contexts, including a wide range of nations, cultures, socioeconomic classes, and historical periods. The thresholds for literacy have sometimes been defined in terms of the ability to recognize a certain number of words or graphic symbols. The qualification for literacy has also been expressed as a functional skill for a specific type of text,

e.g. religious catechism texts in 17<sup>th</sup> century Sweden (Venezky, 1991). In some countries today, a literate person is one who can read and understand a newspaper (UNESCO, 2005). Other thresholds are based upon years of formal schooling, regardless of the individual's actual reading skills (UNESCO, 2005). These definitions approach literacy from the negative side of the literate threshold; they define who is labeled illiterate, without addressing the full range of potential literacy skills of a literate person. The English term *literate*, on the other hand, while sometimes used to describe someone who can read and write, is often used to index the other end of a literacy spectrum; a *literate person* is someone who is cultured, educated, erudite, well versed in literature ("Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged," 1971). *Literacy*, then, may refer to a threshold skill in decoding printed or written text or it may evoke a far wider range of abilities such as interpreting pre-modern text, explicating poetry, or deciphering legal code.

Does the construct of *literacy* include writing as well as reading? Many of the national criteria used to distinguish literates from illiterates for monitoring purposes refer only to reading but some countries also require basic writing ability as a benchmark (UNESCO, 2005).

**Reading in what language?** In many countries the criteria for literacy recognize skills in a privileged language that is not the mother tongue of many citizens (UNESCO, 2005). The standards for literacy in these cases usually reflect hierarchical political relationships among linguistic groups within a nation in which the reification of one or more officially recognized languages, at the expense of others, is associated with the identity of the nation-state and the preservation of its territorial boundaries (Dwyer, 1998).

**Does *literacy* refer exclusively to language?** Some constructs of literacy include numeracy "either as a supplement to the set of skills encompassed by 'literacy' or as a

component of ‘literacy’ itself” (Fransman, 2005, p. 6). In recent years, the term *literacy* has gained traction as a “metaphor for any kind of skill or competence” (p. 7). The terms *information literacy*, *new media literacy*, *digital/computer literacy*, *visual literacy*, *environmental literacy*, *citizenship literacy*, and *cultural literacy* (2005) as well as *scientific literacy* and *arts literacy* are sometimes used to describe skills that a competent person might use to interpret specific types of information.

**Literacy defined for policy use.** A 2005 UNESCO report on progress made toward promoting literacy attempted to offer a definition of literacy that is both sensitive to the varied constructs of literacy valued by peoples in many different cultures and also useful as an operationalized benchmark for governmental monitoring (UNESCO, 2005). The term *functional literacy* was initially framed as related to economic productivity but later also became associated with individuals’ abilities to meet their own needs (2005). This broadened view of literacy shaped UNESCO’s 1978 revised definition of functional literacy—“A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development” (p. 154).

The construct of literacy has expanded in recent years “beyond its simple notion as the set of technical skills of reading, writing and calculating . . . to a plural notion encompassing the manifold meanings and dimensions of these undeniably vital competencies” (p. 155). This view of literacy acknowledges the sociocultural contexts of literacy and “recognizes that there are many practices of literacy embedded in different cultural processes, personal circumstances and collective structures” (UNESCO, 2004, as quoted in UNESCO, 2005, p. 155).

**Literacy and teaching.** While policy institutions have addressed literacy as related to monitoring and advocacy, academics have also problematized the construct of literacy in relation to teaching and research. In recent decades, scholars have expressed a growing realization that literacy pedagogy has often been narrowly prescriptive and “restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 9). Scholars in the mid-1990s began advocating a pedagogy of reading reflecting an awareness that the literacies “needed to make meaning are radically changing in three realms of existence: our working lives, our public lives (citizenship), and our personal lives (lifeworlds)” (p. 10). This realization gave rise to the term ‘multiliteracies’ to encompass the “multiplicity of discourses” reflecting diverse cultures and expressed in a wide variety of texts, including visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal communication (p. 14). Some educators have found pedagogy based on multiliteracies highly engaging for students (e.g. Silvers, Shorey, & Crafton, 2010).

**Literacy and second language teaching.** Scholars of second/foreign language teaching have also identified a need to reconceptualize literacy and develop new pedagogies supportive of broader goals for literacy acquisition. The critique of foreign language literacy pedagogy has been situated, at least in part, in post- 9/11 discourses on the need to restructure foreign language programs to produce graduates with skills relevant to national needs (Geisler et al., 2007). Refocused goals for foreign language education include a strong emphasis on cultural competency as well as linguistic skills. “The ultimate goal extends beyond high-level foreign language proficiency to include intercultural and symbolic competence as part of an increasingly plurilingual, multiliterate global citizenry” (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008, p. 562). This means training graduates who are not only competent in the cultural and linguistic forms of the target language but who can also reflect upon the perspectives of different cultures (Geisler et al.,

2007). A 2007 committee of the Modern Languages Association (MLA) articulated a revised goal for foreign language programs to produce “educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence” (p. 237).

Transcultural competence, as defined by the MLA, can be characterized by facility in multiliteracies, including “the ability to comprehend and analyze the cultural narratives that appear in every kind of expressive form—from essays, fiction, drama, journalism, humor, advertising, political rhetoric, and legal documents to performance, visual forms, and music” (Geisler et al., 2007, p. 238). The emphasis on cultural narratives is grounded in a view of literacy as social practice. “Literacy redefined must encompass complex interactions among language, cognition, society, and culture” (Kern & Schultz, 2005, p. 382). This means developing an understanding of the social and cultural context of literacy practices and even going beyond linguistic forms. “Learning to read and write thus involves a great deal more than mastery of a given writing system—it involves a broader ability to understand relationships of visual and verbal forms in a wide array of contexts. It involves seeing how writers and readers create *discourse worlds* mediated by conventions both linguistic and non-linguistic in nature” (Kern, 2015, p. 11).

Some advocates of a multiliteracies approach to foreign language education have stressed the benefits of exploring new media literacies, e.g. instant messaging, synchronous chat, blogs and wikis, remixing, and mmp online gaming, arguing that these modes are often embedded in the everyday lives of both foreign language learners and native speaker peers (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). These and other non-traditional forms of language may serve as a “realia counterweight to the prescriptivist versions of grammar, style, and vocabulary in foreign language texts that typically are not based upon actual language use” (p. 562). This is not

intended to imply that new media literacies are to be privileged. A broadened concept of advanced foreign language proficiency must include competence in conventional, analogue literacies as well as digital literacies (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). At the Superior and Distinguished levels of proficiency, the highest levels of foreign language acquisition as defined by ACTFL (The American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages), proficiency requires the ability to navigate among a wide range of genres, including lengthy academic texts. “Discourse competence at the Superior level means the ability to understand and construct full texts. At Distinguished levels, those texts can be very long manuscripts, as in the case of reading or writing books or dissertations” (Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002, p. 27). The expectation for those who have achieved the highest levels of language acquisition is not only the ability to navigate long texts but to use precise academic language and “all the communication management devices and discourse devices present in literary and professional texts produced by native speakers” (p. 27).

The reconceptualization of literacy has significant implications for foreign language pedagogy. Some may assume that handling a range of genres requires a certain threshold of proficiency. Indeed, awareness of genre and of cultural differences in discourse have been identified as hallmarks of advanced foreign language acquisition (Leaver & Shekhtman, 2002; Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). Others have posited that a multiliteracies approach can also be applied effectively to introductory foreign language teaching (Willis Allen & Paesani, 2010). It has been argued that a pedagogy of multiliteracies, applied to beginning classes, can make introductory foreign language classes more engaging for students and support the development of academic literacy from the beginning (2010). Some have also suggested that a pedagogy of multiliteracies might help address the longstanding challenge inherent in the foreign language



curriculum structure at many universities (p. 120). Multiliteracies instruction “offers a way to reconcile the teaching of ‘communication’ with the teaching of ‘textual analysis’” (Kern, 2003, p. 43). Proponents of multiliteracy have identified this approach “as the most appropriate instructional framework for teaching language, culture and literature as a continuous whole in introductory-level collegiate FL courses” (Willis Allen & Paesani, 2010, p. 136).

### **What is Literacy in Chinese?**

The highly complex visual forms of the Chinese writing system have been in use for several thousand years. The social practices of literacy in China today are grounded in traditions that trace back over 3,000 years. China’s literacy practices are closely associated with a perceived cultural continuity but have also been subjected to disruptive reforms as well as the impact of new technologies. Chinese literacy traditions have also been characterized by a strong tendency toward *diglossia*, in that the formal written language and the spoken forms of language were highly divergent. What does it mean to be literate in China today? How is literacy viewed in Chinese culture? How does the concept of multiliteracies apply to literacy in Chinese?

**Chinese literacy—in what language?** The multiliteracies perspective acknowledged a “multiplicity of discourses” including the diverse range of sociolinguistic, ethnic and cultural practices that may coexist in a society (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). China is a highly multilingual society. While the official reports of some Chinese linguists recognize about 130 languages in China (Huang, 2015), *Ethnologue*, a catalogue of world languages, lists the significantly larger total of 297 languages spoken in China (*Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Eighteenth edition*

2015). These include languages spoken by the 56 officially recognized ethnic groups<sup>12</sup> of China as well as minority languages not recognized by the government and those spoken by immigrant groups. The languages spoken in China include those traditionally termed “Chinese,” i.e. the languages spoken by Han Chinese, the dominant ethnic group of China, as well as other languages within the Sino-Tibetan language family, and those from linguistic families not related to Chinese, e.g. Altaic languages such as Uygur and Mongolian (Norman, 1988).

Sinologist Jerry Norman wrote “few language names are as all encompassing as Chinese” (1988, p. 1). As he pointed out, the English term “Chinese” comprises everything from ancient characters on oracle bones to modern spoken dialects. This ambiguity is reflected also in Chinese terms such as *Hànyǔ* 汉语 [Han language]<sup>13</sup>, or the language of the Han people, a currently popular term in China that can be used to encompass ancient as well as modern language. The languages of the Han people are often collectively termed “Chinese” in English, which encompasses “scores of mutually non-intelligible varieties of Chinese” (Norman, 1988, p. 187). These varieties are often referred to as dialects, but the distinction between the term dialect and language is largely political rather than linguistic. For linguists, “the modern Chinese dialects are really more like a family of languages” (p. 1). The varieties of modern spoken Chinese are often grouped by linguists into seven dialectal groups, the largest of which is the Mandarin group of

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<sup>12</sup> The Chinese term used is *mínzú* 民族, which is translated as “nationality” in official Chinese publications. The term has clearly defined boundaries and strong legal and political implications in China.

<sup>13</sup> Transliterations of Chinese will be given in standard Pinyin, with a diacritic used to indicate lexical tone, usually over the main vowel, per the standard conventions for Pinyin. The diacritics and corresponding tones are (using the vowel “a” as example): ā- first tone (high level), á-second tone (rising), ǎ third tone (dips and rises), and à (falling). For the complete rules of Pinyin see [www.pinyin.info](http://www.pinyin.info) or (Y. Zhang, 1998). For the convenience of readers familiar with Chinese, most terms will also be given in Chinese characters.

dialects, which are spoken “by about 70 percent of China’s Han population” (p. 190). When the People’s Republic of China announced in 1956 the designation of a national language of China, to be called Putonghua (*pǔtōnghuà* 普通话), or Common Speech, the prescribed official language was formally defined as based primarily upon the Beijing variation of northern Mandarin, with the grammar based upon contemporary (mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century) vernacular publications (Chen, 2008). The PRC Common Language and Script Law enacted in 2000 further reifies Putonghua as the national language (Ross et al., 2005). Dictionaries currently published in the PRC indicate the prescribed pronunciation of characters in Putonghua (using Pinyin, a Romanization system for Chinese described later in this chapter).

Although in some limited circumstances, primarily in minority semi-autonomous regions, literacy in minority languages or other Chinese dialects may be officially recognized and even taught in local schools, to be literate in China generally means to be literate in Putonghua (Ross et al., 2005). Since not everyone speaks Putonghua or a close variant as a first language, becoming literate for many Chinese requires, first, the acquisition of Putonghua. Although Chinese characters generally have identical or similar meanings (with different pronunciations) across dialects of Chinese and may be used to write text in different Chinese dialects, the lexicon and syntax vary somewhat among dialects. Children from non-Putonghua speaking families, therefore, are learning Putonghua as they learn to read. For children from homes where a non-Standard Chinese dialect is spoken, this means learning a language closely related to but not identical with their home language. For students from families that speak a non-Chinese language, e.g. Uyghur, acquiring literacy requires the acquisition of a language that may be completely unrelated to their home language. For many children in China, then, becoming “literate” may require a steep learning curve and may involve also becoming aware of a relative

devaluation of their home language vis-à-vis the privileged, official language of government associated with the national identity of China.

**Literacy defined in Chinese terms.** The Chinese language does not have a term for “literacy” that indexes the same range of meaning as the English term (H. Li, 2015). The Chinese term *shìzì*<sup>14</sup> 识字<sup>15</sup> translates directly as “to recognize words” and is typically used to mean “being able to read and write” (H. Li, 2015, p. 8). Policy documents on literacy often express the concept in the negative, using the term *sǎománg* 扫盲 which means “to sweep away illiteracy” (p. 9). The phrase *yǒu wénhuà* 有文化, which can be directly translated as to “have culture” or to “have civilization,” is sometimes translated as “literate” or “well-educated” (“The New Chinese-English Dictionary”, 2003). Native speakers disagree as to whether this phrase implies depth of knowledge, integrity, civilized behavior, or all of the above.<sup>16</sup> The phrase *xuéwénhuà* 学文化 [to learn culture] has been used to mean “to become educated,” “to learn to read and write” (“The New Chinese-English Dictionary”, 2003). The word *wénhuà* 文化 [culture] itself includes the morpheme *wén* 文, one meaning of which is “writing” (“The New Chinese-English Dictionary”, 2003). These phrases reflect a strong connection between literacy and culture.

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<sup>15</sup> This phrase is pronounced *shìzì* in the Standard Chinese used in Taiwan (Yin & Felley, 1990)

<sup>16</sup> In an online bulletin board discussion on the distinctions between those “with culture” and those “without culture,” some posts defined the term as related to knowledge and learning while others stressed meanings related to moral integrity (“shenme shi you wenhua? n.d. retrieved from <https://www.zhihu.com/question/19616518>).

*How many characters?* In China, the threshold for literacy is usually expressed in terms of the number of characters recognized. Although the Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Language includes entries for nearly 50,000 characters (China Academy, 1970), the number of characters commonly used is far smaller. The 1988 Xiandai Hanyu Changyong Zi Biao (Table of Commonly Used Modern Chinese), a reference frequently used by scholars, lists 3,500 most commonly used Chinese characters (Lou & Wang, 1987). In the early 1950s, when China launched vigorous campaigns to eradicate illiteracy, one basic threshold for minimal functional literacy was 500 characters (Ross et al., 2005). In some contexts, a different threshold was used for urban and rural populations, with a 1,500 character goal for villagers and 2,000 characters for urban workers (2005). A threshold somewhere around 3,000 is probably the most commonly quoted benchmark, but some claim that very basic reading and writing may be achieved with about 1,800 characters (Chen, 2008). Children are generally expected to recognize about 3,000 by the completion of elementary school (Chen, 2008). College graduates are estimated to know at least 3,500 characters (Duff et al., 2013), and specialists in pre-modern literature and culture may know 5,000 or 6,000 (Norman, 1988).

The ability to recognize a certain number of characters, however, does not infer the range of vocabulary needed to read even relatively simple text in Chinese. As described earlier, Chinese characters represent single-syllable morphemes, which can be combined to form multi-syllable words. Readers, therefore, rely heavily upon awareness of the spoken lexicon to correctly parse word boundaries in written Chinese.

*Which characters?* Literacy in the PRC requires the ability to recognize the officially prescribed set of characters known as simplified characters. The PRC promulgated a set of simplified characters and character components during the anti-illiteracy campaigns of the 1950s

“to increase literacy and to make the achievement of government policies easier” (Spolsky, 2014, p. e167). (See earlier description of simplified characters.) The PRC Common Language and Script Law enacted in 2000 now limits the use of traditional characters to “highly restricted functions and purposes such as handwritten shop signs and artistic works” (F. Wang et al., 2009, p. 215). It may be argued, however, that the “highly literate” may also have an awareness of the traditional forms of Chinese characters, which often retain greater graphic detail and historical etymological information (Ramsey). In addition to printed Chinese characters, handwritten characters often differ significantly in appearance from printed fonts, presenting an additional challenge to literacy.

**Other visual forms in Chinese text.** In reading Chinese text, the visual forms that the reader must process include not only Chinese characters but also additional symbol systems, some of which have been imported and adapted to Chinese. Arabic numerals are often used in Chinese text, sometimes alongside the Chinese characters for numbers. Modern Chinese uses a punctuation system similar to that of English, but with some added symbols, including an additional comma used only for series and a set of symbols used with names of books, as well as unique conventions, e.g. enclosing the names of the recently deceased in boxes. A fully literate reader can also rely upon the recognition of conventions for formatting text to correctly identify written information. As in many other cultures, letters, addresses, invitations and other documents follow prescribed formats.

**Pinyin.** The Roman alphabet also plays an important role in Chinese. In 1958, the PRC promulgated the Pinyin system for using the Roman alphabet to note the prescribed pronunciation of standard Chinese. The system grew out of earlier efforts, including those of foreign scholars, to use the Roman alphabet or other symbol sets to represent the pronunciation

of Chinese (Chen, 2008). Some argued in favor of using Pinyin to replace Chinese characters, on the grounds of efficiency (Chen, 2008; Spolsky, 2014). Those who objected, however, cited the potential ambiguity caused by the large number of homophones and the importance of the cultural heritage of Chinese characters, and the idea was abandoned (Yen, 2005). Pinyin was introduced, therefore, not to replace characters but to “annotate the pronunciation of characters to facilitate learning” (Chen, 2008). First graders in most PRC schools are initially taught Pinyin, as a bridge to Chinese characters, and Pinyin is used in other contexts to reinforce the pronunciation of the characters in the Putonghua standard. The use of Pinyin in labeling export products, maps, and other items for external consumption is an auxiliary function (see discussion in (Spolsky, 2014). It is worth noting that the Pinyin system, unlike earlier systems developed by foreign scholars, e.g. Wade-Giles, Yale, and others, was developed for domestic Chinese purposes and not expressly for the teaching of Chinese as a second or foreign language. For this reason, the phonetic values assigned to some of the letters of the Roman alphabet in the Pinyin system are quite different from the values used in English and other European languages.

**Formal written Chinese.** Being fully literate in Chinese not only requires oral fluency in the national language but also competence in a written language that often differs significantly from the spoken language. Formal written Chinese today still includes elements of the highly diglossic culture of pre-modern China, in which the official written language employed archaic forms markedly divergent from spoken language. In pre-modern China, literacy required the ability to read formal written Chinese, sometimes known as classical Chinese, or *wényánwén* 文言文, a terse style of writing based upon the literary writing of the Qin (221 BC to 206 BC) and Han (206 BC-220 AD) Dynasties and previous eras. Most writing subsequent to the Han Dynasty was shaped by the prescriptive forms of *wényánwén*. Although a parallel tradition of

“vernacular written language” began acquiring popularity in the Tang Dynasty, the vernacular form was primarily limited to vernacular novels and informal writing (F. Wang et al., 2009). For “formal and official functions in education, administration, and legal proceedings, however, traditional written Chinese-*wenyanwen*-was the undisputed norm” (Chen, 2008, p. 203). The privileged positioning of an archaic form of language allowed for consistency in the written language over time. It has been posited that this conservative tradition of composition, along with the relative stability of the appearance and meanings of Chinese characters over centuries, has allowed literate Chinese continuous access to an ancient cultural heritage (Chen, 2008; F. Wang et al., 2009).

It has been argued also that this stability of the writing system is supported, at least in part, by the lack of a strongly consistent connection between the written language and spoken pronunciation. Chinese characters “can be read across time and space because the logographs of [Chinese characters] are not associated with a particular phonological system” (F. Wang et al., 2009, p. 408). Even this extreme perspective does not mean that literate readers of classical Chinese over the centuries have been unaware of the phonetic values of the characters. Awareness of pronunciation is especially evident in the traditional Chinese literary practices related to poetry. The ability to recite and compose poetry, using prescribed rhythms and rhyming schemes, has been a hallmark of the literate classes, particularly since the Sui and Tang dynasties (Sui 581-618, Tang 618-907). As reflected in the rhyming dictionaries published in several dynasties as references for poets, the rhyming schemes followed prescribed archaic pronunciations. Throughout much of the history of pre-modern China, therefore, a complete appreciation of some texts required not only an awareness of the archaic meanings of Chinese characters but also of the archaic pronunciations of those characters.



While the grammar, lexicon and, in some contexts, even the pronunciation of formal written Chinese thereby remained relatively stable, the spoken language continued to evolve naturally. Written Chinese, therefore, became “increasingly divorced from spoken language after the Han dynasty” (Chen, 2008, p. 204). The gap between vernacular spoken Chinese and the terse, archaic forms of formal, written Chinese exacerbated the difficulties of acquiring literacy (F. Wang et al., 2009).

**Cultural importance of literacy.** Despite the difficulty of learning formal written Chinese, powerful incentives for acquiring formal literacy existed in pre-modern China and continue to figure prominently in education and upward social mobility in China today. In pre-modern China, “literacy provided the most important ladder for success”(Kern, 2003; F. Wang et al., 2009, p. 407). Although access to education in pre-modern China, as in many cultures, was often restricted to affluent elite males, literacy was often viewed as the most important requisite for upward social mobility, and the non-elite classes sometimes found ways to acquire literacy. A civil service examination system, implemented as an extensive, national system in the Sui (581-618 AD) and Tang (618-907 AD) Dynasties, allowed male candidates from ordinary families to sit for the examinations (F. Wang et al., 2009). The system was perceived as facilitating the selection of the most meritorious to serve as government officials (J. Wang, 2013). Passing the exam allowed men to be considered for appointments as government officials, thereby acquiring wealth, prestige, and influence. The exams tested knowledge of classic texts (F. Wang et al., 2009), based on a Confucian belief that exposure to the wisdom of the Ancients nurtured moral character (Gu, 2006). Thus, a highly literate person, educated in the texts of the ancient philosophers, would bring moral integrity to service as an exemplary government official. The

civil examination system, implemented throughout most of the regimes after the 7<sup>th</sup> century, “strengthened the link between literacy and officialdom” (F. Wang et al., 2009, p. 407).

The association between literacy and economic and social advantage offered a powerful incentive for all classes to acquire literacy, whether through organized schooling, home tutoring or other means. One scholar estimates that male literacy in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) could have been as high as 40 percent (Zarrow, 2008, p. 22). Women, however, were rarely afforded the opportunity to become literate. At the time of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, it was estimated that “90 percent of the women in China were illiterate” (F. Wang et al., 2009, p. 402).

The social barriers to access to literacy inspired some of the rallying cries of the idealist intellectuals of the New Culture Movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The reformers rejected the use of *wényánwén* [classical Chinese] and demanded that it be replaced with *báihuàwén*, or vernacular Chinese, “as the standard written Chinese for the great majority of uses and functions” (Chen, 2008, p. 212). They called for the use of vernacular language in writing in part to allow for easier access to literacy by the working class, women, and others traditionally deprived of education. This did not result in a new literary language completely devoid of archaic forms. Indeed, modern written Chinese often includes “literary and formal expressions, metaphors that are connected to ancient stories or myths, and four-word idioms...” (Duff et al., 2013, p. 82). Knowledge of poetry, also, remains a requisite attribute of a well-educated person. Children in China are often encouraged to memorize poetry written in classical Chinese, especially Tang Dynasty poems, and well-educated adults are expected to remember at least a few famous poems. A fully literate person in modern China, therefore, is well-versed in the literary forms of *wényánwén* and the cultural referents of the classics.

Literacy is still an important pathway to upward social mobility in today's China. The university entrance exam, a high-stakes test that determines whether and where a student may attend university, is perceived as the best pathway for children of ordinary families to join the upper middle class, via the cachet of a degree from a prestigious institute of higher education. Both Chinese language arts, including elements of classical Chinese, and English are required subjects on the exam, thereby reinforcing literacy in both Chinese and English “as critical gatekeeping mechanisms” (Spolsky, 2014, p. e174).

**New media literacy.** The digital revolution in China, as in other countries, has had a disruptive impact upon literacy, creating new forms of communication and the need for new literacy skills. As China strives to become a global leader in innovation and technology, governmental education policies have identified a need to train both urban and rural students in digital and multimedia literacy skills (Bowcher & Xia, 2012). China currently has the world's largest population of internet users and near complete cellphone saturation, with a large percentage of smart phones with internet access (H. Su, 2015, p. 19). Online participation has become part of daily life for many people, and Chinese wǎngmín 网民 [netizens] or wǎngyǒu 网友 [internet friends] form myriad online communities in “newsgroups, mailing lists, chat rooms, BBS forums, and blogs” (Yan, 2013, p. 7). Texting services and SNS (social networking sites) platforms provide channels for online gaming, dating, job searching, and other social activities (Yan, 2013).

The shift to multimodal expression across the world, with greater incorporation of visual imagery in digital media, has not necessarily led to less writing but to “returns to writing” in previously unimagined ways, e.g. SMS and blogging (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). In China, the popular adaptations of digital skills have generated new and sometimes unexpected ways of

using language and literacy for communication. Pinyin, for example, has taken on a new role. Until recently, Pinyin was used primarily to teach Putonghua to young native speakers and to non-Chinese speakers. Adults rarely used Pinyin for communication. With the explosion of digital communication, however, Pinyin has now become highly useful for adult native speakers. Most of the input methods for typing Chinese characters on computers and other digital devices are based on Pinyin. More recent Pinyin-based IMEs (Input Method Editors) are context driven, allowing for rapid input of Chinese text. Text messages are sometimes written in Pinyin, or in a combination of Pinyin, characters, numbers and emojis. This is partly for expediency, as some users find it easier to type Pinyin or numbers than characters, and partly for amusement.

Internet communication activities have generated new forms of language and require new forms of literacy to navigate. Texting has become an extremely popular means of communication (Wallis, 2011). Texting “is often a preferred means of emotional communication for young Chinese, especially when it comes to romantic expression and conflict management” (Wallis, 2011, p. 162). The “accelerated message exchange” possible in texting often leads to informality and playfulness with words, emojis and logograms using numbers as homophones for words, e.g. 775885 (*qī-qī-wǔ-bā-bā-wǔ* which sounds like *qīnqīn wǒ bàobào wǒ* 亲亲我抱抱我) [kiss me hold me] (H. Su, 2015, p. 173). Older people and rural residents are also adapting digital literacy for their own purposes. Migrant workers use bbs (bulletin board sites) and websites for workers from the same rural area to stay connected to home (H. Su, 2015, p. 129). In some cases, texting gives less educated users access to higher literacy, through the use of pre-written messages that “compensate for low literacy levels (especially difficulty with inputting characters)” (Oreglia, 2013, p. 416).

It has been pointed out that the new forms of multimodal, digital communication have given rise to a worldwide contradictory “shift in the balance of agency” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 8). Gamers often have some control over the narrative of the game; readers and users of digital texts and visual materials have expanding degrees of control over the mix and timing of images and text (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). This shift in agency applies also to China, as internet users explore ways of using digital multimodal communication to create new cultural narratives and to push the limits of the freedom of expression.

The viral popularity of internet memes, as in many other societies, are particularly evident in China’s social media (Wallis, 2011). Many of these draw upon the large number of homophones in Chinese, which have historically provided rich opportunities for puns and other inventive uses of language. In today’s multimodal arena in China, internet memes often use homophones to evade internet censors, spoof commercial entertainment, or make jokes (Wallis, 2011; T. Wang, 2013; Yan, 2013). Some mild examples include *yāli* [鸭梨 white Asian pear] for “stress” [压力 *yāli*] and *tóngxié* [童鞋 children’s shoes] for “classmate” [同学 *tóngxué*] (S. Willis, personal correspondence, July 14, 2018).

The internet has had an impact on popular language usage in China in unexpected ways. The “contact us” link common to many websites is often presented on Chinese websites as a literal translation, *liánxì wǒmén* 联系我们, a violation of standard Chinese grammar, in which *liánxì* 联系 [to contact, connect with] is not a transitive verb and would require the phrase *gēn wǒmén* 跟我们 [with us] to occupy a pre-verbal position, i.e. *gēn wǒmén liánxì* 跟我们联系 [with us contact, i.e. contact us]. Despite the ungrammaticality of *liánxì wǒmén* or perhaps because of it, the phrase has been popularized by the internet to the extent that it has now become acceptable grammar in everyday conversation. Similarly, after customer service agents

on Taobao, the Chinese mega retailing website, began addressing all of the customers with *qīn* 亲 sweetie, a word traditionally reserved for close relationships, the word caught on and is now “used ubiquitously in everyday life, especially among younger people” (Wallis, 2011, p. 152). This style of communication has come to be called Taobao Style *tǎobǎotǐ* 淘宝体 (T. Wang, 2013).

**Multiliteracies in Chinese.** As we examine the beliefs of teachers on teaching literacy in Chinese, it is important to remember that literacy may index a wide variety of visual forms that interact with spoken language in complex ways. A person who is fully literate in Chinese recognizes the visual forms of the language and understands both the verbal antecedents and cultural contexts referenced by those forms. A literate reader of Chinese, in other words, engages fully in the *discourse worlds* Kern described as created by writers and readers (Kern, 2015).

To summarize, then, decoding Chinese text even at a basic level requires the ability to recognize characters, separate the characters into words, correctly interpret the use of punctuation and spatial formatting, and, in some cases recognize Arabic numerals and even the Latin alphabet. Reading a range of authentic texts also requires, in addition to these basic decoding processes, an understanding of classical Chinese, and the cultural contexts, both pre-modern and modern, that shape the cultural narratives of Chinese literary expression.

## **Part Two: Challenges Faced by Chinese Language Teachers**

### **Studies of CFL teachers.**

*General studies of CFL teachers.* The cognition of CFL teachers is a new area of inquiry, with relatively few studies published on this topic. Many of the studies of CFL teachers

in English speaking environments are theses or dissertations by CFL teachers themselves or those who work closely with them (e.g. W.-C. Chen, 2013; W. Chen, 2013; Ferro, 2014; Gao, 2010; Hanson, 2013; I. C. Liu, 2012; X. Liu, 2012; Romig, 2009; D. Sun, 2010; X. Sun, 2011; Xia Wu, 2011; Xu, 2012). Most of the studies of CFL teachers reviewed here focus on K-12 teachers but a few describe university-level teachers (e.g. Jiang, 2014; S.-h. Yang, 2008). Almost all are qualitative or mixed methods projects. Since most of the Chinese language teachers in the United States and other English-speaking countries are from China, it is not surprising that most of the studies look at teachers from China, including recent immigrants and temporary, visiting teachers from China. In the studies reviewed for this proposal, some common themes emerge. These include strong motivations to promote Chinese language and culture, frustrations with American school culture, difficulties in accepting and applying the foreign language pedagogies considered best practices in U.S. schools, and insecurities over technical expertise.

*Motivated by pride in culture.* The native speaker teachers of Chinese interviewed in many of these studies expressed pride in their own culture and a desire to generate positive interest in Chinese language and culture as motivations for becoming a teacher of Chinese. One teacher stated her goal was to “share my love and knowledge of the Chinese language” and that a Chinese teacher “carries the Chinese culture” (Gao, 2010, p. 88). The teachers feel a strong need to generate interest in learning Chinese. “As a teacher, I would like to help my students to cultivate and develop an interest in Chinese language and culture” (M.-T. Chiang, 2010, p. 57). The teachers hope not only to generate enthusiasm for Chinese language and culture but also for interacting directly with Chinese people. A teacher in one study commented that she wanted to help her students use “the target language in real-life experiences” (Ferro, 2014, p. 133). Another mentioned, “I often encourage my students to talk to any native Chinese speakers they may

encounter in restaurants or other places, where they could practice what they learned” (M.-T. Chiang, 2010, p. 57).

Eradicating stereotypes and other misunderstandings of Chinese culture is also a recurrent theme. A graduate student teaching Chinese in a university expressed concerns about the content of the Chinese texts he was told to teach. “The topics we taught in Chinese classrooms tended to be focused on a negative description of Chinese society such as plagiarism and unpunctual behavior [...] I felt uncomfortable about teaching negative aspects of Chinese culture to foreigners” (S.-h. Yang, 2008, p. 1570). A graduate student in a second language teaching program listed as one of her reasons for becoming a teacher of Chinese the desire to “engage more people in learning about China, to help them see the real China, and to eradicate stereotypes” (Xia Wu, 2011, p. 14). While a sense of responsibility for promoting understanding of China may be present for all Chinese teachers, the visiting teachers, particularly those who have volunteered to teach in the United States in programs sponsored by the Chinese government, may feel especially obligated to serve in this way, as representatives of their culture hoping to generate good will toward China and Chinese culture.

*Professional identity, status of teachers, and school culture.* International teachers often experience a threat to self-efficacy when they realize that expertise in teaching, which defined a respected professional identity for them in their home countries, may not apply in the United States (Nganga, 2011). Teachers from China sometimes express insecurity arising from their lack of familiarity with local school culture and prevailing practices in pedagogy. This insecurity is exacerbated by dismay at the lack of overt respect paid to teachers in the United States. As one CFL teacher commented, “From my personal experience studying in the United States, although university teachers in the United States have high prestige and reputation, but teachers from K-



12 are not like that” (Xia Wu, 2011, p. 66). The need to adjust to a less honored role may pose a threat to the professional identity of new teachers from China that goes beyond typical culture shock. Teachers in China have high social status. They are expected to provide students with moral guidance and discipline, in addition to content knowledge, to students. Teaching and learning are seen as a serious business, involving hard work and discipline, the results of which have a critical impact upon both the future career and the moral character of each student.

The assignment, then, to make learning engaging for students is seen by some Chinese teachers as trivializing the duty of teaching. Some Chinese teachers have expressed frustration that “Chinese had to be presented as a ‘fun’ subject” and that “U.S. schools did not encourage students to take their education seriously” (Hanson, 2013, p. 83). The U.S. curriculum structure also has an undermining effect upon the professional identities of these teachers. Whereas in China English is a required subject and a strong score in English on the college entrance exam is required for admission to university, Chinese teachers in the United States have complained that “Chinese language is not considered an important academic subject at all levels in U.S. schools, and that there is a general lack of commitment to teaching and learning world languages” (Hanson, 2013, p. 81).

Difficulties in adapting to local school culture are especially evident in struggles with classroom management, a prominent theme in CFL teacher narratives. A mixed methods study of foreign language teachers found that, among the international teachers, the Chinese teachers had the greatest difficulty with classroom management, which the authors attributed to cultural differences from China, “where expectations related to education and parenting are quite different from those commonly held in the United States” (Kissau, Yon, & Algozzine, 2011, p. 46). Many of the Chinese teachers in the studies reviewed here expressed dismay that teachers

were not automatically treated with respect by students and parents (M.-T. Chiang, 2010; Gao, 2010; Hanson, 2013; J. Liao & Zhao, 2012; X. Liu, 2012; Romig, 2009; X. Wang, 2011; Xia Wu, 2011; Xu, 2012). Many complained that students were unmotivated, unwilling to do homework, and not hardworking (Hanson, 2013; Xu, 2012) and some suggested that the lack of high stakes, year-end tests such as those used in the Chinese educational system represented a missing incentive for students to study (Hanson, 2013). The teachers complained that students slept in class, put their feet up on the desks, and engaged in other behaviors perceived as disrespectful (Hanson, 2013). One teacher remarked, “In the U.S., students are the gods. If they complain to the principal or their parents, teachers might be replaced, which is very different from China” (M.-T. Chiang, 2010, p. 69). The teachers expressed difficulty in grasping school expectations for student behavior and in learning techniques for managing that behavior. Some responded by failing to take control, as in the case of one teacher who was dropped from a program due to her ineffective classroom management (Romig, 2009); others developed carefully planned routines for maintaining tight control (D. Sun, 2012) or continued to struggle (I. C. Liu, 2012). Some were able to adapt with coaching and training.

A study of the classroom management experiences of six Chinese immersion school teachers of pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade students in the United States found that the teachers initially experienced great frustration with classroom management. They expected the students to be quiet, sit up straight, not interrupt their teachers, complete their homework on time, and come to class well prepared (W. Zhou & Li, 2015). The teachers were not initially trained in age and culturally appropriate expectations for students or in management strategies for reinforcing those expectations. They were also unaccustomed to students with diverse needs, including special education students in mainstreamed classrooms. The teachers’ attempts to use

strategies common in China such as stern looks and group punishment were not effective. They eventually learned to adopt American management strategies that emphasized clear rules, awards and consequences. Although some of the teachers objected to the materialistic emphasis of these strategies, they learned to use them effectively (W. Zhou & Li, 2015).

*Chinese is (too) hard.* A common theme among the Chinese teachers was that expectations needed to be lowered for American students. Several studies of Chinese teachers revealed a lack of confidence in the potential ability of learners and a high degree of uncertainty about appropriate expectations for learners. One teacher remarked “Chinese is much harder than other languages” (Gao, 2010). Others expressed a lack of confidence in the ability of any learner of Chinese to acquire accurate pronunciation, especially accurate tones. One participant in a study of Chinese teachers in Britain asserted that “no foreigners in her knowledge speak with a good accent” (X. Wang, 2011, p. 16). The teachers adapted by lowering expectations and shifting emphasis from language proficiency to cultural activities. “Students are not expected to learn Chinese particularly well, and having a certain amount of basic language and Chinese cultural knowledge would be sufficient for the school students” (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012, p. 86).

*Differences in pedagogical approach.* The Chinese teachers in these studies recognized that the teacher-centered, grammar-focused pedagogy they had experienced as language students and teachers in China was not appropriate for their new classrooms (W. Chen, 2013; M.-T. Chiang, 2010; Gao, 2010; Hanson, 2013; X. Wang, 2011; Xia Wu, 2011; Xu, 2012). “‘*Teach the way you are taught*’ does not work in the American classroom at all” (Xu, 2012, p. 19). The teachers consistently reported difficulty, however, in shifting to a more student-centered pedagogy, and some expressed strong resistance to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach they were expected to use (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012; Moloney & Xu, 2012; X.

Wang, 2011). A study of novice Chinese language teachers in Australia showed that the teachers held many misconceptions about CLT. Some believed that CLT was only appropriate for teaching spoken, colloquial language and not for teaching reading, writing, grammar, or other language goals (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012). They also believed that CLT increased learner resistance and would only be effective with highly motivated learners (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012). The teachers responded, therefore, by decreasing expectations for student language proficiency, trying to maintain student interest by teaching culture, and increasing the use of mechanical drills (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012). A study of Chinese teachers in the UK found great antipathy to CLT. The teachers felt that CLT was more suitable for teaching European languages than for Chinese (X. Wang, 2011). Some teachers from China noted that their experiences as learners and teachers in large classes in China, where “there is no free thinking: following the teacher’s way was the only way” left them ill prepared to offer student-centered instruction (Hall Haley & Ferro, 2011).

Not all teachers from China reject communicative language teaching. A Chinese teacher in an M.A. program in second language teaching described his teaching philosophy as geared toward a learner-centered classroom, communicative language teaching, and effective assessment (W. Chen, 2013). He traced his enthusiasm for meaningful communicative language teaching back to his own language learning experience. “After learning English for eight years in teacher-centered classes focused on word repetition, grammar learning, and translation, I was unsuccessful in making a conversation with an American teacher whom I met in my freshman year in China. However, I became somewhat fluent after talking to her for just one semester, because the conversation was meaningful and spontaneous” (W. Chen, 2013, p. 8). He also credited reflection, observation of master teachers, and observation of videos of his own teaching with helping him to learn to teach in a more student-centered fashion and stay in the target

language. “When I first began teaching, I did not know how to teach in a student-centered way” (p. 21). “After reflecting on my own teaching of Chinese, I have been able to achieve a significant reduction of teaching talk in my class” (p. 21).

Another student in the same program also indicated her acceptance of CLT but also a reluctance to let go of traditional Chinese views of teaching. “In teacher beliefs, the two countries’ teachers have many opposite thoughts and opinions. I like Chinese teachers’ devoted spirit and serious attitude in the teaching profession. On the other hand, I also like American teachers’ active language classroom. For me, there is no good or bad when judging Chinese and American teachers [...] my purpose is to find a balance for myself between American and Chinese teachers in order to better help my future students” (Xia Wu, 2011, p. 67).

A compromise approach was also suggested by a mixed-methods study of CFL teacher beliefs and practices related to standards-based, learner-centered instruction which showed that teachers given training and opportunities to reflect were sometimes able to find a middle ground between traditional Chinese teaching and learner-centered pedagogy (Ferro, 2014). After training, the teachers from China still expressed concerns that learner-centered pedagogy “diminished the role of the teacher” and remained convinced of the greater effectiveness of teacher-centered instruction for new content. They generally accepted, however the “role of a language teacher as a facilitator of meaningful communicative activities on topics of interest to their students and as a role model for both the target language and cultures” (Ferro, 2014, p. 217).

*Technical expertise in Chinese language.* For teachers who are immigrants, technical expertise in the language is often a source of insecurity. A study of Chinese immigrant teachers in Britain found that the teachers often expressed a manifestation of the “native speaker fallacy,”

or the assumption made that ethnicity and race imply teaching expertise, whereas the teachers often felt inadequately equipped with the pedagogical expertise necessary to teach Chinese effectively (X. Wang, 2011). Several also expressed strong insecurities about their own language skills. Accents other than the Beijing accent and dialects other than the northern Mandarin-based Standard Chinese are considered by some as inferior and less worthy of representing “Chineseness” (X. Wang, 2011, p. 9). Not all native speakers share this attitude. A Chinese teacher interviewed in a mixed methods study of CFL teacher beliefs on standards-based pedagogy pushed back against the notion of a privileged dialect, insisting that her students needed to appreciate regional variations in accent and usage (Ferro, 2014). For visiting teachers from China, most of whom are screened for competence in Standard Chinese before selection for visiting teacher programs, linguistic expertise may be less of a concern than it is for some immigrants from China and heritage speakers. As described earlier, the visiting teachers tend to have more insecurity about expertise in other areas, including English, U.S. school culture, and Western pedagogical techniques.

*Studies of CFL teachers related to teaching Chinese literacy.* Most of the studies of the cognition of CFL teachers do not focus on beliefs related to teaching Chinese literacy. Some of these studies, however, do mention teacher beliefs, attitudes, and experiences in teaching reading and writing within a broader context of teaching Chinese. Reports on CFL literacy pedagogy research sometimes also refer to the attitudes and assumptions of CFL teachers on teaching literacy (Jerome L. Packard, 1990). The questions raised and sometimes passionately held views expressed, in both the teacher cognition studies and the pedagogy research, reflect the extensive controversy and debate among teachers of Chinese related to teaching literacy in Chinese. Some of the questions discussed include whether to teach traditional characters or simplified

characters, how many characters to introduce and how quickly, whether to require students to write characters from memory or simply to recognize and copy, whether handwriting and stroke order is important for learners, and whether to teach reading with authentic materials or modified materials (Y.-Y. Chiang, 2010; Chung, 2002; W. Dai, 2012; Everson, 1994, 2008; Tam, 2005; Ye, 2013; Z. Zhang, 2009).

*Simplified vs. traditional characters.* Which type of characters to teach—simplified or traditional? The challenge for teachers here is that, regardless of the choice made between traditional and simplified characters and whether the teachers had a voice in that decision, the choice will be viewed by some as a political stance, and the teachers sometimes find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being asked to justify that choice or to teach a character set unfamiliar to them (X. Wang, 2011). It has been pointed out, however, that although this can be an emotional issue for teachers, students can and do learn to “navigate in both traditional and simplified universes” (Ning, 2011, p. 48).

*Goals and expectations.* How many characters should be taught and should students be asked to write characters from memory? At one extreme, there are those who advocate not teaching students to write characters at all, on the grounds that typing characters with computers is easier and more consistent with contemporary life in China, and students would benefit more by investing time in other aspects of learning the language (Allen, 2008). Most character entry methods for typing in Chinese involve entering words in Pinyin and then choosing the correct characters from among homophonic options displayed. It is argued, therefore, that learning to type in Chinese also reinforces reading skills. At the other end of the continuum, some teachers expect students to emulate the process of literacy acquisition followed by native speakers, by learning to write characters from memory, with correct stroke order. Others argue for “lowering

the expectations about how many characters should be learned, and whether students should be able to recognize them only or recognize them and produce them from memory” (Ye, 2011, p. 25). Many teachers support a compromise position, requiring students to write core vocabulary from memory and recognize additional vocabulary. Many high school Chinese language teachers, for example, require students to recognize one to three hundred new characters each year and to write a subset from memory. The varied expectations for character learning in secondary school often set students up for frustration as they transition to university, as university programs tend to require production of characters from memory, with about 1,000 characters covered in the first two years (see for example the Integrated Chinese series or the Chinese Link series (Yuehua Liu, Yao, Bi, Ge, & Shi, 2009; S. Wu, Yu, Zhang, & Tian, 2011)).

*How to teach literacy?* Some teachers recognize that traditional methods of learning characters, drawn from the approaches used to teach native speakers, may not be the most appropriate for learners of Chinese as a foreign language but the teachers feel uncertain as to the best methods to use. In a case study of a teacher from Taiwan, the researcher noted, “she was especially uncertain about teaching the characters, which is very time-consuming with slow rewards” (Gao, 2010). The teacher tried to avoid assigning too many tedious copying exercises but experimented with other ways to help the students memorize more characters. “She tried to promote the right stroke order in writing, which is strictly required in the Chinese context, while worrying that it would overburden the student...” (p. 87). Some teachers insist that only the traditional methods emphasizing memorization are effective for teaching reading and writing and that Communicative Language Teaching does not support the type of hard work the teachers feel necessary for learning Chinese characters. “It seems that the foreign language teaching methodology doesn’t really concern the question of characters. I consider drilling and testing



very important, and I definitely ask students to copy” (X. Wang, 2011, p. 17). Even teachers who do not necessarily expect student to memorize characters often encourage copying characters by hand and even view it as an essential step in learning to recognize characters (Ye, 2011).

There is much discussion among CFL teachers about the sequencing and timing of introducing oral language, Pinyin, and characters (Everson, 1988; S. Hu, 2003; Jerome L. Packard, 1990; Ye, 2011, 2013). An Australian study investigated the question of whether children in lower elementary school could learn to write characters from memory, while also learning the vocabulary in Pinyin (S. Hu, 2003). The study was motivated by hesitation among the Chinese teaching staff on whether to introduce Chinese characters, rather than teaching only Pinyin, and if so, at what stage of learning. The researcher concluded that young children could learn to both read and write Chinese characters at early or later stages of learning. The research design did not explore these questions deeply, but the study reflected the doubts often expressed by CFL teachers on introducing characters and Pinyin.

Two studies have focused on the attitudes or beliefs of CFL teachers on teaching Chinese literacy. The following is an examination of each of these studies.

*Ye: “Shall we delay teaching characters in teaching Chinese as a foreign language?”* (2011, 2013). Lijuan Ye’s 2013 article, based on her 2011 dissertation, investigated both teacher and student beliefs on the optimal timing for introducing Chinese characters in university-level Chinese language programs. She questioned whether delaying the introduction of Chinese characters would be acceptable or even preferred by Chinese teachers and learners. The theoretical foundation for delaying the introduction of characters derives from observation of native speakers. First language learners, including Chinese children, draw upon oral language fluency when learning to read. CFL learners, however, are often expected to acquire oral

language and literacy at the same time. This creates a cognitive overload that may not be conducive to literacy acquisition. It has been suggested, therefore, that CFL learners might be more successful in learning to read and write Chinese characters after establishing a foundation in oral language (Everson, 1988). Preliminary studies testing the effects of initially teaching oral language supported by Pinyin only and delaying the introduction of Chinese characters found that students who experienced a delay of three weeks in introducing characters had better ability to “discriminate phonetically” and better spoken fluency, with no diminished performance in reading or writing characters (Jerome L. Packard, 1990, p. 173).

Ye conducted online surveys of 914 students, enrolled in 75 postsecondary institutions, and 119 instructors, employed at 124 universities (Ye, 2011). The survey asked about preferences and actual practices in the timing of the introduction of Chinese characters in introductory courses (2011). Ye also interviewed 21 students and 5 instructors (2011). Most of the programs in the survey introduced characters at the outset of instruction, and most of the respondents, both students and instructors, indicated a preference for that approach. Only about 25% of the teachers favored a delay in introducing Chinese characters. These respondents agreed that “a solid foundation in speaking and listening skills can better ensure that students progress to reading and writing” (p. 117). They also agreed, however, that “characters are an important part of Chinese language” and “Everything in China is written in characters” (p. 117). Hence, even those who favored delaying the introduction of Chinese characters supported the teaching of Chinese characters, but after a brief delay to establish some oral language skills first.

The most common reason indicated by instructors for not delaying the introduction of characters was a belief that this approach would make learning characters “less difficult in the long run” (Ye, 2013, p. 619). Instructors also agreed that “characters are an essential aspect of

the Chinese language,” “students are interested in learning characters,” and “if learning characters is delayed, then students are likely to rely on pinyin” (p. 619). Ye noted also that over 30% of the instructors did not give any reason for not delaying the introduction of characters but just seemed to feel that “immediately introducing written characters was self-evident” (p. 619). It would appear that, for the majority of the teachers in this study, teaching Chinese without characters, even if only for an initial period, is unacceptable. As one teacher commented in an interview, “characters are an integral part of the Chinese language. [...]students can connect characters to speaking and listening from the beginning, rather than wait until the second semester. Otherwise, students may resist writing characters” (Ye, 2011, p. 112). Ye commented that the teachers interviewed who preferred to teach characters at the beginning of the semester gave responses that “indicate that their own literacy education in China influenced their beliefs” (p. 122). She did not explain her rationale for this assertion. Overall, however, the study makes an important contribution in that it demonstrates a strong attachment among CFL teachers to teaching Chinese characters as an integral part of the language.

*Lü and Lavadenz: “Native Chinese-speaking K-12 Language Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices” (2014).* Chan Lü and Magaly Lavadenz conducted a mixed-methods study designed to examine the relationships between the beliefs and practices of CFL teachers (2014). They chose literacy pedagogy beliefs and practices as a focus of the study, in light of the difficulty of teaching and learning Chinese literacy. “Chinese teachers’ unconscious, sometimes culturally imposed, assumptions about literacy instruction may lead to frustration and misunderstanding in students with an alphabetic language background” (p. 631). The researchers situated this focus on literacy teaching within the context of the proficiency-oriented, student-centered pedagogy

and World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages endorsed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Board, 2015).

As part of their conceptual framework, the authors presented linkages between theories of reading (bottom-up versus top-down processing) with teacher-centered versus learner-centered approaches to pedagogy. In bottom-up reading, readers decode the meaning of text “from the smallest textual units at the ‘bottom’ (letters and words) to larger and larger units at the ‘top’ (phrases, clauses, intersentential linkages)” (Carrell, 1988, p. 2). In top-down theories of reading, readers rely upon contextual information and background knowledge to predict, infer, and hypothesize meaning from the text, using cues from the “graphonic, syntactic, and semantic systems of the language” to confirm those hypotheses (p. 3). The “whole language” pedagogy approach popularized in the 1980s drew upon top-down models of reading and proposed a classroom philosophy which redefined “reading and writing as processes for making sense out of and through written language” and repositioned the learner as an active agent, with the teacher-student relationship characterized by “supportive development rather than controlling” (Goodman, 1989, p. 69).

Lü and Lavadenz noted that previous studies of CFL literacy learning and teaching strategies have generally focused on bottom-up strategies in decoding Chinese characters. They linked bottom-up reading strategies in Chinese with teacher-centered classrooms, implying that an analytical approach to Chinese characters would necessarily be associated with the explicit teaching of decoding Chinese characters. The authors contrasted this with the emphasis on context and meaning in top-down approaches to reading and linked this approach to a student-centered classroom. They also mentioned the interactionist model of reading which, in their description, “integrates these two divergent views (bottom-up and top-down)” and indicated that

teachers aiming to use an interactionist approach would be expected to express a balance between bottom-up and top-down preferences (p. 634).

The participants in the study were recruited from teachers participating in a combined teacher training and student teaching summer STARTALK program. STARTALK is a federally funded program that offers summer institutes for students and/or teachers in critical languages. The teacher programs offer training in standards-based pedagogy emphasizing STARTALK-endorsed best practices such as student-centered learning and teaching in the target language. 39 native speakers of Chinese were included in the study. The participants were given a survey with two groups of statements related to teacher beliefs, with responses indicating degrees of agreement using a Likert scale. The first section contained 25 statements related to beliefs about literacy instruction, with 10 statements characterized as related to “top-down/child-centered” learning and 15 statements related to “bottom-up/teacher-centered learning,” as well as one additional statement about preference for “teacher-centered vs. student-centered literacy class” (Lü & Lavadenz, 2014, pp. 639-640). The “top-down/child centered” section included statements such as “Directly teaching students how to use the phonetic radical and semantic radical of Chinese characters is not important, because students can come to know more Chinese characters and words through extensive reading” (p. 639). An example of a statement in the “bottom-up/teacher-centered” section is “The ability to understand single words is very important for reading comprehension” (p. 640). The survey instrument did not include any statements labeled by the authors as directly related to the interactive reading model. The second section of the survey presented statements related to “standards-based language teaching,” e.g. “an effective language teacher should use target language (Chinese) in the classroom” (p. 643). In addition to the surveys, the researchers selected four volunteers for classroom observation and interviews.

The responses to the first section of the survey indicated that the teachers generally preferred bottom-up approaches to CFL literacy instruction. “The teachers believed that reading involved proceeding from lower levels to higher levels[...] and that the teaching of word recognition and decoding skills was important and necessary” (Lü & Lavadenz, 2014, p. 638). The classroom observations also found strong evidence of bottom-up instruction. The teachers “explicitly taught and emphasized the importance of character recognition; the teachers predetermined characters for each lesson or unit during lesson planning sessions and consistently chose which characters to write during actual literacy instruction” (p. 638). The researchers observed that the teachers tried out different games to engage students with the characters, rather than insisting upon traditional practices such as rote copying, but even these activities were still very consistent with a bottom-up approach.

The single question directly addressing student-centered versus teacher-centered learning elicited “a modest preference for the student-centered approach” (pp. 641-642). In the classroom observations, however, the researchers noted that the teachers seemed to lack a clear understanding of student-centered teaching.

The section on standards-based teaching generally elicited responses in agreement with the standards. The classroom observation analysis showed that the teachers observed lacked a clear understanding of how to teach in ways consistent with the standards. The researchers concluded that the teachers need more training in “practical pedagogical strategies” and in “opportunities for thoughtful and retroactive reflection on student learning” (p. 646).

The discussion and conclusions in this study focused primarily on the authors’ views of the additional training needed by novice CFL teachers. The authors called for teacher training for CFL teachers to include more reflection, in order to build deeper understanding of the theoretical

basis for teaching. The study attempted to connect teacher beliefs on theories of reading, i.e. bottom-up versus top-down, with beliefs on student-centered, standards-based, i.e. proficiency-oriented, teaching. The literature review and discussion, however, did not explore these relationships in any depth. Although the authors did refer to teacher awareness that “their students’ learning should not parallel the more traditional ways in which they themselves were taught,” they did not raise questions related to the source of the teachers’ belief systems or about the role of cultural background (p. 647). Overall, however, the study is a useful preliminary effort in examining the beliefs of Chinese teachers on teaching CFL literacy.

### **Part Three: Conceptual Framework**

#### **Teacher cognition.**

*Introduction to studies of teacher cognition.* For several decades, researchers seeking to understand teacher behaviors have attempted to study the cognition of teachers. Observers of teachers have noted that teacher actions in the classroom are not necessarily consistent with the pedagogy imparted in teacher training. This has given rise to speculation that classroom pedagogy decisions are sometimes driven by more deeply held beliefs from other sources. Often motivated by a desire to improve the effectiveness of teacher training, researchers have attempted to identify those deeply held beliefs, as well as the sources and susceptibility to change of teacher beliefs. A reliable model for understanding teacher cognition, however, has proven elusive. A 2012 meta-analysis of over 700 peer-reviewed, empirical studies on teacher beliefs published in the previous 57 years prior found that researchers examined the topic from a wide range of theoretical perspectives and employed a variety of methodologies to focus on different specific beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012). The authors note, however, that, despite the many attempts to establish “a clear psychological construct, beliefs, that could serve as an explanatory

and predictive mechanism for explaining differences in teachers' practices,...outcomes with students,...and experiences," the construct of "beliefs" remains "murky" (p. 471).

Many of the studies in the past two decades have cited an earlier overview of the field by Pajares (Pajares, 1992). Pajares' catchy title, referring to the "messy construct" of teacher beliefs, probably contributed in part to the popularity of the article. In the text of his essay, Pajares actually argued that "the construct is less messy, far cleaner, and conceptually clearer than it may appear" and "when specific belief constructs are properly assessed and investigated, beliefs can be [...] the single most important construct in educational research" (1992, p. 329). Pajares attempted to tease apart the constructs of belief and knowledge. In his analysis, he drew substantially from a previously little noticed 1987 essay by Jan Nesper (J. Nesper, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Subsequently, Nesper's article attracted the attention of many researchers and is still widely cited by researchers examining teacher beliefs. Nesper has more recently distanced herself from the article, criticizing herself for "arbitraging" terms and concepts from cognitive psychology and for publishing a "detachable" text not grounded in empirical data (2012, p. 454).

Nesper's original work still resonates, despite her more recent disclaimers, because her essay offers an eloquently stated explanation for the decision-making process of teachers in the complex setting of the classroom. She characterizes teaching as an "entangled domain" in which teachers are often confronted with "ill-structured problems" which may not be easily addressed by ready-made "courses of action" (1987, pp. 324-325). Belief systems, she asserts, can be distinguished from knowledge by features such as "'existential presumption,' 'alternativity,' 'affective and evaluative loading,' and 'episodic structure'" (1987, p318). Beliefs, unlike knowledge, are closely linked to emotion and direct personal experience. She suggests that episodic memories of salient personal experiences serve both as a source and an organizing



structure of those beliefs (1987). She argues also that belief systems, unlike knowledge systems, are “unbounded” or “loosely bounded” with “no clear logical rules for determining the relevance of beliefs to real-world events and situations” (1987, p. 321). Because belief systems are unbounded, Nespor argues, they can be applied to a “vast range of new events or experiences” and are therefore “particularly useful for dealing with ill-structured problems and entangled domains—the very kinds of domains and problems that one might expect to find predominating in school settings” (1985, p. 27).

Subsequent researchers have continued the quest for a common understanding of constructs that can be operationalized to study how teachers think. Some scholars have focused on the epistemological foundations for teacher’s belief systems. In a critical review of previous research in epistemological theories in education, Hofer and Pintrich note that “*beliefs* has been a particularly slippery term in the psychological literature” and that researchers have offered a range of definitions attempted to distinguish beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge (1997). Hofer and Pintrich propose a “construct of epistemological theories composed of the four dimensions of certainty of knowledge, simplicity of knowledge, source of knowledge, and justification for knowing” (1997, p. 133). Hofer and Pintrich later acknowledged that their theoretical construct might evolve as researchers began to address these questions with constructivist approaches based upon a relativist worldview.

A suggestion has been made that students (and, presumably, teachers) may have “a range of epistemological resources, the activation of which depends on context” (Hammer & Elby, 2002). Other researchers have focused on teacher cognition that evolves with direct experience in the classroom. Elbaz labeled this “practical knowledge” and the construct was expanded by Clandinin and Connelly as “personal practical knowledge” (D. J. Clandinin, 1985; Connelly et

al., 1997; Elbaz, 1983). In an in-depth review of research on the role of beliefs in the professional development of teachers, Richardson notes that the data show that incoming pre-service teachers arrive with strong beliefs about teaching and learning (Richardson, 1996). These beliefs “are powerful and relate to... previous life and schooling experiences” (Richardson, 1996, p. 109). The studies reviewed by Richardson reflect a weak impact of professional training, which “is sandwiched between two powerful forces—previous life history, particularly that related to being a student, and classroom experience as a student teacher and teacher” (p. 113).

*Studies of second/foreign language teacher cognition.* Research on the impact of teacher belief systems has been extended also to second/foreign language teaching. Researchers in this domain of teaching have also not developed a generally accepted definition for this complex construct. In a widely cited overview of second and foreign language teacher cognition, Simon Borg notes that, as in mainstream education research, studies of L2 teachers have also employed a diverse array of labels and constructs, sometimes ambiguously defined (2003). In a 2007 “state-of-the-art” essay, Turnbull and Arnett note that researchers investigating the role of teacher beliefs among second and foreign language teachers have used terms such as “attitudes,” “reasoning,” “knowledge,” “perceptions,” “decisions,” “guiding maxims,” “personal practical knowledge,” and “beliefs,” in many cases without defining these constructs (2007). Borg points out that the diversity in terminology and concepts obscures several overlapping themes in these studies: “the personal nature of teacher cognition, the role of experience in the development of these cognitions, and the way in which instructional practice and cognition are mutually informing” (2003, p. 83). Rather than distinguish among beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and other aspects of teacher thinking, Borg chooses “teacher cognition,” as “an inclusive term to embrace

the complexity of teachers' mental lives" (p. 86). He defines this term as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching-what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81).

For the purposes of this study, I have not attempted to thread a needle with a finely honed definition of "belief." I have opted instead for an inclusive concept based upon Borg's construct of teacher cognition, with a focus on "beliefs" within that construct. As a defining feature of "beliefs" I draw on the work of Milton Rokeach to look for cognition that appears to guide action. Rokeach defined "belief" as a type of value:

An enduring prescriptive or proscriptive belief that a specific mode of behavior or end-state of existence is preferred to an opposite mode of behavior or end-state. This belief transcends attitudes toward objects and toward situations; it is a standard that guides and determines action, attitudes toward objects and situations, ideology, presentations of self to others, evaluations, judgements, justifications, comparisons of self with others, and attempts to influence others. (Rokeach, 1973, p. 25).

A belief, in this schema is a rule for living, a guide for action. In my conversations with the participants, I have attempted to identify cognitions that appear to meet this description.

***The Borg model for language teacher cognition.*** Borg completed a qualitative meta-analysis of 64 studies of second and foreign language teacher cognition, in which he examined evidence for answering the following key questions:

What do teachers have cognitions about?

How do these cognitions develop?

How do they interact with teacher learning?

How do they interact with classroom practice?

(Borg, 2003, p. 81)

Based upon the evidence presented in the studies included in the meta-analysis, Borg developed a model to represent the key categories of experiences of language teachers and how those experiences contribute to language teacher cognition.

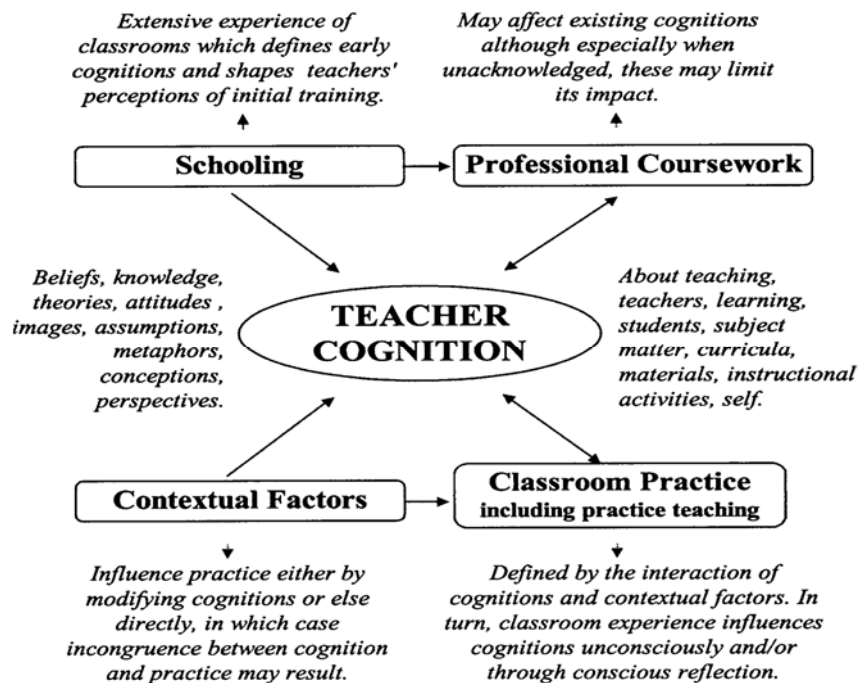


Figure 1: The Borg model of second language teacher cognition. (Borg, 2003, p. 82) (quoted from unpublished Borg manuscript dated 1997)

*Schooling (and learning outside of school).* One of the patterns Borg identifies is the sustained influence of schooling experiences. Referring to Lortie’s concept of “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), Borg notes that teachers often form early impressions of language teaching through their experiences as learners. He looks at studies demonstrating that teachers’ opinions on language pedagogy are often derived from their own positive or negative experiences as language learners (Borg, 2003). He concludes that the prior language learning experiences of second language teachers “establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualizations of L2 teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives” (p. 88).

The studies examined by Borg focus primarily on classroom experiences but, in at least one instance, also incorporate language learning experiences outside of school. It might be reasonable, then, to extend Borg's concept of "schooling" to include language learning experiences within the home and other experiences outside of formal schooling.

*Professional coursework.* In the studies examined by Borg, professional training achieves a variable impact. Cognitive change and behavior change do not always match, and the type of data used as evidence of change varies in the studies reviewed (2003). Borg notes a need for further research, particularly longitudinal research, to examine the outcomes of teacher training programs.

*Classroom practice, including practice teaching.* Borg looked at studies examining the relationship between teacher cognition and classroom practice. Many of these studies look at classroom decision making from what Borg terms a "technicist view of teaching" to identify the antecedents for instructional decisions, particularly departures from lesson plans, and describe the process used by teachers to make pedagogical choices (2003, p. 93). In Borg's model, classroom practice interacts with teacher cognition in both directions. He notes that "cognition not only shapes what teachers do but is in turn shaped by the experiences teachers accumulate" (2003, p. 95). He points to several studies demonstrating that the cognition of experienced language teachers differs significantly from that of novice teachers. Experienced teachers, for example, are more likely than novice teachers to focus more on language issues and less on classroom management (Borg, 2003).

*Contextual factors.* Context, in Borg's model, refers to the specific "social, psychological, and environmental realities of the school and classroom" (2003, p. 94). He lists as examples "parents, principals' requirements, the school, society, curriculum mandates, classroom

and school layout, school policies, colleagues, standardized tests, and the availability of resources” (2003, p. 94). Borg highlights examples of specific school contexts that thwart teachers’ ability to implement their beliefs. Teachers coping with heavy workloads and large classes, for example, find themselves unable to practice student-centered teaching or communicative language teaching, despite their own beliefs in the efficacy of those pedagogies (2003).

Borg’s concept of context does not appear to extend to a larger context of cultural environment. For example, his model does not appear to account for the shared cultural values in the environment surrounding the learning and teaching experiences of the teachers. Other researchers have noted the need to consider “a teachers’ sociolinguistic and sociocultural upbringing and life experiences” when examining the past experiences that shape teacher beliefs (Turnbull & Arnett, 2007, p. 24). Second and foreign language teachers may have been raised and educated in cultural environments other than the culture surrounding their current teaching assignments. Conflict between the cultural values imparted in a teacher’s sociocultural upbringing and the cultural context in which a language teacher works could explain gaps between teacher beliefs and behaviors and even resistance to change.

*Second/foreign language teacher cognition and culture.* A few researchers examining language teaching experiences have drawn on social psychologist Hofstede’s theories of culture (e.g. (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, Trumbull, Keller, & Blanca, 2010). These studies primarily focus on cross-cultural teaching contexts in which the teacher and the students have different cultural backgrounds. The studies employ Hofstede’s theories that cultures can be situated on a continuum of each of four different dimensions of cultural difference—“Individualism versus Collectivism, large versus small Power Distance, strong versus weak Uncertainty Avoidance,

and Masculinity versus Femininity” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 301). For example, Rothstein-Fisch’s team used the Individualism versus Collectivism dimension to explain the differences between the attitudes of teachers and Latino immigrant children in one school in the United States (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2010). Hofstede’s theoretical framework may shed some light on cultural conflicts in academic settings but may not provide adequate explanatory value for the inner cognition of language teachers. Other scholars have attempted to construct theories more closely connected to teaching and learning within specific cultural contexts. Singleton points out that childhood experiences with learning are situated in a social context with a set of “cultural learning theories” (as quoted in Cowie, 2006, p. 24). These include beliefs and values on what is worth learning, where knowledge comes from, the characteristics of a “good” student and of a “good” teacher, the status of teachers in society, who gets an education, whether an education improves one’s social status, the “best” ways to learn and other aspects of teaching, learning, and the role of education in society. Although these beliefs may be implicitly and often uncritically shared by members of a culture, they may vary widely among cultures. A “good” teacher in Japan, for example, may be associated with the metaphors “friend, an arouser, a source of knowledge, a model, a parent” whereas a “good” teacher in Turkey is associated not only with “friend,” “parent,” and “source of knowledge” but also with “sibling, a sunny day, a guide, a comic, and a model” (Cortazzi, Jin, & Wang, 2008, p. 119). The most valued sources of learning may be a prescribed canon of ancient texts, as in pre-modern China, or direct personal experience, as in the Amazonian Pirahã culture (Everett, 2009). The learning process can vary widely. Examples include step-by-step learning for both vocational and personal advancement, as in China, consensus and dialogue, as in Ubuntu culture, or group learning by discussion and

daily tasks within the extended family, as in Maori and Pakeha culture (Cseh, Kumar, & Cavallaro).

*Extending the Borg model to include culture.* Ferro's dissertation study extended Borg's model to account for the role of culture (Ferro, 2014). Her study was motivated by her observations of the struggles of international teachers from China to adapt to U.S. classrooms, in particular to the student-centered, standards-based pedagogy currently expected in many U.S. schools. She noted the need to develop better teacher training programs for international teachers that included consideration of the cultural backgrounds, professional identities, and pedagogical beliefs of the teachers. Ferro designed her dissertation study to examine the pedagogical beliefs of Chinese language teachers, their perceptions of standards-based, learner-centered instruction and the relationship between those beliefs and perceptions and classroom practices.

Ferro's research questions included:

1. How do the self-reported pedagogical beliefs of the Chinese language teachers in this study reflect standards-based, learner-centered instruction?
2. How do the self-reported and observed instructional practices of the Chinese language teachers in this study reflect standards-based, learner-centered instruction?
3. In what ways are the pedagogical beliefs of the teachers in this study congruent and incongruent with their instructional practices? (p. 9)

As a theoretical framework for her study, Ferro constructed a model in which the national standards for foreign language teaching and for second/foreign language teachers shape the methods and strategies currently used in standards-based, learner-centered instruction. In this model, classroom practices are impacted not only by the principles of standards-based, learner-centered instruction but also by language teacher beliefs and by cultural context. Beliefs are, in



turn, also shaped by training in the standards, classroom teaching experiences, and cultural context.

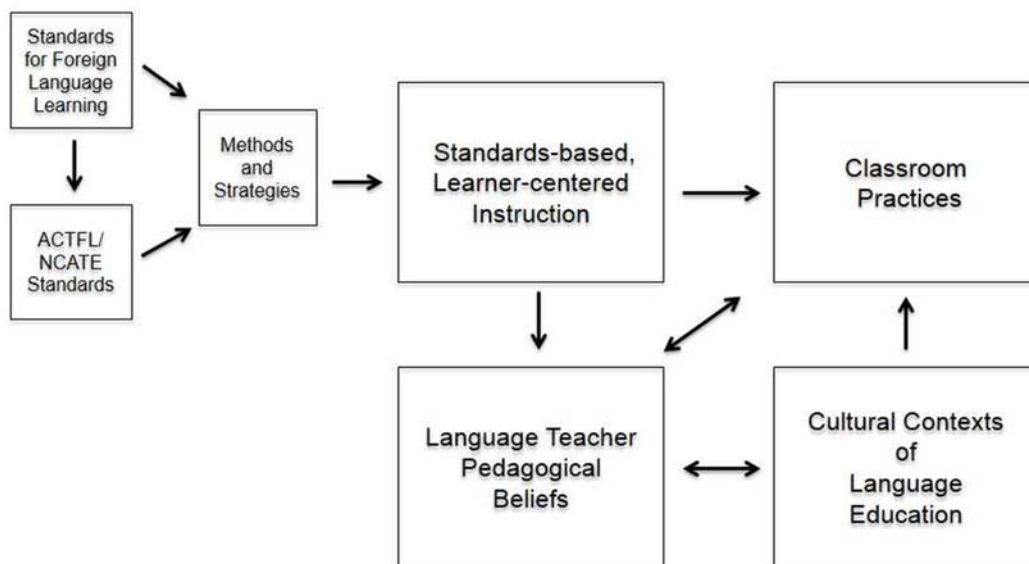


Figure 2: Ferro's theoretical framework (Ferro, 2014, p. 19).

Ferro connected her theoretical framework to an extended version of Borg's model. In her extension of Borg's model, the "cultural contexts of education" serve as a "mitigating factor between standards-based, learner-centered instruction and [the teachers'] pedagogical beliefs" (p. 69). The extended model assumes that language teachers receive training in new pedagogies "through filters shaped by their home cultures of education" (p. 69). Ferro argues that "this is particularly true for language teachers that are recruited from a culture of education that is vastly different from the culture of education where they are expected to teach effectively" and suggests that this characterizes the circumstances of many Chinese language teachers currently teaching in the United States.

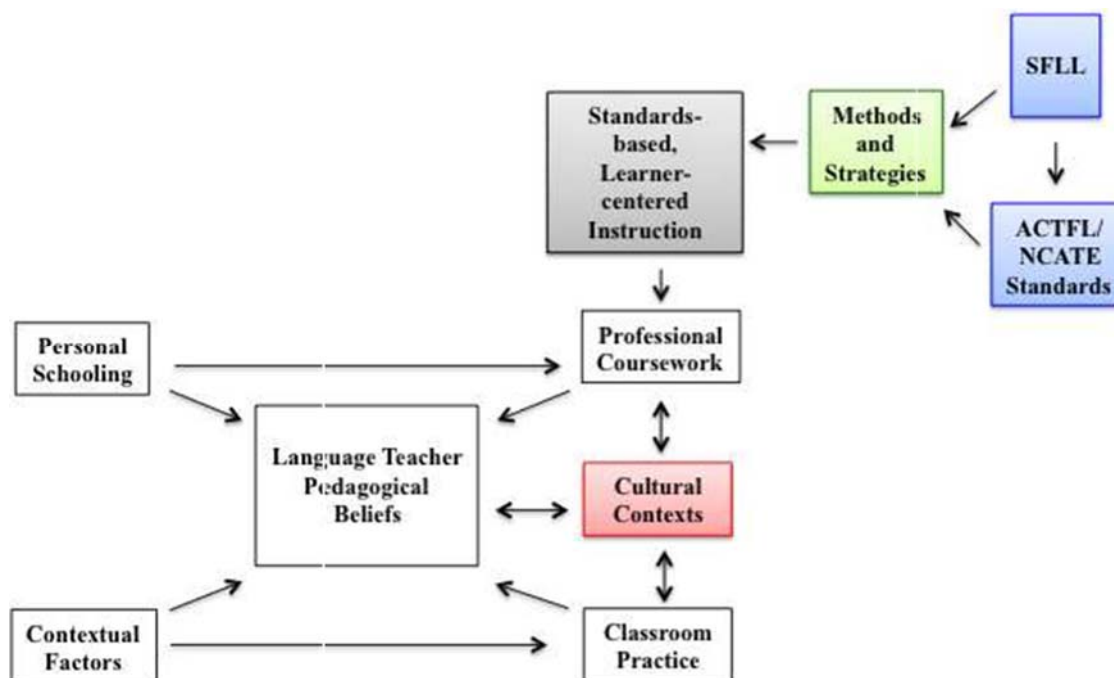


Figure 3: Ferro's approach to expanding Borg's Model for Teacher Cognition in Language Teaching. (Ferro, 2014, p. 69).

Ferro's mixed-methods study included 71 K-12 Chinese language teachers who had participated in at least one STARTALK training program between the years of 2007 and 2011. The teachers had all been raised in China but over half had received some post-secondary education in the United States. 71 teachers completed an online survey which included questions on general pedagogical beliefs adapted from the Teacher Beliefs Interview developed by Luft and Roehrig (2007), additional questions developed by the researcher on the standards, as well as biographic data. A subset of 17 teachers were then interviewed and four teachers were observed in the classroom (Ferro, 2014).

Ferro found that the teachers were aware of the principles of standards-based, learner-centered instruction and were "openly accepting of these educational innovations" as appropriate to the goals of foreign language education in the United States (p. 221). She found evidence of some areas of consistency with acceptance of standards-based, learner-centered instruction in the

teachers' classroom practices, e.g. in the use of authentic materials, both in the self-reported information and classroom observations. On the other hand, she found that the teachers did not completely embrace student-centered learning. They believed "teacher-centered instructional practices were more suitable for introducing new grammar and vocabulary" and that teacher-centered instruction is more efficient and more effective for classroom management. Two participants also indicated a preference for teacher-centered instruction for teaching stroke order in writing characters. The teachers generally advocated a sequence of teacher-centered instruction for new material, followed by student-centered practice. The teachers appeared to find teacher-centered instruction more consistent with their own identity as professionals in the classroom. One teacher commented that she did "not agree with marginalizing teachers" (p. 130). Ferro attributed the teachers' views of the appropriate balance between teacher-centered and learner-centered instruction as originating in the "teachers' personal schooling experiences that occurred in cultures of education that value teacher-centered instruction practices" (p. 183).

In Ferro's analysis, the cultural background of the teachers not only impacted upon their beliefs but also upon their ability to implement these beliefs in the classroom. As evidence, she points out that, although the teachers espoused a belief in teaching in the target language, several reported difficulties in following that practice. Frustrations with classroom management were also common. The teachers themselves attributed these difficulties, at least in part, to cultural differences. They "not only recognized the differences between the cultures of education in their home countries and those found here in the United States, but also stated how these conflicting cultures of education influence their ability to implement standards-based, learner-centered instruction" (p. 203).

Ferro concludes that the evidence collected supports the expansion of Borg's model "to include the cultural contexts of education as a legitimate mitigating factor between language teachers' pedagogical beliefs and their application of standards-based, learner-centered instruction" (p. 227). She adds that the expanded model "also includes the bi-directional relationship between home cultures of education and language teacher pedagogical beliefs" (p. 228). She does not explain how the teachers' beliefs might impact upon the "home culture of education," a construct which she apparently uses to refer to the Chinese culture of education. Although Ferro summarizes some of the findings of Cortazzi and Jin on the Chinese culture of learning, including, for example, traditional Confucian values on the nature of knowledge and the moral and patriotic goals of learning, in her study she appears to equate the Chinese culture of learning with teacher-centered instruction. This may be an over-simplification. It is possible that the traditional Chinese cultural values and expectations regarding education play a more complex role in the cognition of Chinese language teachers. Rather than simply a mitigating factor between beliefs and instructional practice, culture may be embedded in the understanding and interpretation of all learning and teaching experiences of the teachers and may shape teacher cognition in indirect and complex ways that are both shared by members of the group and highly individualized.

An additional limitation of the study is that the surveys and interviews were all conducted in English. Ferro acknowledges that some of the responses, both to the surveys and in the interviews, may have been restricted by the participants' lack of proficiency in English. In addition, the participants had all been exposed to standards-based instructional training in STARTALK training programs and may have answered some questions in ways that conformed to their perceptions of the researcher's expectations rather than their own deeply held beliefs.

Despite the minor limitations of the study, it offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of the cognition of international teachers from China. The extension of Borg's Model for Teacher Cognition to include the role of culture is an important contribution to the theoretical understanding of language teacher cognition and warrants additional exploration and testing. In addition, Ferro aptly points out the importance of valuing home cultures of international teachers in designing training programs. She cautions that overlooking home cultures of international teachers not only leads to ineffective training but may also be a form of cultural imperialism. She calls for a compromise in which "rather than expecting Chinese language teachers to divest themselves of their personal schooling experiences and their pedagogical beliefs related to their home cultures of education, might we actually be able to learn from them and adopt/adapt pedagogical practices from their home cultures of education?" (p. 235).

**Studies of Chinese cultures of learning.** Ferro (2014) raises the question of the role of traditional Chinese cultural values in the cognition of Chinese teachers. What are the traditional Chinese cultural values associated with education? British research team Jin and Cortazzi have worked on comparative cultures of teaching and learning for over two decades. They developed a construct of "cultures of learning," defined as the "taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, values, and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, how to teach or learn, how language is used for learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, as cited in Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 178).

Jin and Cortazzi emphasize that their intent is not to ascribe a monolithic culture to any group of people. In the case of Chinese culture, "we use 'cultures' as a plural form, as a reminder

that Chinese peoples embrace a wide range of both social and individual diversity” (2008, p. 178).

*Metaphor studies.* Using this core construct, Jin and Cortazzi have conducted a series of studies analyzing Chinese “cultures of learning,” often in comparison with other cultures or even across time in Chinese history. They have used a variety of methods to uncover metaphors revealing different facets of the Chinese “culture of learning.” In a study of physical stance, for example, they analyze photographs of learning settings, using the visual images as “bodily enactments of metaphor” (2008, p. 179). They cite photographic data of Chinese classrooms showing large classes with rows of students listening intently to a teacher, often on a wooden platform, as reflections of a teacher-fronted classroom and the “centrality of books” (often open and displayed prominently). They use these images to identify the metaphor “TEACHING IS AN UPRIGHT STANCE” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 181). Jin and Cortazzi see this metaphor as encompassing two traditional Chinese phrases “teaching the book” (*jiāoshū* 教书) and “teaching the person” (*jiāorén* 教人). They note that this metaphor is consistent also with classroom observations in which classroom talk is primarily teacher-directed, with choral response. Referring to pictures of Chinese students reading and reciting aloud outdoors on campus, they suggest also that an operant metaphor for learning in Chinese culture is “LEARNING IS RECITING ALOUD, ALONE, WITH CONCENTRATION AND REFLECTION” (p. 182). As a contrast, the authors compare this with photographic data of Lebanese students chatting and studying in small groups before class, with much more relaxed body language, and assert that the Lebanese metaphor might be “LEARNING IS A STANCE OF SHARING WITH FRIENDS” (p. 183).

Using data from word association studies and surveys, Jin and Cortazzi have developed metaphors for a “good” teacher in Chinese culture, including a teacher is a “gardener,” a “doctor,” “a spiritual engineer,” “a good friend,” “a parent,” “a source of knowledge,” “a guide,” and “a model” (Martin Cortazzi, Jin, & Wang, 2008, p. 119; Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 184).

They argue for the historical continuity of these metaphors by examining traditional Chinese sayings. They point to sayings such as “pulling up a seedling to help its growth” and “a strict teacher produces a talented student” as evidence of the need for teachers “to practice discipline, control and constructive criticism” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 191). The Confucius quote “three people in a group, one must be my teacher” implies both the value of humility and the “profound reciprocity of teaching and learning” (p. 191). Sayings such as “if you make enough effort, you can grind an iron pillar into a needle” illustrate the value of hard work and perseverance (p. 190).

Jin and Cortazzi cite metaphors to argue that, although Confucian tradition was overtly vilified during the early decades of the People’s Republic of China, particularly during the Cultural Revolution when teachers were often condemned as “enemies of the people,” the deep, implicit values of Confucian educational tradition were not fundamentally altered. Toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, one common metaphor for teachers was “THE TEACHER IS RED AND EXPERT,” i.e. both a source of ideological guidance and of content knowledge. Although expressed in terms of socialist ideology, this phrase was not inconsistent with traditional Confucian concepts. A teacher is both a guide for behavior and a virtuoso. Teachers provide caring discipline and guidance for good students. There is a strong bond between

teachers and students, consistent with the traditional Chinese “TEACHER IS PARENT” metaphor (2008, p. 187).

*Contrasting images of teachers in Chinese and Western cultures.* Jin and Cortazzi also looked at survey data to compare perceived images and practices of Chinese and British teachers. In their data, the Chinese teachers are seen as knowledge-based, friendly, understanding, teaching students about life (2008). British teachers are methods-based, stimulating learning through activities and clear explanation. The researchers observe that if a British teacher does not know the answer to a student’s question, the teacher may say he or she does not know. A Chinese teacher is expected to have deep knowledge and therefore will avoid admitting not having a response, either by preparing so thoroughly as to avoid not knowing or by changing the subject (2008). A quantitative study using survey data of Chinese and Australian teachers (in Hong Kong) echoes Jin and Cortazzi’s work. The Hong Kong study found that, although the two groups of teachers were similar in many ways, the Chinese teachers assumed more “parent-like responsibility” (Ho & Hau, 2004).

*Comparative attitudes in China and the United States.* Other studies compare folk beliefs about learning in China with those in the United States (J. Li, 2003b). Li uses word association exercises with native speakers to generate learning-related terms in English and in Chinese and then sort these terms into hierarchical categories. The analysis shows that both cultures generate large numbers of words related to learning, indicating that the learning domain has great significance in each culture. The U.S. list has more words related to social factors, including “resources, institutions, and teaching activities,” and “ideas about thinking, mental processes, and inquiry” whereas the Chinese lists include a greater emphasis on “hard work, effort, and persistence” as well as “strong desire and passion“ (2003b, pp. 261-262).



In Li's analysis, the "Americans elaborate on learners' mental functioning and their related processes," and "the Chinese dwell on personal *virtues* (as referred to in Chinese), attitudes, and action principles in learning" (2003b, p. 264). Examples of these *virtues* would include perseverance in the face of hardship and humility. Li concludes that "European American middle- and upper-class members basically view learning as a process by which individuals' minds acquire what is out there" (p. 264) and that Americans have a "'mind orientation' toward learning" in which learning is important but not "intimately connected to their emotional, spiritual, or moral lives" (p. 265). Li asserts, on the other hand, that "Chinese regard knowledge as something that is indispensable to their personal lives" (p. 265). According to Confucian tradition, knowledge is not only utilitarian but should also serve to further cultivate one's moral and personal improvement. Hence, Li describes Chinese beliefs about learning as reflecting a "person orientation" (p. 265). These different orientations inform behaviors including teaching and parenting styles. For example, Li suggests that Western parents may encourage independence and creativity because of the Western view that learning is a "process of developing and using the mind and exploring the world," whereas Chinese parents may exhibit more direct involvement in their children's learning because "learning is regarded primarily as a process of developing personal virtues and cultivating oneself socially and morally through mastering academic subjects" (p. 265).

***Confucius vs. Socrates.*** Li suggests contrasting historical cultural traditions as the sources for these differences. She compares the Socratic ideal of a learner as "one who develops and uses his or her mind well to inquire into the world" with the Confucian ideal of a learner who seeks to become a "better (more virtuous) person" (J. Li, 2005). Li characterizes the Western model of learning as leading to "understanding the essentials of a given topic or

developing expertise in a field, as well as to personal insights and creative problem solving” and asserts that learners who succeed feel proud whereas those who fail experience low self-esteem (p. 191). She contrasts this description with one of Chinese beliefs as based upon a “virtue orientation” in which students aim to “perfect themselves morally and socially, to achieve mastery of the material, and to contribute to society”) (p. 191). Students are expected to remain humble and failure is expected to result in shame and guilt that lead to greater effort towards self-improvement.

***Risks of stereotyping.*** While comparative analysis of cultures of learning may shed some light on the challenges faced by Chinese language teachers working in the United States and other western, English-speaking countries, it is risky to overgeneralize. Jin and Cortazzi, as well as others, have cautioned against stereotyping and note that the cultural models proposed are not intended to negate or obscure wide individual variation or the multiple cultures that exist in each society (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Yuan & Xie, 2013). “Cultural models are distinct from personal models...we do not imagine a one-to-one correspondence between a cultural model and particular individuals; that is, the models allow for some diversity within a cultural community for which the model is proposed” (Martin Cortazzi et al., 2008, p. 111). Other researchers have also cautioned against taking a “binary view of the attributes of learning in different cultures” and note that “there are often more differences to be found within cultures than between them” (Ryan, 2013, p. 41). It is important to avoid “homogenizing and essentializing individuals” within cultures (Ryan, 2013). Western academics have been accused of stereotyping “Confucian Heritage Culture” learners and pigeonholing Asian students as bringing with them inferior practices of learning or, conversely, as particularly collaborative rather than competitive (Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Louie, 2007). Some of these overgeneralizations have been based upon conflating

Confucian texts of different eras and overlooking the diversity of Confucian heritage cultures (Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Louie, 2007). It is important also to remember that “no culture is static” but constantly changing (Ryan, 2013, p. 54).

*The Cultural significance of the Chinese writing system.* One foundational component within the Chinese culture of learning is the writing system. The often passionate debate among Chinese teachers about teaching literacy arises in part from the powerful salience of the writing system in Chinese culture. Literacy in Chinese, as discussed earlier, plays a prominent role in Chinese culture, both in pre-modern and contemporary society. Even more than literacy, the writing system itself has an especially prominent role within the Chinese culture of learning. Jin and Cortazzi point out that literacy acquisition in Chinese has a strong cultural component that is much more deeply rooted than simply learning to read and write. The characters themselves and the rituals associated with learning and using them are viewed as essential to Chinese identity (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008).

The Chinese writing system is imbued with rich cultural significance that goes far beyond basic written communication. Some even argue that the writing system “has always constituted an essential element of ‘Chineseness’” (Yen, 2005, p. 135). Practicing brush calligraphy and even ballpoint pen handwriting is considered a means of cultivating one’s mental and physical health (Yen, 2005). In pre-modern China, copying the classics with a brush was an important educational practice, designed to indoctrinate students in Confucian ideology as well as to improve handwriting (Kraus, 1991). Elegant calligraphy was considered a hallmark of elite sophistication (1991). The hours of practice required to become an accomplished calligrapher ensured that the skill was restricted primarily to males of the wealthy classes (1991). Calligraphy was evaluated on some levels of the national civil service examinations and good “calligraphy

was an emblem of an official's sophistication" (1991, p. 38). The calligraphy of officials, particularly high-ranking officials, was often distinctive and recognizable by the public. It has been argued that, due in part to dialect differences, "calligraphy took the place occupied in modern Western politics by public speaking" (1991, p. 39). Daughters of landowning families sometimes also became competent in calligraphy but their work never entered the public sphere (1991). Elegant calligraphy in pre-modern China, therefore, was a signifier of elite, male power.

Although the traditional art of calligraphy has been criticized at times in socialist China as a remnant of oppressive, feudal practices, good calligraphy remains today a required attribute of elite political leaders. Calligraphy is still used in China today to convey endorsement of political stance or patronage. The People's Daily masthead still displays Chairman Mao's distinctive calligraphy, and Deng Xiaoping's calligraphy is sometimes enshrined over the main gates of some universities, to indicate past political patronage (Q. Wang, 1994; Yen, 2005). Poor calligraphy by leaders is seen as a sign of weakness or lack of intelligence and sophistication. Hua Guofeng, Mao's successor as chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, was mocked for his awkward calligraphy (Kraus, 1991). At openings of institutions and other ceremonial events, attendees are often asked to write inscriptions with a calligraphy brush. Chinese calligraphy remains an important signifier of power and strength in the public arena in China.

Not only calligraphy but also the writing system itself is freighted with political implication. As Yuehping Yen points out, "because of its importance as an emblem of Chineseness, Chinese writing has been a locus of continuous re-examination and redefinition concerning China's place in the modern world since the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, the issue of Chinese writing has been one of the major battlegrounds for indigenous cultural critiques and self-identification" (Yen, 2005, p. 159). The narrative of Chinese history

taught to children includes the story of Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor, mandating a consistent style and set of forms for Chinese characters, as an important example of the controversial First Emperor's contributions to unifying China (F. Wang et al., 2009; Yen, 2005). The national narrative also proudly emphasizes the role of Chinese characters as a unifying force throughout the history of dynastic China, as all literate Chinese throughout different regions of the country could read the same texts, despite speaking mutually unintelligible Chinese languages, or "dialects."

As discussed in earlier sections on Pinyin and on simplified characters, reformists in the early twentieth century viewed the Chinese writing system as inefficient and backward, "the chronic disease responsible for China's debilitation" (Yen, 2005). The opponents offered passionate arguments for preserving Chinese characters, as an essential component of Chinese cultural heritage and identity (2005). Those in favor of simplification, rather than elimination, of Chinese characters eventually prevailed in mainland China. The continuing vehement and highly politicized arguments over the form of Chinese characters are further evidence of the critical cultural significance of the writing system.

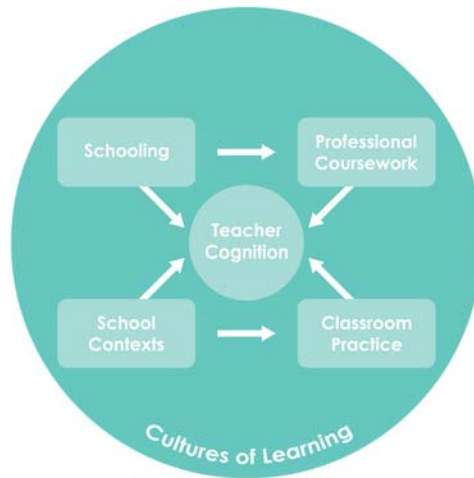
Chinese characters also play an important role in folk culture. A wealth of folklore is attached to popular etymology and divination using Chinese characters (Yen, 2005). Characters carefully chosen for both aesthetic value and meaning are often used in decorative contexts at festivals and events such as weddings. Folk religious traditions include writing characters on talismans invested with magical powers (2005). In traditional contexts, folk astrologers apply the Five Elements Theory (a cosmological scheme used in philosophy, medicine, fengshui and other traditional practices) to make recommendations for names. After calculating the balance of the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water) present at the time of a child's birth, astrologers

recommend characters that include radicals for any of the five elements considered deficient in the child's fate (2005). Fortune tellers use the components and numbers of strokes in characters to predict the fates of individuals or other entities (2005).

The Chinese writing system, therefore, is not only a means of encoding the spoken language of Chinese but also a set of symbols empowered in the realms of politics, aesthetics, and the supernatural. All of this adds to the cultural weight teachers of Chinese must contend with when teaching Chinese literacy.

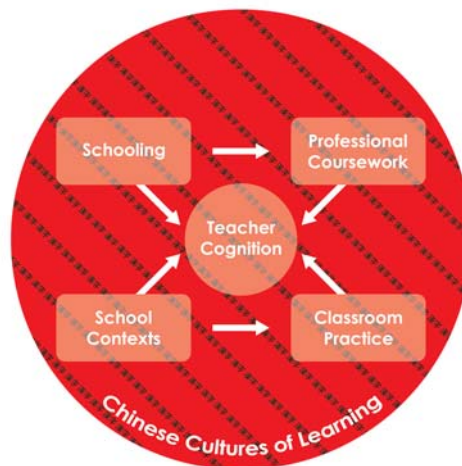
**Conceptual framework: a multi-faceted lens.** This study will adopt a composite, multi-faceted lens which will extend Borg's model to include the Chinese cultures of learning and awareness of the cultural significance of the Chinese writing system to explore the beliefs of Chinese language teachers on teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers.

This extension of Borg's model will be similar to Ferro's in that it extends the model to include the role of culture. In this conceptualization of Borg's model, however, culture is posited not as a filter in a linear flow of cognitive development, but as a cultural environment that surrounds the teachers and permeates their learning and teaching experiences. Figure 4 places Borg's model (see Figure 1) in a surrounding atmosphere of cultures of learning. This is designed to illustrate the relationship of cultures of learning to the cognition of teachers in Borg's model. In this conceptualization of the extended model, the cultures of learning are not specified. (Note that "schooling" here and in the following figures includes childhood learning experiences outside of school, as discussed previously and below.)



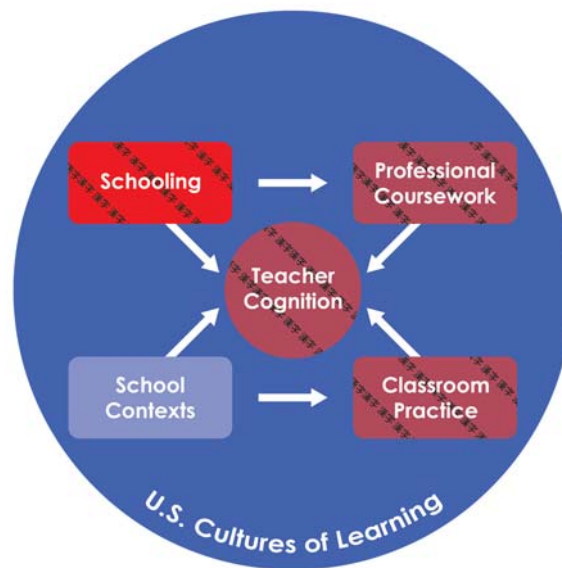
*Figure 4: The Borg model extended to incorporate the role of surrounding cultures of learning. Adapted from (Borg, 2003, p. 82).*

Figure 5 uses the reconceptualized, extended version of Borg’s model to take into account that, in their native society, Chinese teachers are surrounded by Chinese cultures of learning, which shape all of their learning and teaching experiences.



*Figure 5: The cognition of Chinese teachers in China, as represented by the Borg model extended to incorporate the role of surrounding cultures of learning. Adapted from (Borg, 2003, p. 82).*

Finally, Figure 6 illustrates the phenomenon in which, when the Chinese teachers go to the United States to teach CFL, they carry with them their own experiences in Chinese cultures of learning and then experience teaching, school environments, and sometimes even professional training within U.S. cultures of learning. The interaction of the Chinese cultures of learning and the U.S. cultures of learning may shape the cognition of individual teachers from China in different ways. It is possible that, in the cognition of some teachers, the two sources of cultural values conflict while for others a harmonious balance is achieved. The Borg model allows for continued, ongoing interaction of experiences with cognition that may result in change over time. The study proposed here aims to view the stories of the Chinese teachers through this lens, to allow a picture of their individual perceptions of learning and culture to emerge.



*Figure 6: The cognition of CFL teachers in the United States, as represented by the Borg model extended to incorporate the role of surrounding cultures of learning. Adapted from (Borg, 2003, p. 82)*



By looking at cognition related to the teaching of literacy, a language domain that is, in the case of Chinese, so closely interconnected with traditional cultural values related to learning, it may be possible to bring to the foreground the influence of deeply rooted cultural values within the categories of Schooling, School Contexts, Classroom Practice, and Professional Coursework.

*Schooling: CFL teachers' experiences as learners (both in and outside of the classroom).*

*Approaches to teaching literacy in Chinese schools.* Borg's model suggests that teacher cognition is strongly influenced by each teacher's experiences as a learner. The CFL teachers in this study learned Chinese literacy as a first language in China. It may be useful to consider some of what is known about Chinese first language literacy acquisition in the educational systems there. The first language literacy acquisition experiences of the teachers in the study may vary somewhat depending upon where and in which decade they attended primary school. In the early decades of the PRC, characters were taught largely by rote memorization, with some minimal instruction on semantic radicals. Pinyin was introduced to elementary school students to teach correct pronunciation but not as an important tool for literacy (Yongbing Liu, 2005).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, education experts in China called for reforms of literacy education in response to what was called a "literacy crisis," as evidenced by studies showing poor literacy achievement in Chinese junior secondary schools (Yongbing Liu, 2005). The crisis was attributed to the Cultural Revolution and to pedagogy based on rote memorization of content not engaging for students (Yongbing Liu, 2005). Educators began experimenting with new ways of using Pinyin for literacy in the mid-1980s (Yongbing Liu, 2005). In these experiments, Pinyin was used not only to gloss the pronunciation of new characters but also "as an independent writing system" (Yongbing Liu, 2005, p. 406). This allowed students "to escape

from the limitations imposed by the slowness of character learning and to read and write sophisticated texts that suit their interests and cognitive capabilities at a very early stage” (Yongbing Liu, 2005, p. 409). In third grade, the Pinyin support is gradually withdrawn so that Pinyin is then used only to gloss the pronunciation of new characters (Jerome L. Packard et al., 2006). The use of Pinyin as described here was promulgated as officially sanctioned pedagogy by the Ministry of Education in 2000 (Yongbing Liu, 2005).

As of the 1990s in mainland China, elementary school education aimed to teach 3,000 characters by the end of sixth grade, with most new characters taught in the early grades and a gradual move to greater emphasis on reading comprehension and composition (Xinchun Wu, Li, & Anderson, 1999). The pedagogy stressed drill and repetition. One observer described an elementary school lesson on reading and writing:

The teacher reads new characters and shows how to write them with careful attention to the placement and order of strokes of the pen. The teacher tells ‘stories’ about some characters to make them more memorable, but most characters are taught using arbitrary mnemonics instead of by highlighting structurally significant features. Students read new characters repeatedly, unison whole-class reading alternating with individual turns. For homework, students are required to write new characters many times. (Xinchun Wu et al., 1999, p. 585)

In traditional Chinese literacy pedagogy for young children, minimal attention was paid to character structure and explicit instruction on sub-morphemic components was limited to the introduction of a few semantic radicals (Xinchun Wu et al., 1999). Instruction in reading emphasized rote memorization supported by muscle memory developed through extensive copying of characters using correct stroke order (Xinchun Wu et al., 1999). A series of studies

conducted in Beijing in the early 2000s demonstrated that explicit instruction for early elementary school children in the structures of characters and the roles of semantic and phonetic components in compound characters resulted in improved performance in both reading and writing characters (Jerome L. Packard et al., 2006; Shu, Chen, Anderson, Wu, & Xuan, 2003; Xinchun Wu, Anderson, Wenling, Xi, & Xiangzhi, 2002). It is unclear to what extent this practice has taken hold throughout the rest of the country.

The national curriculum for Chinese language arts, geared toward preparation for high-stakes exams, tends to keep literacy classes in lock step throughout the country. In recent years, more experimentation has been allowed at the local level (see, for example Bowcher & Xia, 2012). The exam imperative, however, as well as large classes and cultural traditions, appears to inhibit flexibility. Recent observers have noted that Chinese literacy instruction still tends to follow traditional pedagogy (H. Li, 2015). The patterns of that pedagogy appear to be resistant to change and even to different contexts. A study by Rao, Li, and Tse found consistent features of literacy teaching in China, Hong Kong and Singapore, with a heavy emphasis on direct teaching, copying, and choral reading aloud (Rao, Li, & Tse, 2012). A faculty member from a U.S. university visited her home town in China in 2006. She observed that the literacy teaching there was largely unchanged from her childhood education. “In all the classrooms I visited, from kindergarten to college, the teacher stood in front of the class to lecture and question. From the front of the classroom, the teacher firmly controls what, where and how the students learn” (Y. Hu, 2004). She noted that, even when the teachers asked the students questions about the text studied in class, the teachers identified the correct responses and did not allow for variation (Y. Hu, 2004). She observed also that, as in her childhood, students were not encouraged to read for pleasure outside of class (Y. Hu, 2004).

The lack of student choice in the curriculum was lamented also by a Chinese elementary school teacher who participated in a narrative inquiry study. He described his frustration with the rigidity of the curriculum and pedagogy and the tyranny of the examination system. “I believe literacy is more than a score on a test. Literacy is education for life. Reading should fulfill both a student’s intellectual and his or her aesthetic needs. Instead, in Chinese schools what children read and write about may be totally removed from their experience” (Syed, 2008, p. 6).<sup>17</sup>

*How native speaker readers of Chinese mentally process Chinese characters.* What do we know about how native speakers learn to read and how adult skilled readers mentally process Chinese characters that might be relevant and helpful to CFL literacy teaching?

National education policies prohibit reading instruction in preschool or kindergarten, requiring the delay of reading instruction until first grade, in keeping with an educational philosophy based upon the theories of reading readiness (H. Li, 2015). Studies of reading development in Chinese children, however, have shown that children often show signs of emergent literacy well before first grade. Children as young as three years old can distinguish characters from pictures and by age four can often indicate awareness of the correct orientation of characters (H. Li, 2015). “Chinese children at around age 6 are already sensitive to the cueing functions of phonetic and semantic radicals in compound characters. They are also acquainted with the legal positions of these radicals.” (Cheung et al., 2006, p. 430).

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<sup>17</sup>In Taiwan, the approaches used to teach beginning literacy have been similar to those used in mainland China, except that the students are initially taught a different set of symbols, known as 注音符号 [zhùyīnfúhào], rather than Pinyin, to indicate the pronunciation of the characters, and the characters used are traditional, rather than simplified (Lin, 2000). In recent years, reforms have been implemented to allow for whole language approaches and more student-centered learning (Lin, 2000).

The role of submorphemic components in the mental processing of Chinese characters by adult skilled readers has attracted growing attention from researchers in the past two decades. Linguistic scientists have used behavioral, psycholinguistic, and neurolinguistic methods to investigate the mental processing of Chinese characters, particularly semantic-phonetic compounds. Studies examining the processing of common vs. uncommon radicals, left-right positioning of radicals, more vs. fewer strokes in characters, comparisons of brain regions activated in reading Chinese vs. alphabetic languages, and other questions contribute to new understandings of the mental processes involved in reading Chinese (some examples include Hsiao & Liu, 2010; Hsu, Lee, & Marantz, 2011; Kong et al., 2010; Ying Liu & Perfetti, 2003; Ren, Liu, & Han, 2009; I.-F. Su, Mak, Cheung, & Law, 2012; Tan, Laird, Li, & Fox, 2005; C.-Y. Wu, Ho, & Chen, 2012).

There is some consensus that the semantic values of semantic radicals are activated and facilitate character recognition during skilled reader processing of semantic-phonetic characters (e.g. (Feldman & Siok, 1999). Although there is controversy on the role of phonological activation during the recognition and processing of Chinese characters, a series of studies, including priming studies by Charles Perfetti and colleagues, point to phonological activation as a critical stage in word recognition (Liu, Wang, & Perfetti, 2007; C. Perfetti & Tan, 1998, 1999; C. A. Perfetti, Liu, & Tan, 2005; C. A. Perfetti & Zhang, 1991). Perfetti has proposed an “Interactive Constituency Model” which specifies that the components of a character interact through a visual, orthographic identification process that reaches a threshold activation level that activates the pronunciation of the character, which in turn activates the meaning of the character. The graphic, phonological, and semantic information related to each character are activated as a sequence of overlapping processes (Liu et al., 2007; C. Perfetti & Tan, 1998, 1999; C. A. Perfetti

et al., 2005).

The conclusions of Perfetti's team are consistent with the Universal Phonological Principle (UPP) posited by (Perfetti, Zhang, & Berent, 1992), which proposes that word reading activates phonology at the lowest level of language allowed by the writing system (phoneme, syllable, morpheme, or word).

This field of research holds great promise for expanding our understanding of reading in Chinese. The application of findings in this field to Chinese literacy pedagogy, both for native speakers and for L2 learners, is still very limited. CFL teachers also have little opportunity for exposure to developments in this area of research. This is an area that warrants further investigation by researchers in CFL literacy pedagogy.

*Learning English as a Foreign Language in China.* The relevant schooling experiences of CFL teachers also include their experiences learning English as a foreign language. This may be an important source of embedded memories of what it looks like to teach and learn reading and writing in a foreign language. Again, the learning experiences of the teachers may vary depending upon when and where they studied English. In the 1970s and 1980s, English was taught in China with a national syllabus that followed standardized textbooks and emphasized “sentence and dialogue drills, reading passages, vocabulary and grammar exercises” (X. Zheng, 2005, p.8). Grammar-translation pedagogy, which dominated English teaching in the early decades of the PRC, was still common in the 1970s and 1980s (X. Zheng, 2005). The audiolingual method was promoted during the 1980s and 1990s. The revised national English curriculum promulgated in 2000 ostensibly included elements of the communicative language teaching approach but in a weak form (X. Zheng, 2005). In the early 2000s, the Ministry of Education launched a reform that attempted to shift English teaching from a focus on grammar

and reading comprehension to more effective teaching of communication skills (X. M. Zheng & Borg, 2014). Efforts to reform English teaching in China, however, have met with limited success and the pedagogy still emphasizes grammar and reading, at the expense of developing communicative skills in speaking and listening, in large part because high stakes exams in China still focus on reading and translation (G. Hu, 2002; X. Liao, 2003; H. Yang, 2012; X. Zheng, 1976; X. M. Zheng & Borg, 2014).

***Professional Coursework: CFL teachers and professional training.*** The literature on pedagogy training in China for teachers of Chinese as a second or foreign language appears quite limited. Although several universities in China now offer undergraduate and graduate degrees in this field, I have thus far not found studies of these programs. One exception is a study by Kun Shi who evaluated MA programs for teachers of Chinese as a second or foreign language at six Chinese universities and concluded that the curriculum did not include enough pedagogy training or practical experience (2010). Noting that these programs trained teachers to be sent to the United States and other countries as government-supported visiting teachers, he recommended that the training programs increase the number of credits in pedagogy courses, include more practical instruction in adapting pedagogy to foreign country environments, and strengthen cross-cultural training (2010).

***Classroom practice: CFL teachers' experiences as teachers.***

*Teaching (CFL) literacy in English-speaking countries.* CFL literacy has been taught largely with traditional methods similar to those used to teach native speakers in China, that is, through rote copying, recitation, and memorization of characters. Textbooks and pedagogical methods for teaching Chinese in the United States, have traditionally not explicitly reinforced awareness of the orthography of semantic-phonetic compounds. Some experts have complained

that textbooks have tended to reinforce the “ideographic myth of Chinese as a writing system that “represents ideas directly rather than by way of sounds” (Z. Zhang, 2009, p. 70). Most Chinese language textbooks currently used in U.S. universities contain little explicit information on the decomposition of Chinese characters (Fan, 2010). Even the textbooks that do introduce the component structure of characters have tended to emphasize the semantic radicals almost exclusively, with little or no attention paid to the phonetic components (Z. Zhang, 2009). A greater understanding of phonetic radicals, however, is potentially very helpful to learners. There is strong evidence that pronunciation plays an important role for learners in remembering characters. Studies on learner strategies have shown that learners use pronunciation notes and reading aloud to aid in learning characters (H. H. Shen, 2005). Several studies have found a strong correlation between the ability to name, or give the pronunciation of a character, and recall its meaning (Everson, 1998; Ke, 1996). Some recent educators and scholars are advocating explicit teaching of phonetic radicals, instruction in genre and register, more extensive reading, more meaningful practice, and other methods (Curtain et al., 2016; Everson, 2011).

*Learning to read Chinese as a foreign language.* Adult learners of Chinese, like native speaker Chinese children, appear to gradually develop awareness of the radical components of characters (Helen H. Shen & Ke, 2007; Tong & McBride-Chang, 2010; Xin, 2001). Some studies have also shown that L2 readers of Chinese, over time, develop some of the same patterns of mental processing used by native speakers and access similar neurological resources (Ying Liu, Perfetti, & Wang, 2006; C. A. Perfetti et al., 2007).

There is no common agreement, however, on how learners can best achieve that awareness. Studies of character-learning strategies commonly used by adult L1 English learners of Chinese have found a range of techniques including rote copying, creating idiosyncratic



mnemonics, and reading aloud, as well as analyzing components (Lee - Thompson, 2008; H. H. Shen, 2005). Researcher Helen Shen found that learners perceived the analysis of sub-character components as more useful as they acquired greater proficiency (2005, p. 62). She noted that beginning learners did not appear to appreciate the benefits of character component knowledge, probably because they lacked sufficient vocabulary to perceive useful patterns on their own and suggested that “systematically introducing orthographic knowledge, particularly radical knowledge, to beginning learners can greatly facilitate character learning” (p. 62).

*CFL teachers and U.S. school context issues* In Borg’s model, the institutional and social context of teaching also play a role in teacher cognition. In the case of CFL teachers from China, the institutional culture, curriculum requirements, relationship with administrators and parents, as well as other school environmental factors may present challenges for the teachers and even clash with the expectations and cultural values that the CFL teachers bring from China. Some of these issues were covered in the earlier review of studies of CFL teachers. The lack of high-stakes exams as a lever for encouraging student effort, for example, has been identified by some CFL teachers as a challenge. Interviews with CFL teachers may bring other conflicts and challenges to light.

The conceptual framework outlined above has been applied in this study to the data collection and analysis to seek understanding of the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

Question 1: What do teachers of Chinese as a foreign language believe about teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers?

Question 2: Where do these beliefs come from?

Question 3: How do the teachers view the relationship between their beliefs and their Chinese literacy classroom practices?

## **Chapter III Methods**

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, I will first provide a statement on the epistemology I have embraced for this study, followed by a brief overview of the study design. This will be followed by sections on trustworthiness and ethics, participant selection, procedures for data collection, and analysis methods.

### **Epistemology**

This research focuses on the beliefs of teachers, both explicit and tacit. The puzzle addressed in this study assumes a perspective that each teacher is different and has a unique story, a story that evolves over time and is not static from moment to moment, but has some qualities or patterns that might evoke transferable insights. This perspective would not be easily captured by a research design based upon a positivist or post-positivist epistemology that assumes a fixed reality such that collection and analysis of data could lead to generalizable conclusions. Teaching is an interactive process that takes place between specific individuals. As such, it is a very personal and highly social experience. The underlying ontology for this perspective on teacher beliefs is one that views reality as relative to individual experience. The related epistemological perspective assumes that knowledge is not an externally imposed, fixed body of thought but constructed by individuals through their unique experiences, including social experiences. Therefore, rather than use quantitative surveys or other methods that would generate data points detached from personal thought patterns, I chose to approach this research puzzle with qualitative methods that have allowed me to “get closer to the actor’s perspective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10).

We cannot know for certain where the highly personal beliefs of teachers come from. Perhaps they may be traced to “flashbulb” memories from childhood, family interactions, classroom experiences in both childhood and adulthood, specific interactions with students in teaching settings, pedagogical training, exposure to related texts, and other experiences. All of these experiences may become “grist for the mill” and help shape a teacher’s implicit and explicit beliefs that inform his or her teaching. The intent of this study, then, has been to work with the teachers to collect a variety of “slices of reality” and construct meaning from them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5).

### **Design Overview**

My focus in this study is on the individual perspectives of teachers. What moments in the lives of the teachers have helped shape their current beliefs? How do they view their current teaching? To address these questions, I chose direct, personal interviews as a primary strategy for facilitating expression of personal beliefs by the teachers.

The teachers may or may not be overtly aware of their own beliefs or be able to immediately point to experiences that have had the most impact on those beliefs. Although teaching is a very personal interaction, the cognition and actions of teachers reflect not only their own individual experiences and development but also the cultures within which those experiences occurred (Hamilton, 1996). The “cultural models” referred to by Jin and Cortazzi (2006) are shared assumptions and beliefs by members of a culture about the way the world works, in this case, the world of education. Because these assumptions are tacit, taken-for-granted, and not necessarily overtly expressed, evidence of these cultural models in individual cognition may not be easily brought to light.

For these reasons, I assumed that direct questions about beliefs alone might not always generate responses that would lead to greater understanding of this puzzle. Therefore, in addition to direct questions about teaching, I focused part of the interviews on eliciting stories of personal experiences. I attempted to gather anecdotes from the teachers of their experiences in learning to read and write, both in their native language and in English as a foreign language, and of their experiences in teaching CFL literacy as well as in learning to be teachers. My hope was that the personal anecdotes told by the teachers would reveal some of their tacit beliefs and attitudes.

While this study does not fall within the parameters of a narrative inquiry study, my approach shares an interest in personal stories with the narrative inquiry genre of qualitative research. Narrative inquiry researchers Clandinin and Connelly (1994) note that “people by nature live storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (p. 416). In this study, I collected anecdotes of experience, in addition to other comments. Some of the anecdotes were elaborated stories with some detail but many were just brief vignettes, or even snippets of related conversations. Vignettes and snippets have been used by researchers in other fields, particularly identity studies, to explore the perspectives of individuals. Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2007) calls these “small stories,” which she used to look at issues of identity in young Greek women. A Chinese teacher in England used “small stories” elicited in interviews to complete a study of the professional identities of Chinese language teachers (X. Wang, 2011). I also found it useful to be alert to “small stories” told by the teachers and attend to potential insights to be found in those vignettes.

A few years ago, in a conversation about teaching Chinese characters to a class of beginning high school students, a Chinese teacher commented to me that she felt it was very important to ask the students to copy each character at least twenty times. She then related a

story in which she expressed gratitude for her second-grade teacher who had demanded that my friend and her classmates copy each character two hundred times. She said that she remembered resenting the tedious extra work but later was grateful because she acquired perfect stroke order and attractive penmanship. It struck me that, despite many conversations we had had about the relative merits of instruction on graphic form, stroke order, sequencing of information on character components, etc., what resonated most with this teacher was her own childhood experience of rote practice and of this interaction with her teacher. The vignette appeared to reveal more about my friend's deeply held beliefs than any explicit pronouncements she had made on teaching literacy.

Based upon these observations, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with Chinese language teachers. I initiated the interviews with a list of questions (see section on interview structure below) but approached the conversations with flexibility, to allow the participants to tell their stories, including “small stories,” and freely offer their perspectives on literacy teaching. In addition to the interviews, I asked the participants to provide literacy lesson plans and to allow me to observe the teaching of a lesson that included literacy. I used the lesson plans and teaching observations to develop follow-up questions about the perceptions of the teachers on their own teaching and the ways that their beliefs inform or conflict with their teaching.

The strategy of including lesson plans and teaching observations, in addition to interviews, allowed for triangulation, as I explored the cognition of the teachers. The lesson plans, in some cases, demonstrated how the teachers translated their beliefs into planning. The classroom observations helped me understand how the teachers actually applied their literacy teaching beliefs to the classroom.

## **Trustworthiness and Ethics**

Lincoln and Guba contested the evaluative criteria traditionally used in quantitative research—reliability, validity, objectivity, and generalizability—as reflective of a positivist epistemology not congruous with constructivist qualitative research (2000). They proposed instead credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability as measures of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The following sections describe how I have embedded those features of trustworthiness in my methods.

**IRB approval.** Because my study involves human subjects, I approached the privacy and welfare of my participants with careful rigor. The research plan was submitted to the University of Kansas Human Subjects Review Committee for approval before I gathered any data, including interviews or classroom observations. Each participant was given a letter with information about the project and an informed consent form approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee (see Appendix A). All audio and video recordings and transcripts with personally identifiable information were stored on encrypted drives or locked cabinets, in keeping with the University of Kansas regulations on the protection of privacy and of personally identifiable information. Classroom observation requests were submitted to the host school in advance for approval, following any IRB or other institutional procedures required by the schools. I did not collect or use any data on the students taught by the teachers in this study. This was made clear to the schools and the teachers.

### **Transferability.**

Transferability, as used by Lincoln and Guba, indicates that the findings can be applied to other contexts. One effective way to ensure this is the use of thick description. In this study, I

have studied the data carefully and completed a thick and rich description of what I found. This is presented in Chapter IV.

**Triangulation.** The strategy of including lesson plans and classroom observations was used for triangulation, not to replace the positivist requirement for validation but as an “alternative to validation” to add “complexity, richness and depth” to this research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 5) and as a way to establish credibility.

**Researcher Positionality.** One important component of credibility is the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The qualitative research orientation acknowledges the presence of the researcher in the milieu. “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Shulamit Reinharz has pointed out that the researcher brings a multiplicity of “selves” into the studied world, including “research selves, brought selves..., and situationally created selves” (Reinharz, 1997, p. 5, as quoted in Lincoln & Guba, 2000). While my “researcher self” may step back to rotate and examine the facets of imaginary three-dimensional models of the beliefs studied here, I also cannot ignore the multiple layers of my researcher positionality or, in Reinharz’ terms, “brought self.”

My own personal narrative includes a history of learning to read and write Chinese, from both native speakers and non-native speakers, in the United States, in Taiwan, and in mainland China. I have designed curriculum for teaching Chinese, taught adults and teenagers, and supervised teachers of Chinese. I have also studied the psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic processes involved in reading Chinese. I cannot deny that I have opinions on teaching Chinese. My researcher positionality, therefore, must be acknowledged in the research design and process, as well as in the analysis of the results.



I was very careful to establish my credibility with the participants and assure them that their views would be respected and heard. In addition to the IRB-approved informed consent letter describing the study purpose, I also described my own background to the participants briefly and answered any questions they posed about my background and intent. I carefully conducted the interviews in an atmosphere that was “respectful, nonjudgmental, and non-threatening” (Merriam, 1998, p. 85). This included showing respect for issues of ethnic/national pride and political sensitivities.

Rather than attempt to keep one hand constantly holding up a firewall between my researcher self and brought selves, I have endeavored to maintain attempted constant reflexivity, “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human as instrument’” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 183). For this purpose, I kept a research journal, in which I kept notes on my reflections and research activities. I keep notes on my initial reactions to the data, my process of transcribing and analyzing the data, and doubts and questions that arose. The notes are informal and “messy” but helped me to look back on my journey and see how my thinking evolved, and were included as one component of data for the purpose of analysis.

**Critical friend.** As recommended by my committee, I found a “critical friend” with whom I discussed my experiences in interviewing and my thoughts on the direction of the project. My friend was also working on a dissertation project, at another university, and had more experience in qualitative research. It has been extremely valuable to have her as a sounding board. This component also supported my efforts to maintain confirmability and dependability.

**Checks.** Toward further establishing credibility of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), I offered the participants opportunities to review and make corrections to the transcripts (and

translations, where relevant) of the interviews. Thus far, none of the participants have chosen to do this.

## **Participants**

I employed a purposive approach to selecting participants, seeking individuals who met the following criteria:

- Native speaker Chinese language teachers who are currently teaching in K-12 schools in the United States or have taught in U.S. schools within the past three years, with at least two years of experience teaching in the United States.
- Completed all or most of primary and secondary school education in China.
- Have had relevant professional training in China or the United States or both.

In addition, I hoped to include both male and female teachers and also both teachers of beginning Chinese and those who teach more advanced classes, including AP Chinese. I did not limit the participants to any particular region of the United States but attempted to include teachers in several regions. I had hoped to include participants from Taiwan, as well as different regions of mainland China but I did not make this a requirement for participant selection.

Participants were recruited by word of mouth among friends, acquaintances, and colleagues in the Chinese language teaching profession that I know through my current role as supervisor of a Chinese language teaching program at the University of Kansas. Working through this network, I asked my contacts to recommend teachers who might be willing to participate. I also contacted directly a few teachers whom I knew.

I interviewed seven teachers for the study. In one case, however, I discovered that the teacher, although very enthusiastic about teaching, had had no relevant professional training and therefore did not meet my criteria. A second participant, also a very dedicated teacher of

Chinese, I learned had moved to the United States in elementary school and therefore also did not fit my criteria. Unfortunately, he was the only male teacher who had agreed to participate and I was not able to find another male participant.

My final list of five participants is a purposive sample representation of CFL teachers. All are female. One is in her early 40s and the others are all about 30 years old. The following table includes some basic biographic data. The names used here are all pseudonyms. In some cases, the participants chose their own pseudonyms; in others I chose the pseudonyms. The participants were raised and educated in several different regions in China. They have all completed relevant degrees in China; two also hold graduate degrees from U.S. universities. Two teach in private schools; the others work in public schools. The schools are situated in a variety of locations, including inner city environments and affluent suburbs, in large and midsized cities in the Midwest, upper Southwest, and the mid-Atlantic regions. TCFL refers to teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

*Table 1: Study Participants: Selected Biographic Data*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Wang Xiaomei</b>	<b>Lin Huixian</b>	<b>Tang Jiajia</b>	<b>Jin Yulan</b>	<b>Li Yan</b>
<b>Age (approx.)</b>	About 30	Early 40s	About 30	About 30	About 30
<b>Home region in China</b>	South Central China	Central China	Northern China	Southwest China	Southwest China
<b>Undergrad: major</b>	TCFL	English/Biology teaching	Educational Psychology	Chinese literature/ linguistics	TCFL
<b>Grad: major, place</b>	MA-TCFL, Central China	MS-Business, UK	MA-Curriculum and Instruction, Southern China	MA-Chinese lit, Central China; MA FL Teaching, U.S. university	MA-Ed Psych/Ed Tech, U.S. university

Table 1, cont.

<b>Age group currently teaching</b>	Secondary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Elementary School - Immersion
<b>School location</b>	Inner city, major city, Midwest	Affluent area of major city, Midwest	Inner city, mid-sized city, Midwest	Major city suburb, Mid-Atlantic	Major city affluent suburb, upper Southwest
<b>Type of School</b>	Public-Magnet, IB	Private, AP	Public	Private, AP	Public

## Procedures

**Interviews.** The interviews were conducted in person, face-to-face, in a setting chosen by the participant. In most cases, the setting was the teacher’s schoolroom or a separate work room at the school. Two of the participants chose to hold the interviews in coffee shops. These turned out to be somewhat noisy but relaxed. I attempted to limit the interviews to no more than one hour, to avoid participant fatigue. Most of the interviews were a little more than an hour. In one case, the interview was spread out across shorter segments during the teacher’s breaks and recess during the school day.

**Lesson plans.** I asked each participant to give me at least one lesson plan for teaching CFL literacy. In some cases, the teachers described the lesson plan to me orally rather than giving me a written plan. Some of the teachers also gave me teaching materials that either were to be used with that lesson or that they felt exemplified their literacy lessons.

**Observation.** I observed each of the participants at a time that was convenient for the teacher and when I could travel to her location. When I observed participants in cities far from my location, I conducted the observation and the interview on the same trip, usually interviewing

one day and then observing the next. For the teachers located closer to me, I was able to interview and review the results of the interview before conducting the observation. In one case, I had to wait nearly three months before I could do the observation, due to the IRB procedures of the school district. The other schools took less time to give permission. During the observations, I took descriptive field notes of the teacher's observable behavior bracketed with my comments and questions. I did not take notes on individual students and only mentioned group behavior by students where directly related to my observation of the teacher.

My original proposal allowed for the possibility of follow up interviews, but the initial interviews, observations, and lesson plans provided rich data, and I did not find it necessary to schedule follow-up interviews.

**Interview procedures.** I structured interviews upon the guidelines in Rubin and Rubin (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) on qualitative interviewing. I did not use a formal interview protocol, with a list of questions to be shared with the participants. I preferred, instead, to retain the flexibility to pursue lines of conversation that appear to shed light on the topic. I prepared a conversational guide for the interviews, with a list of the main questions and some potential follow up questions, to help me stay on track. The interview questions were initially structured in what Rubin and Rubin describe as a “tree and branch” structure (p. 145). In this approach, the research problem is divided into a number of parts, with a question for each part. The tree and branch structure allows for breadth but can result in a less natural flow to the conversation. When I found that happening, I allowed the participant to elaborate on the topic that she seemed most interested in discussing. This is something akin to what Rubin and Rubin call the “open the locks” approach with a focus on one or two main questions (p. 144). I approached each interview with flexibility and viewed the conversation as a co-constructed exploration of a topic by myself

and the teacher. This means that, although all of the main questions were covered in each interview, they were not necessarily discussed in the same order or to the same level of detail.

The interviews began with a warm up, with a few biographic data questions and some easy background questions to establish rapport. I chose this approach based on my years of experience and observation of culturally appropriate ways of developing cordial relationships within Chinese culture. I asked each participant to tell me generally about their current teaching situation, including the levels of Chinese and types of students they teach, and how long they had been teaching CFL. I also asked where they grew up and where they received teacher training.

Following the warm up came several “main questions.” The first four were oriented to the sources of cognition identified in Borg’s model. The subsequent questions were designed, in part, to explore attitudes related to the role of the writing system in Chinese cultures of learning or to explore the interaction of U.S. and Chinese cultures of learning in the experiences of the teachers. Each question was intended to elicit memories, stories, vignettes, or comments that convey vividness, nuance and richness followed by probes, as necessary and appropriate, to sustain the conversation and gather greater detail and depth. These included continuation probes, designed to encourage the participant to continue, elaboration probes, to request more detail on a statement by the participant, clarification probes, and steering probes, to guide the conversation back to the question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). After each main question was answered, I sometimes continued with follow up questions.

***Main questions and optional follow up questions:*** Each main question below is followed by examples of potential follow up questions. I did not force the conversation with these follow ups but only used them when it felt natural to do so.

- (1) As you know I am interested in how native speakers and non-native speakers learn to read and write Chinese. What do you remember about learning to read in your native language? Is there a memory that sticks out in your mind?
- a. Did your parents read to you? If so, what did they read?
  - b. Did your parents teach you characters at home? If so, how?
  - c. Did your teacher ever tell stories about new characters? Discuss the components of the characters?
  - d. Can you remember learning a word that you thought was difficult? How did you conquer the difficulty?
  - e. What did you like to read as a child? Did you have a favorite book? What did you like about it?
- (2) What do you remember about learning to read English? Can you tell me about your first English class?
- a. Do you remember your first English teacher? What did you do in class? Did you like your English class?
  - b. What was the hardest aspect of learning English? How did you approach it?
  - c. Did you have a favorite book in English? What did you like about it?
- (3) What sticks out in your mind about the ways you were taught to teach Chinese reading and writing in your professional training in China?
- a. If you also received training in the United States, was it different from the training you received in China and, if so, how?
  - b. Do you agree with how you were trained to teach Chinese literacy?

- c. Can you give an example of a technique you have tried that was not included in your training in China?
- (4) Can you tell me about a lesson you have taught in CFL reading and writing?
- a. What did the students learn from the lesson?
  - b. Can you walk me through the steps of the lesson? What did you do? What did the students do?
  - c. How was it different from the way you learned as a child?
- (5) Can you give an example of what your students have achieved in reading and writing Chinese?
- a. What skills do you expect them to acquire? Writing characters from memory? Copying? If you require students to memorize characters, have you had students resist memorization?
  - b. Have you ever taught your students to read authentic materials? If so, what type? How did they react? What did they do with the materials?
  - c. Have you ever tried teaching your students formal written Chinese? If so, how did that go?
  - d. Have you ever tried teaching your students to appreciate and use different levels of formality in written Chinese? Have you taught social media messaging? Formal letters? Can you walk me through the lesson?
- (6) What pedagogical techniques or learning activities do you think are the most effective in teaching students to read and write Chinese?
- a. Have you taught your students about semantic radicals? Phonetic radicals? How did they react?



- b. How have you used Pinyin in teaching your students?
- c. How have you taught stroke order? Good handwriting? Have you had students with good handwriting? What about students who could read well but had poor handwriting? If so, how did you react to that?

(7) Can you give an example of a pedagogical approach that you use now but would not have used in the past?

- a. Can you compare this with your previous approach?
- b. What prompted you to change your approach?

The main questions and potential follow up questions were useful to help me cover the issues of interest. I did not, however, follow a rigid script. As Rubin and Rubin remind us, it is important to listen carefully to the conversation partner and be respondent. “Improvisation often works as well as following established patterns” (p. 199).

One area of particular relevance where Rubin and Rubin advise careful listening is in identifying stories. They note that stories often reflect important content but are sometimes brief and not immediately recognizable. They advise listening for clues, such as passages that “are told smoothly, with little fumbling or backtracking,” “are told as adventures,” “are carefully structured,” “marked by haunting symbols or condensed, summary images,” told with “a change in speaking tone,” or given as “an extended response that seems not to speak to the question” (2005, p. 175). I paid careful attention during the conversations for clues that announced the telling of stories and tried to encourage the participants to continue the stories whenever possible.

*Follow up interviews.* I concluded the interviews with a polite request for permission to contact the participant again for a subsequent conversation if needed.

*Cultural and linguistic issues.* Although this is not field research in another country, this project shares some features with cross-cultural research. One of the assumptions of cross-cultural research is that “maintaining rapport between the interviewer and interviewee” may require overcoming both “nonverbal and verbal challenges” to communication (Ryen, 2002, p. 337). To consider the verbal challenge first, language barriers have been noted as impediments by other researchers conducting similar studies. Ferro (2014) noted that, despite her efforts to develop survey questions in English understood by the participants in her study, the participants appeared to experience some difficulties in expressing themselves in English when responding to Ferro’s questions. A researcher who conducted an interview study of teachers of English as a foreign language in Vietnam initially intended to conduct the interviews in English, to avoid the need to translate transcripts for analysis. He discovered, however, that by interviewing the teachers in his native Vietnamese, he was able to establish closer rapport with the participants (Borg, 2006).

In this study, I allowed the participants to choose whether to conduct the conversations in Chinese or English, or both. The participants chose to speak in Chinese most of the time, with occasional code switching into English. I have (ACTFL) superior-level skills in spoken Chinese and interact with native speakers every day. I realize, however, that I am not a native speaker. In the few moments when I was not sure of a participant’s meaning, I asked for clarification at the time.

*Recording and notes,* I audio recorded the interviews, with at least two digital voice recorders at each interview, for redundancy. I used an Olympus DS400 and a Zoom H1 recorder, sometimes also backed up with an Olympus DS30. It has been noted by other qualitative researchers that the presence of an audio recorder does have an impact upon the conversation, as

evidenced, for example, by the common phenomenon of participants choosing to add more comments “off the record” after the recorder is turned off (Warren, 2002). I decided, however, that relying upon notetaking would provide inadequate, inaccurate data and therefore opted for audio recording. I took only a few brief notes, or “jottings,” during the interviews, mainly to remind myself of follow up questions to ask during the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 148). Most of the time, I chose not to be distracted by notetaking but to focus directly on my partner in conversation. After each interview, I made an entry in my research journal on the non-verbal aspects of the conversation, including the venue and atmosphere and my impressions of the participant’s body language, tone, attitude, or any other details that could prove relevant.

***Transcription and translation.*** I transcribed the interviews, using an Olympus AS-2400 transcription kit with a foot pedal and transcription software that allows playback at different speeds. After the first interview took over twenty hours to transcribe, I experimented with different approaches. I found that speech to text software did not work for the recorded voices, but the Chinese speech-to-text function available in the Apple OS does work if one speaks slowly and clearly. I developed a method in which I played the audio into headphones, using a foot pedal to pause after each phrase, and then repeated the phrase slowly and clearly into the Mac mic. This method was still very slow but about twice as fast as my original method of listening and typing. After transcribing each segment of audio, I reviewed the transcription with the audio, making careful corrections to ensure that the transcript accurately reflected the audio recording.

I chose to analyze the transcripts in the original language, which was predominantly Chinese. This allowed me to remain closer to the data. I am an experienced translator and well aware of the potential loss of nuance in translation. (I have over thirty years of experience doing

Chinese↔English interpreting and Chinese>English translation, including work for the U.S. Department of State, the court system, and professional translation agencies.) Researcher Pat Bazeley, in her guidelines on qualitative data analysis, cautions against translation if the process appears to lose important depth of meaning. She advises researchers to “transcribe and analyze your interviews in their original language” and then use quotes in the original language, glossed by translation or explanation as appropriate, in the final report (Bazeley, 2013, p. 77).

One added advantage of analyzing transcripts in the original language is that it allowed me to identify key terms and phrases with significant meaning to the participants. Rubin and Rubin (2005) note that participants sometimes use ordinary words or phrases in unusual ways or with unexpected frequency. This sometimes signals that the term or phrase has a unique significance in the experiences of the participants. This type of subtle detail could be lost in working with a translated transcript.

Riessman has pointed out that there is no widely accepted form for transcribing interviews. It is misleading to assume that the transcription is a simply mechanical task. In transcribing interviews, researchers “do not stand outside in a neutral objective position” (Riessman, 2008, p. 27). In rendering speech, usually from an audio recording, to a written format, the researcher is compelled to make choices on questions such as the rendering of tone of voice, volume, speaker identity, pauses, laughter and other non-verbal utterances, pacing, and even gestures and body language, if a video is used. The final document is one more step removed from the recording, which itself is already a facsimile of the original conversation. The analysis is usually conducted on the written document, not directly on the recording. The choices made in “constructing a transcript,” even the spacing and formatting of the words on the page, reflect the researcher’s orientation to the analysis of the narrative (Riessman, 2008, p. 27).

I have chosen to transcribe every word spoken (with unintelligible utterances indicated) and to indicate laughter and other non-lexical conversation sounds. I have also included my questions and comments. This preserves the flow of the conversation, including places where my questions may have interrupted the participant's train of thought. I have indicated hesitations with a series of periods. I have not, however, included indications of tone of voice or speed of speech, as I have felt that this would not necessarily add to my understanding.

I translated relevant quotes and stories into English for the final report. In those quotes, any words or phrases originally said in English are represented as originally uttered, underlined with a wavy line. The translation errs on the side of word for word accuracy over fluency. This may result in a translation that appears slightly choppy than the original Chinese. I did this to preserve a sense of spontaneity, of immediacy, and to allow opportunities to interrogate word choice or phrasing. In some cases, however, I have done minor editing for clarity and ease of reading. It has been pointed out that, "the disjuncture between what coheres in natural talk and what demonstrates communicative competence in written prose comes as a shock" to speakers when reading their verbatim quotes in print (Poland, 2002, p. 634). Poland recommends that it is sometimes acceptable to do minor editing to "tidy up quotes" used in publication but only after the analysis has been completed (2002, p. 634). See appendix B for example of transcription and translation.

## **Analysis**

**Initial Steps.** My first steps in analysis were to listen to each audio recording several times, then read and reread each interview transcript and classroom observation and reflect upon the texts, making notes in my project journal, as recommended in Bazeley (2013). The next step was to identify "the short stories and accounts used by participants to convey experiences or

describe events” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 114). I also read through the transcripts carefully to look for terms or phrases that seem to have special significance for the participants, as described in Rubin and Rubin (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

I used NVIVO software to manage my data. I uploaded all the interview transcripts, observation notes, lesson plans, and teaching materials into NVIVO. I also uploaded analytical memos I drafted as I worked through the analysis of the data.

**Narrative analysis of interviews** The main questions in my semi-structured interview protocol were designed to address the research questions, through the lens of the conceptual framework, but I tried to keep the interviews relaxed and conversational and to allow the participants to play an important role in shaping the content of the conversation. I deliberately attempted to elicit stories, wherever I felt there was a natural opportunity in the conversation to do so. In my analysis, I have foregrounded the stories because I embrace the notion, expressed in eloquent ways by many researchers engaged with narrative, that we define ourselves and shape our perspective of the world by the stories we tell. My favorite of these quotes is the one by Joan Didion, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (as quoted in Riessman, 2008, p. 9).

***What is a story?*** Narrative researchers have poured out a lot of ink (or pixels) attempting to tease out a distinction between narratives and stories. In her seminal 1993 volume on narrative analysis, Catherine Riessman carefully defined “stories” as a type of narrative, a subset of narratives with certain defining features, including “protagonists, inciting conditions, and culminating events,” to be distinguished from other genres of narrative, such as “habitual narratives,” “hypothetical narratives,” and “topic-centered narratives” (Riessman, 1993, p. 18). In her later work, she made peace with a more amorphous, flexible concept of story/narrative that allowed for different forms of storytelling and for using the terms interchangeably

(Riessman, 2008). Blurring the boundaries between the terms “story” and “narrative” allows for a more flexible interpretation of the speaker’s discourse, including an appreciation for possible cultural differences in discourse structure. In this study, I have opted to use the term “narrative” in an inclusive fashion to refer to all of the discourse in the interviews and the term “story” for the passages of narrative that I have identified as storytelling. This distinction will not necessarily be rigid and, in some contexts, I may need to use the terms interchangeably. In the discussion on Labov’s model, I will use his term “narrative” where I would otherwise use the term “story.”

As a general principle for identifying stories, I referred to Riessman’s description of storytelling in which “a speaker connects events into a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings that the speaker wants listeners to take away from the story” (Riessman, 2008, p. 3). To delineate the boundaries of the stories, I examined the interview recordings and transcripts from several different angles, searching for passages that seemed to relate a series of events or situations that were particularly meaningful to the speaker. I first listened carefully to the recordings for any “stories” that had not grabbed my attention during the interviews. Then I read and reread the transcripts, again “listening” for stories. I looked for “entrance and exit talk (where a speaker transitions into, and returns from, the past time story world” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). I experimented with labeling segments of text with shifts in narrative to test whether certain passages qualified as stories. In some instances, this included passages that a stricter filtering for “stories” might exclude as “habitual narratives” (see Riessman, 1993, p. 18), but through a more inclusive lens may be seen as transitions that move a story forward. Ultimately, I decided to trust my own ear and identify the beginnings and endings of stories that felt like connected narratives in which action moved forward in some fashion and

in which the speaker appeared to want me to understand an experience or series of experience in her life.

In some cases, segments of story were separated by diversions in the conversation toward other topics. As Riessman notes, in a research interview conducted as a conversation, “one story can lead to another,” with multiple shifts in topics (2008, p. 24). In these cases, I selected passages that appeared to be connected by a common story thread and labeled them as chapters in a longer story.

*Analysis of stories* Narrative analysis examines not only the content of narratives but also the structure and form of discourse, including the sequencing of the action, lexical choices, and other discourse choices. A close examination of these elements can “prompt the reader to think beyond the surface of a text” (Riessman, 2008) p. 13). I initially attempted to use Labov’s method (originally presented in Labov & Waletzky, 1967), derived from literary analysis, to break apart the structure of the stories to find deeper meanings. I found that a strict application of Labov’s rubric did not always fit well with my data. Labov defines a “narrative of personal experience” as one which includes at least one temporal junction, that is, two clauses for which “a reversal of their order results in a change in the listener’s interpretation of the order of the events described” (Labov, 1997, pp. 398-399). The stories I found in the interviews, however, often included passages of habitual action not easily categorized within Labov’s scheme and did not necessarily follow a strict temporal order. Nevertheless, I found the application of Labov’s scheme of structural elements useful. Labov identified six elements often present in narratives, as summarized by Bazeley (2013) below:

- abstract - summary of the sequence of events in the narrative;



- orientation - sets up the time, place, situation, participants, and initial behavior;
- complicating action - reports a sequence of events, each given in response to a potential question, ‘and what happened [then]?’;
- evaluation - consequences for the needs and desires of the narrator;
- resolution - what finally happened;
- coda - a final return to the present in a way that precludes the question, ‘and what happened then?’

(Bazeley, 2013, p. 208)

Labov’s model has been criticized for excessive attention to the mechanical function of clauses in a way that obscures the effect of the whole (Bruner, 1997). Over 50 years later, however, researchers continue to find Labov’s model a useful point of departure and the approach has been adapted, modified, and evolved to suit a variety of research contexts and purposes (e.g. Alsop, Moreton, & Nesi, 2013).

Despite the model’s limitations, I found it a useful way of attending to the shifts in discourse function used by the speakers. Through this effort, I noticed asides, evaluative comments, comparative references to the present, and other subtle discourse turns that suggested deeper lines of inquiry. Bazeley noted that “describing the exact boundaries of some of the elements in a personal narrative is not easy, but perhaps this does not matter in so far as the exercise of attempting to do so helps you to better understand the story and the teller’s perspective on the experience(s) described” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 209). Following Bazeley’s advice, I found it especially useful to attend to evaluative comments to look for hints at the deeper

meaning and intent of the narrator (2013). Labov defined an evaluative clause as “one that provides evaluation of a narrative event” (Labov, 1997, p. 403). He further suggests looking for evaluative comments whenever the narrator speaks directly, or quotes him or herself directly in the narrative, or uses “negatives, comparatives, modals or comments” (Labov, 1997, p. 404). In the narrative analysis of the interview with participant Lin Huixian, for example, she comments, after a description of picture books with Pinyin that she read as a child, “Otherwise, I think I would not have been able to read them.” The modal comment here signaled the value of these books to her, and the access they provided to pleasurable experiences of fictional worlds. Later in the interview, she comments on her childhood friendship with the neighbors upstairs, “that kind of relationship between upstairs and downstairs neighbors does not exist anymore; it might be very uncommon in China now.” This comparative comment evaluates the world she lived in as a child in comparison with China today. Careful examination of the interview transcripts to identify evaluative comments such as these helped to locate passages of significant meaning to the participants.

*Researcher positionality in narrative analysis* The most important drawback I discovered in applying Labov’s model to my data is that it did not adequately consider the contexts of the stories. The contexts I refer to include the conversational context, that is, what Riessman describes as the “evolving relationship between teller and listener that produced the emerging narrative” (2008, p. 101), as well as the social, cultural, and historical context of the narratives. Bazeley advises “social reality is constructed through interaction – and so, when analyzing people’s stories, attend to the audience as well as the narrator” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 212). Although the stories were related by the participants, I cannot ignore my role in shaping these narratives. As mentioned earlier, I approached the interviews as a process shared between each

of the participants and myself as a co-constructed investigation of issues related to teaching literacy to learners of Chinese. The questions I posed, as well as the follow-up probes and reactions, were shaped by many years of studying China and Chinese language, living in China, and working with Chinese language teachers in the United States. Catherine Riessman (2008) notes, in a description of her field work in India, “my listening is already saturated with concepts, such as gender and generational hierarchies in India” (Riessman, 2008, p. 31). In my case, my listening is saturated with my own direct experiences of China and Chinese language teaching and learning, as well as my study of the field.

In addition to the potential biases in my positionality as an interviewer, my presence as the audience for the narratives also had an impact on the responses. The participants were all aware of my position as a supervisor of Chinese language teachers. They may have had a conscious or unconscious desire to impress me. Indeed, several asked me for suggestions for improvements in their teaching. I was aware at times, also, of a desire to have their stories heard. They seemed to want others to understand their challenges and efforts to help their students.

My role as co-constructor of meaning in this process is also actively present in the analysis of the data. In identifying passages for analysis, I made choices based on my reactions to the participants’ narratives. I selected passages and delineated the boundaries of stories. My choices were not necessarily the only options. Another researcher might have chosen different boundaries for the story passages or to connect them by different threads. Riessman notes that the selection of passages for narrative analysis is complex and not governed by predetermined rules but “the analytical decision is important, for it shapes interpretation and illustrates once again how we participate in the construction of the narrative we analyze” (Riessman, 2008, p. 40). My decisions were based on my careful assessment of which passages seemed more

meaningful to the participants but also on my perspective on what content was relevant to my research questions. In summary, my active participation in the co-construction of meaning in this process of narrative analysis took place at three levels: I shaped the conversation through my questions and reactions, I influenced the narrator through my presence as the audience, and I selected and analyzed the selected content of the interviews. At every level, my participation was not that of disinvolved researcher but that of an informed, engaged actor. In my analysis, therefore, I have attempted at each level to be actively aware of my positionality and to reflect that awareness in my reporting.

*Summary of Narrative Analysis Approach* I have opted to adopt an approach that uses Labov as a starting place but focuses more on the co-constructed meanings of the stories. I have added context from my knowledge of contemporary Chinese society and of Chinese language teaching, including my personal experiences. In my labeling of the functions of clauses, I have taken a liberal approach to the category of “Complicating Action” and included clauses that do not meet Labov’s criteria for sequential clauses with a temporal junction, often in passages that could be labeled as habitual action. I have included these passages, however, because my sense of the speaker’s intent in these instances was to portray a scene of importance to her history.

Using this approach, I went through the transcript of each interview, identified stories and drafted memos on those stories, adding a tentative analysis on what I perceived to be the significance of that story.

**Coding analysis.** I found that the narrative analysis of selected passages identified as “stories” in the interviews provided insights into each participant’s personality and the development of that person’s values and beliefs. I felt that a different technique was needed to identify patterns in the interview responses and other data that did not emerge in story form. I

hoped that this would also validate the observations generated through the previous analysis of stories in the interviews.

***Initial exploration.*** In my original research plan, I did not predetermine a data coding scheme. I chose instead to follow Janesick's advice to stay "close to the data" and, to borrow her metaphor of dance, let the music determine the steps of the dance (Janesick, 2000, p. 389). In that mode, I explored several options for analyzing the next steps in analyzing the data. I read and reread Bazely and Saldaña's chapters on memo writing and coding and then did some experimenting. I completed pilot tests with Descriptive Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Process Coding (Saldaña, 2016). Descriptive Coding and Process Coding did offer some utility in breaking apart the text at a granular level and looking for subtle messages but ultimately proved tedious and not that useful for developing insights. I found In Vivo Coding, a method for identifying terms and phrases used by the participants as codes (Saldaña, 2016), useful for identifying Chinese terms or expressions that are not easily into English, or that carry a different scope of meaning than the commonly used English equivalents.

***Values Coding.*** Values Coding appeared promising. Saldaña recommends Values Coding for studies on cultural values and belief systems (Saldaña, 2016). He developed the method for identifying data "that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). This method codes values, attitudes, and beliefs. These concepts are difficult to distinguish. Indeed, the sources quoted by Saldaña offer complex and often overlapping definitions (see, for example, the discussions in (Gable, 1986; Shaw & Wright, 1967)). Saldaña defines these three concepts, hereafter abbreviated as "VAB," as follows:

Value: "the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea."

Attitude: “the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, or idea.”

Belief: “part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world.” He adds that these are “rules for action.”

(Saldaña, 2016, p. 131)

Saldaña cautions that Values Coding is also value-laden and the researcher needs to be acutely aware of bias and researcher positionality. I tried to bear this in mind as I approached the data with this tool.

In my initial attempt at Values Coding, I applied a “splitter approach, coding short segments of text that corresponded most directly to the code. I found later that the resulting quotes were too decontextualized and the disembodied text was not very useful for the further analysis. I went back and recoded the entire interview text with more of a “lumper” approach, coding entire passages or groups of sentences related to a shared thought. This generated patterns that helped me think about the teachers’ cognitions in a more holistic fashion.

For each participant, I coded the interview transcript, working in the original Chinese, with a first cycle coding method combining In Vivo coding and Values Coding. I followed the same procedure for coding the classroom observations, lesson plans, and any other materials or notes I had collected for that participant. For second cycle coding, I sorted and collected related codes into broader concepts. I used Pattern codes to keep track of the sorted codes and emerging themes. Pattern Codes are used in second cycle coding to identify major themes and bring material together to look for explanatory patterns emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016), I made sample charts of the Pattern Codes and VAB Codes and tried out different themes to describe the patterns that I saw (see example in Appendix C). I used NVIVO to pull out and compare

examples of quotes related to the patterns. I treated each participant as a case and wrote a memo analyzing the themes I found in that case. I considered the significance of the stories from each case and inserted the stories into the themes where I determined that they fit best.

In the final stage of analysis, I stepped back to compare themes across the cases. As I worked through the five cases, I looked for overarching themes—patterns of thought—that all the participants seem to share, albeit to different degrees. In some cases, initial themes relevant to one or two participants were subsumed under larger themes, e.g. *by myself-individual agency* was subsumed under *searching* which I later combined with *adapting*. I ultimately settled upon five themes that I have identified as most salient in the data and also most relevant to the research questions. Finally, I rewrote the memos for each of the participants, using the revised themes and combined those memos into my results reported in Chapter IV.

## Chapter IV Results

In this chapter, I will present the data, selected and analyzed using the methods described in the previous chapter. I will begin with a description of each of the five relevant themes that I found in the data. These are: *Searching for a Literacy Pedagogy: Confronting a Challenge*; *Reading for Growth and Pleasure*; *Chinese Literacy and Cultural Identity*; *Bottom-up Skills: Building Up Literacy in a Traditional Chinese Model*; and *Reflecting and Adapting: Finding a Literacy Pedagogy that Works for both Students and Teachers*.

This is followed by a portrait, in a sense, of each of the participants, drawn in terms of the five themes. The section for each participant begins with a brief description of the teacher, how I met her, and the circumstances of the interview and observation. I then show how each of the themes emerges from the data for that participant. Within each theme, any relevant stories told by the teacher are foregrounded. I have emphasized the voices of the participants as much as practical. I hope that this gives the reader a sense of the individuality of each of these dedicated teachers. While they share many experiences and challenges, each is a unique voice with a particular point of view.

In some cases, I have added comments to the teachers' stories, to provide relevant social and historical context in China, both from my personal observation as well as academic sources. For the most part, however, this chapter is intended to showcase the emic perspective of the teachers. I have reserved the etic analysis of their experiences within a broader context of CFL teaching for Chapter V.

### Relevant Common Themes



**Theme: Searching for a Literacy Pedagogy: Confronting a Challenge** Each of the participants discovered, upon starting to teach CFL outside of China, that teaching literacy would prove a daunting challenge. They all described how they initially attempted to apply the traditional models used in China to teach literacy—the ways they had been taught as children and trained to teach in their pedagogy coursework. They found, however, that the traditional model of teacher-centered direct instruction in the basic building blocks of literacy was not adequate.

The teachers looked for other models appropriate for teaching young Americans. They all describe themselves as searching and experimenting. The In Vivo terms that emerges most frequently is *mōsuǒ* 摸索, often translated as “feeling around for something” or “searching.” The participants looked to other CFL teachers for appropriate models. All have sought out training, some in short-term workshops; others in formal degree programs. Some have not had much access to other CFL teachers or extensive training. They have drawn instead upon their own experiences and experimentation to find solutions.

**Theme: Reading for growth and pleasure.** It is not surprising that language teachers love reading. All of the teachers recalled enjoying books as children. They were not exposed to much modeling of reading for pleasure and, for most, extracurricular reading was not especially encouraged by their parents or teachers, particularly during high school. For some of the participants, books other than school textbooks were precious and difficult to access. Nevertheless, they all found ways to gain access to books or magazines.

For the participants, reading was a pathway for personal growth and expanded opportunities. They mention the benefits of good reading skills in improving their opportunities

for further education. Reading also offered access to both imaginative worlds and greater knowledge.

One senses a strong connection in each of them between love of learning and reading. They all also seem to want to instill this love of learning in their students. Each finds ways to encourage her students to read and learn and each has developed techniques for helping her students learn to read Chinese.

**Theme: Chinese literacy and cultural identity.** All five of the participants express a desire to share Chinese culture with their students. Some of the participants emphasize literacy, particularly the writing system, as a signifier of Chinese cultural identity. Although some have had more experience with brush calligraphy, they all express an admiration for calligraphy and a desire to teach their students to appreciate the aesthetics of Chinese characters. There is a sense shared by all that brush calligraphy skills are a required attribute for a literate person and, for those who were not able to acquire this as children, it might be desirable to remediate that deficit as adults.

Some of the teachers focus more on the content of traditional Chinese literary products rather than the visual aspects of writing. They have students write short pieces about figures from traditional literature or discuss the cultural values and perspectives embedded in Chinese literature. Each of the teachers expressed a desire to instill an awareness of and positive attitude toward Chinese culture in their students. This desire manifests in different ways with each of the teachers.

**Theme: Bottom-up skills: building up literacy in a traditional Chinese model.** The participants all described their early education in literacy as a process of rigorous drill in basic skills. These included the mechanics of writing legible Chinese, recognizing the components of

characters, memorizing characters, putting characters together to form multisyllabic words and gradually building to sentences and paragraphs. The traditional approach emphasizes recitation out loud and rote memorization. Students practice the “building blocks” at each level and gradually build up into longer passages of discourse. In this traditional model, the teacher plays a central role; instruction is direct and deductive.

Most of the teachers in this study report starting English lessons at the beginning of junior high school, following a similar sequence to their early literacy in Chinese. The lessons focused on grammar, vocabulary, and intensive reading of a text. The students memorized the text and assessment often consisted of dictation. There was very little practice in meaningful communication.

The teachers who received training in China on teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language were taught to use a similar sequence. They were trained to structure each lesson around a text, with vocabulary, translation, reading aloud, copying, sentence structure practice, and other exercises aimed at intensive reading of the text, in a sequence and approach very much like the one in which they had learned both their native language and English. The only modifications suggested in their training programs were to add activities and multimedia to make the lessons more engaging for foreign students.

Each of the participants expresses some mixed feelings about this traditional model. They all seem to have perceived some benefit from extensive practice and memorization. Most of them, however, also relate vignettes of situations where extensive memorization, particularly of English, did not prepare them for real-world communication.

In their own teaching practice, each of the teachers employs some of these traditional techniques to help their students acquire bottom-up literacy skills. As the reader will see in the

following case portraits, some of the teachers emphasize bottom-up skills more extensively than others. All of the teachers also modify the approach.

**Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.** All of the teachers express a passion for helping their students. They recognize that learning to read and write in Chinese is difficult, but they try to make it easier for their students. Each has experimented with modifying curriculum and pedagogy to help students be successful. In some cases, the teachers grapple with choices for establishing realistic expectations for students. They experiment with emphasizing spoken language and deemphasizing reading and writing expectations. Most require students to recognize more characters than they are expected to write from memory.

The teachers also express a need to modify pedagogy and curriculum to meet the requirements of the schools where they teach. Some are in schools where both the school and the students expect at least some of the students to achieve a literacy proficiency sufficient to perform on IB or AP exams. These teachers note that preparing students for these exams entails different challenges than those in teaching novice level students. More advanced literacy, for example, requires greater awareness of genre and register.

All of the teachers have developed creative approaches for making the curriculum more engaging. In some cases, this means hands-on activities such as calligraphy; in all cases the teachers engage the students in classroom discussions that connect the curriculum content to the lives of the students.

In their *mōsuǒ* 摸索, or “feeling around” and searching, all have become aware to greater or lesser degrees of the benefits of using student-centered learning approaches. They attend to

the needs of individual students; they design activities where the students take some ownership of the learning. Some teachers have had more training and are more adept at this than others.

Although all of the teachers employ some of the skills-based, bottom-up literacy pedagogy strategies characteristic of the traditional Chinese model, they all add modifications. Some add inductive exercises to basic decoding lessons, e.g. by asking students to observe and identify patterns of shared radicals among characters. Others have added activities to develop top-down reading skills. Two have implemented more extensive use of top-down reading activities.

### **The Participants and Their Stories**

The five cases are presented here in roughly the same order that the interviews and observations took place. The sequence is not intended to imply greater importance or value of one participant over another. All of the themes are present in the narratives of each of the participants. For each person, however, the five themes are shaped differently and emerge with different levels of significance. The themes are presented, not in the same order for each participant, but in a sequence that feels natural for that participant's story.

As described in Chapter III, the analysis of the stories within the themes follows an approach based on Labov's model, modified in a way that I find suits this material. In the stories analyzed with that model, I have looked especially to the evaluative comments for insights into the speaker's perspective. For that reason, the evaluative comments in the stories are bolded.

Language: The interviews were conducted primarily in Chinese but the participants occasionally code-switched to English. In the quotes given, I have translated the Chinese to English and marked the words or phrases originally spoken in English with a wavy underline.

The translation from Chinese emphasizes word-for-word accuracy rather than fluency but includes minor editing for brevity and clarity.

Names and professional titles: The names given for the teachers are pseudonyms, chosen either by the participant or by myself, as explained in Chapter III. In this report, I have chosen to refer to the teachers by the title that would be used by their students and by Chinese-speaking colleagues—*laoshi*. In Chinese discourse, the surname is used before the title. Hence, the title that would be used for participant Huixian Lin would be Lin *Laoshi*. This is the way that I would address the participants in a public setting. In some cases, the participants also use an English given name and, for those I am more familiar with, I might use that name in private. I have used initials reflecting given names to indicate the speakers in the transcripts. This is consistent with the informal nature of the conversations.

**Wang Xiaomei.** Wang Xiaomei grew up in south central China. She completed a BA and an MA in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in a university in central China. As part of her practicum for her MA degree, she taught high school Chinese in the United States as a Hanban-sponsored volunteer teacher. After returning to China for one year, she came back to the United States to teach in an inner city high school in a large city in the Midwest. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching there for three years. The school offers six levels of Chinese, culminating in a final course designed to prepare students to take the IB exam in Chinese.

I have known Wang *Laoshi* since she first arrived in the United States for her practicum teaching and we have kept in touch ever since. We have worked together on several curriculum projects and presentations at conferences. We talked in a café near her home. The background

noise was a little distracting at times, but we enjoyed a warm and relaxed conversation. I observed her teaching about six weeks later.

**Theme: Searching for literacy pedagogy: confronting a challenge.** When Wang *Laoshi* first started teaching Chinese in the United States, she became acutely aware of the challenges of teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers in a non-Chinese environment. She was shocked to find that some CFL teachers reacted by lowering their expectations for students to the point of not even teaching characters.

After I arrived in the United States, actually, I feel that my eyes were opened quite a bit. Everyone was using different methods to teach. Some of the teachers I came into contact with only taught Pinyin and did not teach Chinese characters. [...] the entire passages they taught were all written in Pinyin. That is something that I cannot accept, because...I cannot understand what that is. Right. But [...] some teachers [...] have Pinyin and Chinese characters presented together and don't have many requirements regarding the Chinese characters. [...] And some teachers maybe have a gradual transition. In Chinese 1, first year, maybe Chinese characters and Pinyin are together, then slowly it becomes only Chinese characters. I lean toward the latter type, that is you slowly want to move away from Pinyin, then [transition to] all Chinese characters, for reading.

**Theme: Chinese literacy and cultural identity.** In response to a question about learning writing at home, Wang *Laoshi* told a story about a personal accomplishment in calligraphy.

### She Wrote It

Abstract

X:...for example, at Chinese New Year we would write couplet hangings.

Orientation and Evaluative Comments

X: Usually, like in my family, everyone would, each go write some couplets. Then, each would write some themselves, and maybe what we wrote would get hung up. **Because in China, I feel that...they always felt that if your own child could write a really good couplet, with well written characters, it would be something to be proud of.** Right, therefore, sometimes my parents would even use my older sisters' characters. **Their calligraphy was very good, with well written characters,** and they would even say, "see if any of you can write even better." Who...when writing couplets, if the characters are well written, it could be hung up on the front door, **it was really our family's couplet.**

Complicating Action and Evaluative Comments

X: One year it was mine! It was me, seems like it was after I started high school, that year they used my characters.

S: That is great! Were you very happy about it?

**X: Yes, I felt very proud of myself,** because **when other people were celebrating the New Year and came over, when they got to our door, and saw it they would say "oh, she wrote it" so...Dad and Mom would confirm that and say "she wrote it."**

Coda

X: And then, because **all Chinese people can appreciate it to some extent,** that is, [can say] this character was written well or not, and what its fine points are... "this character is well written, this *pie* [downward slanted stroke to the left] is well written, this *na* [downward slanted stroke to the right] is well written, so I feel it is..."

At the lunar New Year, many Chinese families, both urban and rural, hang up vertical banners on either side of the front door. The banners display couplets, usually written by hand in



brush calligraphy with black ink on red paper. The poetic couplets chosen for New Year banners express good wishes for the coming year. In this cultural ritual, Chinese characters perform not only as aesthetic statements but also as talismans. Wang *Laoshi's* parents encouraged their children to learn calligraphy and compete for the honor of representing the family in this way.

The act of hanging up the couplet brought her artistic achievement into a public space, to be remarked upon by others outside the family. Wang *Laoshi* notes that connoisseurship of calligraphy is a subject for popular discourse, even among those with no special training. The appreciation of calligraphy, including a fine-grained attention to individual strokes, identifies calligraphy as a signifier of shared cultural identity. Wang *Laoshi's* pride in her calligraphy binds her to that cultural identity.

In a subsequent story, she illustrates one way she was enculturated in the symbolism of characters and handwriting.

#### Upright Characters; Upright Person

Like many Chinese children, Wang *Laoshi* spent many hours copying characters at home, often copying each character one hundred times. She described filling many notebooks with writing practice.

#### Orientation

Then, like my parents, or one time my older sister, they would say, “Let me see your summer homework”, oh, I was writing whatever character, some character,

#### Complicating Action and **Evaluative Comments**

She would say, would say “ah, this *heng* [horizontal stroke], you need to write it a little straighter” or she would say “this character...”.

Like my mom would say, “when you write characters, you need to write them well, you need to write them upright”. [...], they would say you need to write upright, just like the kind of person you need to be, I think this is what my mom often said, that is “when you write characters, a *heng* [horizontal stroke] is a *heng*, a *shu* [vertical stroke] is a *shu*, you don’t want to write the *shu* crooked, or write the *heng* crooked.” [...] **That is because we Chinese have a saying, “the characters are like the person,” that is when you look at whether your characters are good, you can know whether the moral character of that person is upright or not, “the characters are like the person”, [...] the whole has to be balanced, that is if your characters are upright, that means you are also an upright [righteous] person.**

The saying “characters are like the person” (字如其人 *zìrúqírén*) captures the value of handwriting in China. The word Wang *Laoshi* uses for upright is 正 (*zhèng*), which can be also translated as square, balanced, fair, righteous. The character itself is balanced and square with strong parallel and perpendicular lines. The word reflects a strong linguistic and conceptual connection between the spatial and abstract perceptions of ‘upright.’ In the traditions of Chinese literacy culture, a person’s handwriting reflects not just personality but that person’s moral standing. In this account, Wang *Lǎoshi* relates how her family transmitted that expectation to her. In working to improve her handwriting, she strengthened her cultural identity as a literate Chinese person.

That cultural identity was reinforced by the literacy training she received in schooling, as well as at home. She recounts that, in her elementary school, brush calligraphy and pen handwriting classes were an integral, required part of the language arts curriculum and students were expected to put effort into extensive practice. Wang *Lǎoshi* was very proud of a prize she

won in a calligraphy competition. She complains that handwriting and calligraphy in China's educational system are apparently no longer part of the required curriculum but have been downgraded to extracurricular activities. She sees this is an unfortunate marginalization of what has been an important signifier of Chinese cultural identity.

Wang *Lǎoshi* highlighted the prestige attached to being considered a literate person in a vignette about using a dictionary.

For example our parents, might say “eh, we saw a character, we don't know what it means, in daily life, they would say “so, you take this dictionary and look it up” that is in daily life, parents, neighbors,... would all think....”“You have been to school, so you look up this character for me.” This is a demonstration of being a literate person.

The term she uses for literate person is *wénhuàrén* 文化人 [cultured person]. The term highlights the close association between culture and literacy. A cultured person is literate. There is an implied obligation here for literate persons to share knowledge with others who are less literate; a learner has a “moral and social duty” to serve society (J. Li, 2003a, p. 147).

***Theme: Bottom-up skills: building up literacy in a traditional Chinese model.*** Wang *Laoshi* complains that the current literacy curriculum in China neglects basic character decoding skills. She has observed that some children in China seem to have difficulty distinguishing similar characters. They need practice, she says, with “various types of exercises to differentiate characters. “They have this, for example ‘I’ [我 wǒ] and ‘to search for’ [找 zhǎo], ‘I’ [我 wǒ] is a unitary character, and ‘to search for’ [找 zhǎo] has a left-right structure.”

In Wang *Laoshi's* childhood education, basic skills were paramount. She recounts her memories of learning to read with a surprising level of detail. “In kindergarten, our teacher would teach us how to write. Oh, first it was Pinyin ah, to teach you how to read it [out loud].”

Then they learned the basic strokes. “When they teach you how to write, they would teach *héng* [...] *héng* [horizontal stroke], *shù* [vertical stroke], *piě* [diagonal stroke down to the left]...and then, after we had practiced the strokes, we would use them, we would have homework every day.” They practiced with a brush or a fountain pen. The first characters they were taught were simple pictographic ones, such as “mountain, fire, stone, earth, wood, these pictographic characters (山, 火, 石、土、木).” In retrospect, she realizes, these characters were not high frequency characters but were taught because, in radical form, they become the building blocks for other characters. Each lesson had a text, a story. “I still remember the first text--‘Little Tadpole Looks for His Mama.’” The sequence of the lessons was first practice the text, then learn the new characters, then use the new characters to make compound words, then do more practice with the new words.

The teacher provided direct instruction on the radical components within the characters, with a focus primarily on the semantic radicals.

I think that was explained very clearly and directly, they would directly say, “oh, this is, write it after me” and they would write directly on the blackboard in chalk, [...]. Today we are learning, this, “sun” radical (日 *rì*). Good, which characters have the sun radical? Then there would be related practice, [...] the sun radical has....what characters can you make [with it]?

They were taught to use the radicals to look up unfamiliar characters in the dictionary, either by identifying the semantic radical and then counting the remaining strokes or by noticing the phonetic radical and guessing the pronunciation, then using the pronunciation to look up the character in a dictionary organized by Pinyin.

She remembers her beginning English classes as having a similar structure. “In English, we were first taught the 26 letters. After learning those, we started learning numbers [...] the way we learned in class was more...how to say...more step by step.” Each lesson included reading out loud, copying, memorizing the text, recitation by memory, and dictation.

In her coursework in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, she was trained to teach in a sequence similar to that used for native speakers, Pinyin first, then the basic strokes of characters and stroke order, then focus on a text. They were taught to follow a consistent order: “Character, word, sentence, paragraph,” and to design lessons focused on intensive reading of a text.

Prior to coming to the United States, she received short-term training at Hanban. They prescribed a similar sequence for teaching literacy but with many additional activities designed to make the material “lively and interesting” for American students. The trainees were told to focus on motivating the students to stay interested in Chinese rather than aiming for higher achievement.

In her current teaching, Wang *Lǎoshi* at times deliberately draws upon her own experiences learning to read and write to help her students.

Of course I go back to my instincts. I think...maybe I think back to how I learned as a child, [...] I described in class how it was when I was small, a lot of other Chinese people probably also did this. What I mean is, use tea, that is, for example, your grandpa or grandma would say, “this character, do you know it?” and then you...when you were very small, grandpa and grandma would... of course they had tea beside them, they would pick up their hand and say, “ah, what grade are you in now? ah, you are in fifth grade, then, you are learning... you [should] know this character!” They would challenge

you. Then they would put their hand in, “[can you do] this one?” and dip into the tea, then write on the table.

In Wang *Lǎoshi*'s descriptions of learning to read and write as a child, she mentions repeatedly the practice and effort that was expected of her and her classmates. Daily and summertime homework included extensive copying of characters. Later, when she started learning English in junior high school, the English teacher also expected them to copy letters, then words. She did not resent this and even says she enjoyed it. She criticizes the current curriculum in China for neglecting this type of kinesthetic drill, what she calls “daily, firm [commitment to] hands-on, muscle memory [building].”

The extensive practice included reading aloud. In both Chinese and in English, the students read aloud in class and during the required study hall before school each day. Wang *Lǎoshi* explains that this traditional Chinese literacy practice, in the Chinese cultures of learning, is thought to benefit understanding and memory. “We feel that, if it is a language thing, if you read it out loud, after you read it in a loud voice, you hear your own voice, [...], it makes you more able to..., [it] deepens your memory.” It is also expected to increase one's understanding. “China has an ancient saying...like...oh, I may have forgotten it ‘read a text one hundred times, [and] its meaning will reveal itself.” (文读百遍，其义自见 *wén dú bǎi biàn, qí yì zì jiàn* [text read hundred times, its, meaning self-perceive]).

Repeated practice is expected to increase skill. Wang *Lǎoshi* uses an idiom that resonates for these traditions: “familiar can make skillful” [熟能生巧 *shú néng shēng qiǎo* ], usually translated as “practice makes perfect.” The assessment of this extensive practice is usually memorization, tested through recitation or dictation. Wang *Lǎoshi* describes how she and her classmates had to recite the English texts from their lessons from memory, often to a student

group leader. If a student could not recite the text from memory, they had to try again after school or the next day. Wang *Lǎoshi* said the memorization was sometimes hard, but she appreciated its benefits. “I felt that after you recited it many times, your mouth became familiar [with it], you did not need to think whether to say I am or I was or I are, I is, [...] slowly it was practice makes perfect.”

In her own teaching, Wang *Lǎoshi* also applies the principle of practice makes perfect. She says she gives more homework than the other teachers in her school. She expects all of her students to copy characters. She requires them to learn certain characters from memory and tests this with dictation. She tries to make the practice more interesting with technology, e.g. online tools like Quizlet,<sup>18</sup> but the goal is still gaining confidence in basic skills through extensive practice. During the classroom observation, she had the students read vocabulary and sentences aloud with her. She drilled the students on vocabulary and then had them do a type of dictation. She also occasionally gives them other types of practice using kinesthetic, hands-on activities, such as calligraphy or making papercuts of symmetrical characters. She feels that extensive practice and attention to detail help her students.

Wang *Laoshi* incorporates a few student-centered activities in her classroom but also maintains firm control. In her experiences with schooling in China, the teacher always chose and led all classroom activities. In her elementary school Chinese classes as well as her secondary school English classes, the teacher led the class in reading aloud, copying words, and answering questions. In English class, “the teacher would say, ‘good, please read after me,’ then we read aloud with her, then [...] she would say, ‘good, now I will let you write’ then we would write in

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<sup>18</sup> Quizlet is an online tool used for building flashcards, games and other activities for students. It is popular among foreign language teachers for vocabulary review. See [quizlet.com](http://quizlet.com).

our notebooks [...].then the teacher would say, ‘say it out loud, how to spell it, o – n – e, o – n – e, o – n – e’.” At every step, the teacher led the way.

***Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.*** Wang *Laoshi* reflects upon the way she was taught and considers the best ways to adapt to the needs of her students. While she still appreciates the thorough training she received in bottom-up literacy skills, she has also grown more aware of the importance of applying language skills to meaningful, authentic contexts. In retrospect, she reevaluates the spoken English pedagogy of her secondary school English classes. She recalls that the only lesson in which she and her classmates engaged in communicative exchanges was the day when they were instructed to ask for each other’s names. She reflects also that memorizing text did not always prepare her well for reading authentic text. When she started trying to read English classics, even simplified editions, she found that the language was very different from the carefully edited texts in her textbooks. “This ability of mine was hard to transfer, I was not accustomed to reading this type of text.”

She describes her current lesson structures as an ongoing process of experimentation. Although she puts a strong emphasis on character decoding, she has modified traditional instruction with elements of inductive learning and student-centered activities. For example, she often introduces each character by looking first at whether there are any pictographic radical components. She asks her students to guess what the pictographic character might mean, based on its shape. Then she has the students do exercises such as writing in air, making papercuts of radicals, and playing guessing games like the ones her teacher did when she was young. She feels that the intensive focus on character decoding, while time consuming, pays off for her students. She recounts how, during a recent lesson on the names of vegetables, some of the



students noticed that many of the characters for vegetable names contained the same structure at the top of the character. She had not yet introduced the radical for grass, often used in characters for plant names. She was pleased that the students noticed it themselves. “They are a bit more sensitive. As long as they are sensitive to Chinese characters, then as they go on later, it will be a bit easier.”

She has tried different sequences but still often uses a traditional structure. She first teaches vocabulary, then some games and activities to reinforce the vocabulary. She directs the students to practice writing the new characters, often on individual white boards, sometimes using dictation to test their memory. She uses activities to strengthen their awareness of character components and stroke order. “I will say, ‘good, the fifth stroke of this character, write the fifth stroke of this character.’” Then she asks the students to create sentences using the vocabulary. Then the class addresses the text for the lesson. They read it aloud as a group then answer comprehension questions posed by the teacher. The day that I observed there was a clear emphasis on vocabulary. In all three levels that I observed, the students practiced vocabulary and used the characters of the lesson to build multi-character words or phrases. The reading activities included reading sentences and phrases aloud.

Wang *Laoshi* adds activities to make the content more meaningful for the students. She often assigns the students to work in pairs, asking each other questions on topics related to the text but extended to simulate a more authentic context. For example, for a recent lesson about food in Hong Kong, she asked the students to pretend to hold a conversation between an American and a new student from China, discussing good eating places in the United States. Exchanges of personal experiences offering authentic information shows adaptation of a

traditional, skills-based, text-centered curriculum to include elements of communicative language teaching.

She says the greatest challenge she has faced in adapting her pedagogy has been to support literacy learning for the more advanced students. “I think I did not anticipate that teaching Chinese characters would be this difficult, especially at the higher levels.” She complained that the training she had received, especially at Hanban, did not prepare her to teach more advanced students with the literacy skills needed to pass the IB test. The training from Hanban focused on games and activities designed to motivate the interests of beginning learners. Wang *Laoshi* appreciates the need to keep lessons interesting, but “games cannot solve the problems.” For example, advanced learners need to with formal written language, as well as more casual, spoken forms. Wang *Laoshi* gave the example of the words for “this.” In casual and spoken Chinese, the common word used is *zhè* [这] or *zhège* [这个]; in formal written, the classical Chinese term *cǐ* [此] is preferred. Wang *Laoshi* commented that, without extensive practice, her students tend to mix informal with formal language, e.g. by substituting the informal word for “this”—“*zhège* [这个]” for the formal word “*cǐ* [此],” to form an awkward phrase “*chú zhège yǐwài* [除这个以外]” in place of the standard literary phrase “*chú cǐ yǐwài* [除此以外]” to express the meaning “apart from this.” To address this gap, she has added content on register to her lessons. On the day that I observed, for example, she taught her intermediate students two different sets of terms for units of money—yuan/ten cent piece/cent [元角分 *yuán jiǎo fēn*] and piece/dime/cent [块毛分 *kuài máo fēn*], explaining that the former is typically used in writing and more formal contexts whereas the latter set is more conversational and casual. She admonished her students to be consistent and not mix and match the two sets of terms.

She struggles with the challenge of preparing students for the literacy components of the IB exam, which requires students to read authentic text. The students find it very difficult.

Although some of her students have done well on the test, it is an ongoing struggle.

***Theme: Reading for pleasure and personal growth.*** As a child, Wang *Laoshi*'s teachers did not encourage extra-curricular reading. In school, the focus was solely on the textbook. "You needed to learn the things in the textbook [...] it was considered that you need to get a good foundation in class." She related a story about a famous Taiwanese writer who was punished for reading a classic Chinese novel in class. She also criticized current policies in China requiring school children to complete extracurricular reading lists for overemphasizing extensive reading at the expense of investing time in fundamental reading skills. As a child, however, she enjoyed reading graphic novels and other storybooks. As a teenager, she read some of the classic Chinese novels and other books that were popular among her peers, but her favorites were translations of long Russian novels, such as Gorky's "My Childhood." She reflects now that these books were probably "too mature" for her, but she borrowed them from her older sisters and persisted through the long tomes, perhaps because she wanted to emulate her sisters. There is an ambivalence here toward extracurricular reading. On the one hand, she is concerned about distraction from building what she sees as essential fundamental skills. On the other hand, she has enjoyed reading and even insisted on choosing her own reading material rather than following her peers. In her teaching, she assigns her students to read authentic materials in preparation for the IB exam but does not usually give them free-choice reading opportunities. Preparing for the IB exams, she emphasizes, places a lot of stress on her and on the students and leaves little time for exploring content based on student interests. It might be that, without the

pressure of the exam, she might experiment more with extensive reading or free-choice reading for her students.

**Lin Huxian.** Lin Huixian teaches in a private prep school in a major midwestern city. I have known her professionally for about ten years. We see each other at professional meetings of Chinese language teachers and at other cultural events. We have worked together on some projects, including visits by preservice teachers from China and a summer camp program. She was raised in a small town in central China and attended university in China, where she completed a double major teaching degree in English and Biology. She taught university English for a few years in China before traveling to the U.K to complete a master's degree in business. She then lived in a northern European city briefly before moving to the United States with her family. She has now taught high school Chinese in the United States for about ten years.

We held our conversation in a quiet room one afternoon at her school. The atmosphere was relaxed and warm. She helped me fiddle with the tape recorders to make sure they were working. This interview flowed particularly well, with a strong sense of give and take. In fact, at the end of the interview, she asked if she could then interview me! For another 45 minutes she asked me questions about how I learned Chinese.

***Theme: Reading for pleasure and personal growth.***

### Reading Opens Doors

#### Chapter 1: Childhood Reading Was Fun and Social

Orientation, inclusive of Abstract

S: When you were young, did you read...what were the main things you read?

H: *wawa* [baby] books, right. This is a good question to raise. At that, at that time

actually our family did not have many books, but, at that time we [went to] peddlers,

on the side of the road, those little book peddlers. There would be a person who pushed a cart, and, for example today he might display all those books for you, right?

#### Complicating Action with Evaluative Statements

You could rent a book to read for one cent or two cents, and read “*Niwa* Mends the Heavens,” [...] those kinds of mythology story books.

S: Were they all myths? Were there books with other content?

H: There were a few more myths, yes, but when [we] read them, [...] you **yourself maybe [thought] because the pictures were so pretty, they were beautiful stories.**

S: These were all like comics, with pictures?

#### Evaluative

H: pictures and then underneath were characters, and then under the characters there must have been Pinyin. **Otherwise I think I would not have been able to read them.** So the characters and Pinyin were together like that.

#### Orientation

S: So you called them *wawa* [baby] books.

H: Right, when we were young we called them *wawa* books or “little person books.”

S: “Little person books” all had pictures?

H: Yes. In the beginning, they were all very simple. Then gradually [I] read that kind, they were about this small [holds hands about 4 inches apart], [you] flipped the pages like this [mimes flipping pages with hands], big, [about the size of] a pack of cigarettes, right, that was the smaller size, there were also slightly bigger ones, this big [holds hands about 6 inches apart], then you flipped the pages to read. There were also

bigger books, in color, but also sometimes in black and white like this, but underneath there were still characters.

Evaluative

**Those were a little bit harder *wawa* books, that is, the words were a little harder, but you could read them.**

Complicating Action with **Evaluative Statements**

They were divided into series, it was—a set of *wawa* books could be forty volumes.

So you could [read], for example “Journey to the West” [the Monkey King], The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, **those were the hardest of the *wawa* books.**

S: Oh, did you read those too?

H: I read those too, but when I read that set, [...] **I still remember, the impression is so vivid**, I went to my upstairs neighbors to borrow the books. Our upstairs neighbors, the mom and dad were doctors, so their family maybe had some knowledge and a little bit of money, and the grandfather was also educated, so their family bought a lot of *wawa* books, **it made a big impression on me**, so I went to their home to read those books, they were all very new, very new.

S: They were willing to loan them to you?

H: They were willing, because we upstairs downstairs neighbors were good friends. We often went to their house to play. **So that kind, that kind of relationship between upstairs and downstairs neighbors does not exist anymore; it might be very uncommon in China now.** At that time, that is during the summer vacation, mom and dad went to work, and then we kids, my younger brother and I, their family also had? an older sister and a younger brother, the older sister and I were classmates and the

younger brother and my younger brother were classmates, so sister-brother, sister-brother, we went to their house to play or they came to our house to play, and then, for example during a summer vacation afternoon, the four of us would sit there, actually we were all reading.

S: You each read alone?

H: Each person read their own book.

S: Did you read to your younger brother?

H: No, we each read on our own.... Then the four of us would take turns, to go buy, that is there was a place with a little store not far from our house, go buy little colored candies, little chocolates, ah, buy it and take it home. Then every day, we would buy a bag every day, and then we might divide it up among ourselves. Just like that, reading books, reading books, reading for a while, [then] going to buy candy, [it] became our pattern, an everyday thing, a little over a dime, a little over ten cents, for a pack of small chocolate candies,

Coda

then come home, yes, **a great childhood memory.**

Lin *Laoshi* signals the beginning of a story with “that is a good question...” The next few lines set the stage. Many families could not afford to buy books. Reading for some, especially children, at that time often meant going into a public space and renting books that were shared among many readers. That public space gave her access to new worlds of the imagination. She remembers a specific example, a book on the myth of *Nüwa*, the goddess who repaired the heavens and created humans. As she remarks later, “when you were there reading you could forget the time. You could read one book, two books, three books, four books, you could read a

long time, [...] beside [the cart], you could not take them home.” These fictional worlds were rendered even more enticing with pretty pictures. The formatting of the books provided access to exciting fictional worlds. The scaffolding of Pinyin next to the characters facilitated that access; “otherwise I would not have been able to read them.” They were small enough for a child’s hands to hold easily and flip the pages to enjoy the pictures. This made reading what otherwise would have been very challenging text more accessible to beginning readers. The evaluative statements about reading harder books reflect a sense of achievement at conquering more challenging material. Her envious comment on the neighbors’ ability to buy books reveals a perception of books as valuable and desirable. The children each read on their own but in a shared space. Reading here is an individual act but in a social space, interspersed by a social activity, in this case buying candy. This chapter ends with a coda returning to the current day, looking back at the experience as a happy childhood memory.

The story resonated with me in part because I lived in China during the early 1980s, when this story took place. I was intrigued at the time by the book peddlers and the small graphic novels they rented out. I remember seeing groups of kids and sometimes adults, perched on rickety stools or squatting on the ground, devouring graphic novels. I was fascinated at the time by these outdoor “libraries” but did not have the opportunity then to learn about the perspective of the readers. Here we learn that, for this reader, access to small graphic novels meant joy, comradery, a carefree, happy childhood memory.

## Chapter 2: Teenage Reading Could be Exciting

### Orientation with Evaluative Statements

S: So in high school did you read any extra-curricular materials?



H: Yes, but not many. **This is also a difference between China and the United States, China and here.** Like for me in China, if, generally it would always be, depending on the teacher, just the textbook, [...] especially when we started to learn classical Chinese, it was just some archaic/classical Chinese vocabulary, [we] only understood some, ah, the meaning of the text. Also, at that time we had to memorize the text, we had a lot of text to recite from memory. But, we would also secretly read some popular novels or essays by ourselves, some things like that.

S: So what were the popular novels at that time?

H: One type was, if you want to know, swordplay novels, ah [laughs] Jin Yong, Gu Long<sup>19</sup>, those novels, they, a lot of people liked them, **perhaps I did not read them so much**, in high school.

S: What did you like to read?

H: At that time, **I may have tried to be a bit cool.** At that time [when] I was a student, I preferred [a controversial] writer from Taiwan. [...] because he was from Taiwan, his books were a little bit banned in China, so when we read them it was a bit exciting. I think it was called something like “The Ugly Chinese”, [laughs], he sometimes, I don’t know why [recording unintelligible]

S: So did you read other Taiwan writers?

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<sup>19</sup> Jin Yong and Gu Long are two extremely popular martial arts novelists in the greater Chinese speaking community. Jin Yong (pen name of Louis Cha 查良鏞, b. 1924) is a Hong Kong novelist and newspaperman. Gu Long (古龙, pen name of Xiong 熊耀华, 1938-1985) grew up in Hankou but made his career in Taiwan. Both authors wrote many novels that have been adapted into movies, TV series, comic books and other media and translated into many languages.

H: Yes, ah, that was Qiong Yao<sup>20</sup> from Taiwan, Qiong Yao's [books] were more romance novels. Most parents would definitely not be happy for you to read them, so you had to read those books secretly.

S: So did your parents know about those writers?

H: Parents, they did not know, or they, they generally, they did not let us read any extracurricular books, we read them secretly.

S: Why did they not let you read extracurricular books?

H: Because they, that is, just want you to take the college entrance exam, and get a high score, that is [they wanted you] to go to a top school, study at the top, all extracurricular entertainment was forbidden, for example if you read a novel, **they did not realize that, actually that reading would help your Chinese reading ability, they just thought you were wasting time, ah.**

Her response here starts with an evaluative comparison, setting her story within a larger context. She contrasts the American educational system, which, at least in recent decades, has encouraged extracurricular reading, with Chinese traditions that privileged the curated texts taught in school textbooks and suppressed other reading. Reading in school, in this narrative, meant memorizing vocabulary and reciting the prescribed text. Reading beyond the prescribed texts was restricted by gatekeepers—parents, in the case of all extracurricular reading, and the government, in the case of content with unsanctioned political perspectives. Lin and her peers pushed back against the gatekeepers to seek out texts with more attractive content. The lure of

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<sup>20</sup> Qiong Yao (琼瑶) (pen name of Chen Zhe 陈喆, b. 1938) was born in Sichuan but later moved to Taiwan, where she published over 100 romance novels, many of which have been adapted for film and TV.

forbidden texts made reading a risky and therefore exciting proposition. The teenagers here do not take freedom of access to reading for granted. Whereas the children in the earlier passages overcame financial resource limits to gain access to books, the teenagers here confront barriers related to content. In both cases, they find ways to ways to avoid adult restrictions and select their own reading material.

This passage is framed within the context of a highly competitive educational system geared toward preparing students for high stakes exams. Her description of parental attitudes reflects a shared social perspective of that era, and still today, that educational achievement offers the best pathway to upward social mobility. Higher education was reinstated in China in the late 1970s, after a nearly ten-year shutdown during the Cultural Revolution. Most parents in the 1980s had lived through a period when education was devalued. In reform era China, however, parents observed that the elite few who succeeded in clearing the college entrance exam hurdle to land in a top university often rose to a much higher standard of living. For these families and their children, then, any distraction that might undermine a student's preparation for the exams was seen as a threat. The parents' objections to frivolous reading, therefore, was not necessarily grounded in antiquated thinking. The risks involved in reading government banned materials were also real. Although the extreme measures of the Cultural Revolution had passed, periodic campaigns posed real risks to those who explored reading materials outside the sanctioned press. The teenagers found antidotes to the probably stultifying texts in the official curriculum. Reading, therefore, could be an adventure.

In the final comment, she adds a coda contrasting the restrictive views of that era on extracurricular reading with the common belief among educators today in both the United States

and China that extensive reading actually improves overall reading skills. The comment ties her experiences as a teenager to her current life as a parent, a reading adult, and a teacher.

#### Chapter 4: College Reading Opened Doors

##### Abstract and Orientation

S: So, during the process of learning English, did you reach a time when you could read extracurricular materials?

H: In English 1 it was the textbook. In junior high school it was the textbook; in high school it was also the textbook. When I got to university there was still a textbook, but then **my time was my own, I could study on my own**. At that time for us what was very popular was not extracurricular reading, first let me tell you about my study process,

##### Complicating Action with Evaluative Statements

It was the textbook, focusing on the textbook. **Then after I finished the textbook, I was not satisfied. I felt unsatisfied, right? I wanted to learn more.** [...] during college we had to take the College English Exam, levels four and six, so I read “New Concepts English” that was popular at the time, you have heard of it, ah, so everybody studied it, [...] when you read the texts, you learn more vocabulary, so I passed the level four and level six exams. Actually, the requirement at that time was for college sophomores to pass the level four exam, but it seems that when I was in college, I passed the level four exam as a freshman. Then, they, well it was up to you when you took the level six, but there was no requirement, but it seems that I passed the level six exam when I was a sophomore. It was very early, so my English (requirement) was completed.[...] but at that time, since I did especially well on the exam, it seems I had the top score in the

university, so the university gave me the opportunity to enroll in a double major and get a double degree, to study English as a second major. **Actually, I liked English. In high school I also liked English and wanted to study English but because I was a science student, I could not take too many English major (classes), so in college I became a biology education major and an English education major, actually my focus was on my English and put more of my energy into English.** At that time when you switched into the English major, of course you had to read more English materials. So at that time we were expected to read, for example some of Hemmingway's books, such as *Farewell to Arms*, right, like that, at that time, and then by myself I read things like *Little Women* and all of those famous books like that.

S: What did you like the best?

H: "Pride and Prejudice"

S: Ah, Jane Austen.

H: Right, including reading books this thick [gestures for fat book with her hands]

S: Could you understand it?

H: **It was hard but, you must know, those students, they were very hardworking.**

The reason we read those novels actually was so that, in the process of reading, [we] would increase our vocabulary, increase [our] ability to comprehend. **Actually, it was through reading so many books like that, that I gradually gained, accumulated the [English] reading comprehension [I have] now.**

Lin *Laoshi* frames her response within the context of learning English to improve her prospects. "First let me tell you about my study process." This is a signal that the subsequent narrative conveys the significance of her English reading for that phase of her life history. She

worked hard on her English and her achievement on the English exams opened doors for her. A science track student like Lin would not normally have an opportunity to major in English. Becoming an English major paved the way for her to teach English in a local university after graduation and eventually to studying abroad.

She credits her success in the English exam to diligent study and to extensive reading in English. In both efforts, she emphasizes the benefits in terms of vocabulary acquisition and strengthened reading comprehension. Reading, in this chapter, opened doors that led to life-changing opportunities.

In Lin *Laoshi's* stories about reading as a student, two strong themes emerge. The first is reading as a source of entertainment, excitement, relaxation. Subsumed into that value is also a closely related corollary value—reading for learning.

With her own students, she emphasizes intensive reading of the text, with exercises to strengthen detailed comprehension. This approach is consistent with the intensive reading approach that she described her English teachers using when she was a student. She also believes that students need extensive reading practice. In her teaching, she has experimented with different types of texts to give her students practice reading. She was pleased with the results of introducing graded readers to her students, allowing students to choose books to read at their own pace. “Those small chapter books, those are a huge, a huge step forward, [they] read about one small book per month, [...] that is extremely helpful for their reading.” She notes that this practice helps her students develop the reading fluency necessary to comprehend the text without getting bogged down in reading character-by-character. Her enthusiasm for this activity is consistent with her history of finding satisfaction in reading books of her own choice and wanting to help her students find that satisfaction also.

*Theme: Searching for a literacy pedagogy: confronting a challenge.* When I asked her about her current teaching job and teacher training, she told me her story of becoming a Chinese language teacher. As with the earlier story, this one was told in more than one chapter, during different segments of a co-constructed interview.

### Becoming a Teacher of Chinese as a Foreign Language

#### Chapter 1: Searching for a New Identity

##### Orientation and Abstract

S: [Your undergraduate education] was in a teacher track, but not in teaching Chinese?

H: Right, Chinese language teaching—if you want me to talk about my personal history, it was when I was in England, after I taught English at [Chinese university] for five years,

##### Complicating Action with **Evaluative Statements**

I went to England to go to graduate school, [...] Then, they said, do you want to teach Chinese. [...] because I was Chinese, then I went to a company, an English company, they had interactions with customers from Taiwan, so they wanted to learn a little Chinese. I started from that time, **I started by myself slowly groping my way to teaching Chinese.** [...] later [...], I went to [another European country], to [capital city]. In [city], at that place, taught elementary school in their Sunday school, third grade students, I taught, yes. I taught there one or two years, and then came to the United States.

S: What was that place like?

H: That place, because it was a Sunday school, the pedagogy there was relatively similar to that used for elementary school students in China.

[brief aside on living in another country]

H: **Actually, I think, this is, a person is unceasingly searching, for what suits him/her**, because, actually when I went to apply, for [...] linguistics research, but as a choice to make for myself, I thought to myself, I studied as an English major, [should I go for] business or linguistics. **At the time, I wanted to go to England. Perhaps it would be more interesting, so I went to England.**

Again, she signals an opening to a story, “my personal history” of Chinese language teaching. My question was actually intended to initiate a discussion on training to be a teacher. In her response, she chose instead to describe her search for a new life. Her initiation into teaching Chinese as a foreign language is presented as happenstance; she wanted part time employment and the school suggested a job teaching conversational Chinese to some business people.

## Chapter 2: Feeling for a way to teach Chinese

### Complicating Action with Evaluative Statements

S: So you started teaching Chinese in England? You had never taught Chinese before that?

H: I hadn't.

S: So when you taught those adults there, what Chinese characters did you teach them?

H: They... at that time I only taught them Pinyin, to speak, actually it was very fast. I just did not teach them Chinese characters.

S: What about in [country]?



H: In [country], as I said it was on Sundays, [...] Chinese children, so we used the textbooks they gave [us],[...] then just teach the lesson texts, then teach character recognition, **actually it is just like the Chinese teaching method, if you want to know about the teaching method used in China [...]**

S: So later, when you came to the United States, you came to this school to teach?

H: In the United States, actually before I came to this school, I was at [school name], that was the language survival they had before...

S: a weekend [school].

H: Right. A weekend school, but directed toward American families with adopted children, so I taught some at that weekend school.

S: What was that time like?

H: That time, I taught adults, I was still teaching adults. [...] We still always focused on speaking, on speaking, because those parents, they just came to study on weekends, just to learn a little.

She goes on to explain how she adapted to teaching conversation to adults, then teaching literacy to heritage children, then to teaching adults again, adjusting her pedagogy to suit the needs of the learners.

### Chapter 3: Putting it all together

#### Orientation and Abstract

S: Then when you came to [school]?

H: It was not until after I came to this place that I finally had a real breakthrough.

It was only after I came to this place that I really began teaching, because after all, this is long term, stable. It is not like those places I just mentioned. Those

were all half a year or one year, and it was just the most basic “how are you” “I am fine” “what is the date today?” just the basics. Then at this place you can start to, can slowly strengthen, all the way to learning at a high level.

#### Complicating Action with Evaluative Statements

S: When you first started, what approach did you use?

H: hmm, at that time we were selecting textbooks, [...] How did I teach? **I feel that all of those previous teaching experiences were all helpful to me. Even though they were all very casual, but they made me realize, that is to say, how to start, the issue of starting to teach [Chinese].**

This was the beginning of a more stable phase in her teaching career. Here she explains her reason for describing the fits and starts, the “groping” pathway to becoming a Chinese language teacher. In her story, she has drawn on all of her experimentation, her variety of experiences, to become a stronger teacher. She uses her knowledge to make choices for her students that she believes will give them a good foundation and prepare them to reach higher levels of achievement.

(After a long discussion on other topics, we returned to the topic of being a Chinese language teacher.)

Coda

#### Chapter 4: Finding Confidence and Satisfaction in Teaching

S: That is so interesting. I love the Chinese language.

H: **I also now find that I like it more and more, that is teaching.** You slowly, on your own, every year create a few new activities, those activities, they are suited to different students, [describes an exercise she designed], So you just,

once in a while first you use this, then you use that, but whether it is suitable or not, you have to find a new way for yourself, activities, then base the practice on different groups of people.

Again, the threads of experimentation, flexibility, and figuring things out by oneself are intertwined. In this final “chapter” she has found a rhythm in her teaching, an approach that she is confident with and she finds satisfaction in creating new activities that augment that approach.

**Theme: Chinese literacy and cultural identity.** Lin *Laoshi*'s comments on handwriting reflect an appreciation for the aesthetic value of Chinese calligraphy and for the traditional cultural significance of handwritten characters, “from the way you write, from your *handwriting* can tell your personality.” She did not study much brush calligraphy as a child but describes practicing with a brush and with a fountain pen “to write some characters, that is, to make one’s own characters a bit more upright.” She would like to try teaching calligraphy to her students but is wary of spending time on brush calligraphy in class, citing the time it would take to set up.

Her stories reveal a strongly positive value for becoming educated. As described in her story about reading, she admired those with education and access to books. She pushed herself to attend a better secondary school, worked hard to get into college and later to travel abroad for graduate school. These values are very consistent with traditional Chinese cultures of learning.

**Theme: Bottom-up skills: building Up Literacy in a Traditional Chinese Model.** Lin *Laoshi*'s description of learning English was much more vivid than her memories of learning to read Chinese.

### Learning English

Orientation

S: When did you start learning English?

H: Junior high school, the first year of junior high.

S: So was your English teacher Chinese or a foreigner?

H: Chinese. We did not have any foreign teachers.

S: No foreign teachers. How did they teach?

Complicating Action with Evaluative Statements

H: **My memories of learning English are strong.** Because at that time, it was already junior high school... The first lesson must have been, was those letters, ABCD, [...] then it would have been learn four vocabulary words, I don't remember now, it was probably bee, cake, bed, or the four words I may have forgotten, but in the beginning it started with a few words, we memorized the simplest words, Today, after you memorize these four words, then tomorrow or a few days later the teacher will test you on those words.

S: and then, what was taught next?

H: First it was vocabulary, later, slowly there were sentences, and then we usually had to recite the text from memory. I still remember the text I memorized, I think it was a crocodile and a monkey, a story something like that. The crocodile and whatever, monkey, maybe was going to eat the monkey, [...] [we] memorized a lot, [...] for example the text for this week's lesson, [we] had to memorize all of it, and then go recite it for her to hear, the teacher would inspect each of us, maybe some students would never be able to memorize it, but some could also recite it all from memory.

S: What happened if you could not recite it?

H: I don't know, because I was one of those who could recite from memory.

[laughs] **English was relatively simpler for me, a little easier for me than for a lot of other Chinese students.**

S: Why?

H: That was just that kind of feeling, maybe, that ability to understand, [...] our homeroom teacher at that time was our English teacher, [...] for one thing she taught very strictly, and also your own ability to comprehend, I think.

S: How was she strict?

H: I remember, I have a distinct impression, that is, **I once, you see my English was good, almost without errors**, but one time I made a mistake. She scolded me very sternly. 'How could you not know this?' She scolded me. I think it was a there be sentence, maybe, then make it into a question, maybe it was you know how many pens are there on the desk?, right, like that, but maybe I changed it to how many pens on the desk without are there or something, [She] really focused on my grammar, I think it was a there be sentence that I did wrong, and it was a question form.

S: She had very high expectations on grammar.

H: Very strict. We drilled on grammar at that time, drilled very strictly.

S: English grammar is very troublesome.

H: **Right, but I really liked it, liked it.**

S: Why?

H: **I just like this language, just like this language, then, I think English is very interesting, ah, I don't find it difficult.** So I don't find it difficult, so I, I feel that like learning math ah, English ah, when you understand it, then you don't find it difficult.

She signals that this is a significant story for her. “My memories of learning English are strong.” English was an area where she felt confident and gained a sense of achievement. She also indicates her view of a competent teacher. Her English teacher was demanding. She felt shamed by her teacher’s criticism but also grateful for the diligent attention to form.

The sequencing of the lessons is worth noting, from vocabulary to sentence structure, to intensive reading of a text, with memorization, to additional intensive explication of grammar. Her memories of her earliest Chinese language classes are less vivid but she remembers also starting with basic building blocks—Pinyin, strokes, radicals, simple characters. There was a heavy emphasis on intensive reading and memorization of the text.

Her descriptions of both her own schooling and her teaching reveal a strong sense of duty ascribed to both teachers and students. She values the role of the teacher in guiding students, selecting materials, designing activities, modeling good pronunciation. She also expects students to put forth effort. In her youth, she was expected to memorize material, including Chinese and English texts, vocabulary, characters, spelling, and she expects her students to take responsibility for memorizing Chinese vocabulary on their own.

Her curriculum structure includes careful attention to building bottom-up decoding skills. With beginning learners, she introduces Pinyin and character structure, with a few common components simultaneously, in the first few weeks of the course. She has her students copy characters. “For one thing, I feel that you will understand this character’s, this character’s structure. This [will become] a fluent process for you.” With her students, she provides more detailed instruction than she was given as a child in analyzing the components of characters. At the same time, she does not seem to want to overwhelm them with too much information on the components. She introduces a few components with each lesson and requires the students to

recognize them but not write them from memory. She primarily teaches semantic radicals but sometimes also directs the students' attention to phonetic radicals. "Actually, when I am teaching, I will mention this, but I don't emphasize [it], [...] I just say look at the first character in 'run' (跑- pǎo), and 'bubble' (泡[pào]), and package 包 [bāo], it is all this [points to 包], but this is just the sound, hmm, right." But she cautions that these patterns are difficult for students to grasp. "The reason it is not easy is that, for beginning students, their vocabulary is too small, so they [don't get] the phonetic radical..."

***Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.*** Lin Laoshi's basic lesson sequence echoes, to a large extent, the traditional model she learned as a child, with a strong emphasis on vocabulary first, then on intensive reading of a text. She describes her lesson structure as standardized. "My, that is my steps are repetitive, that is every week, every lesson." She starts each lesson with vocabulary, then focuses on the text. The class reads the text together then translates it. Then she has the students work in small groups to read the text again. "Then, we will ask each other questions based on the text, actually the teacher's role is minimal [here], I just let the students make their own practice.

The use of small group activities and encouraging the students to ask each other questions on their own incorporates student-centered learning into the traditional model. She says the changes she has made to her teaching have mainly been incremental tweaking. Over time, she has found ways to become more student centered. She now encourages the students to lead many of the classroom activities to practice using the material.

Her willingness to experiment has extended to attempts at introducing her students to authentic reading and listening materials. She tried a project in which she asked students to read

and respond to authentic online blogs from China. The students were interested but found it very difficult and time consuming. Eventually she dropped the project. Her experience with this attempt exemplifies her commitment to the belief that teachers must adapt to student needs. She has high expectations of her students but is also sympathetic to their difficulties. It also reflects her curiosity and willingness to experiment, in this case with a form of new literacy popular with her students' peers in China.

She expects her students to take responsibility for their learning and to prepare well for class. "Remembering vocabulary, this is a thing that I cannot help you with, I feel that, you should know this yourself." She expects them to recognize the characters and be able to use the vocabulary but not necessarily to write all of the characters from memory. "Writing [characters] from memory—actually I think that it is not necessary to write from memory, yes, as long as you can write [it] and you can recognize that character, you can type it, if it is the correct character then that is acceptable." She notes that accurate typing requires the ability to recognize characters and typing is a required skill for the AP exam. Therefore, she expects her students to develop good Chinese typing skills. Her curriculum structure reflects a realistic approach to adapting curriculum and expectations to practical learning goals.

Lin *Laoshi's* practice and stated beliefs are anchored in a strong role for the teacher. At the same time, however, she has embraced a belief that teachers must adapt to student needs. Her own evolution as a teacher is marked by adaptation to teaching different types of students. She has also found herself questioning some of the learning goals for her students. She aims her pedagogy and curriculum at preparing students for the Chinese AP exam and for transitioning to university Chinese. She has discovered, however, that universities often require students to write all characters from memory and, in some cases, to use traditional rather than simplified



characters. She questions the value of this requirement. In her observation, the students want to learn practical and useful language.

Recently she has also started questioning the need for adherence to strict grammar rules. She noted that Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg impresses Chinese audiences with his Chinese language skills. His sentence structures often include many errors transferred from English, but his meaning is still comprehensible by his audience “So that made me think, I am just, do I need to be so strict in my grammar expectations for my students? Or, would it be acceptable for them to be able to speak so I can understand, like him? “This willingness to question established expectations for learning goals shows an open mindedness and a sense of curiosity.

Lin *Laoshi* did not cite professional training as an important source for her thinking on teaching. Although her undergraduate degree was in teaching biology and English, she emphasized instead her experiences in the classroom. Her story of becoming a teacher and comments on her teaching reflect a strong preference for the value of practical experience.

I observed Lin *Laoshi*'s Chinese 5/AP class. The lesson plan she provided listed the lesson goal as ensuring that the students “be able to read the text and understand exactly what it is” then be able to ask each other questions about it afterward. The text used, from New Practical Chinese Reader Vol. 4, was a dialogue between two college students discussing their career goals. The lesson began with a YouTube video enacting the dialogue, which allowed the students to practice listening to the text they had already begun reading the previous day. Lin *Laoshi* then engaged the students in a group warm-up exercise, asking them questions in Chinese about recent experiences at school, and encouraging them to ask each other a few questions. She then asked individual students to read aloud some of the lesson vocabulary and corrected their tones.

She read out a few vocabulary terms in English and had the students give the Chinese, in choral mode. The next activity was answering questions about pictures related to the text. This was also a pre-reading exercise with an emphasis on vocabulary. The students then took turns reading aloud lines of the text and translating into English. Lin *Laoshi* then explained in English, in response to a student question, the cultural context of law as a relatively new profession in China. This tracks with the traditional Chinese cultural model of the teacher as a guide but also reflects an adaptation to her students' needs. Lin *Laoshi* then called on individual students to respond to questions related to each line of the text, e.g. how many years does it take to become a lawyer in the United States? She often related the questions to the students' own lives, e.g. "do you want a stable income or not a stable income?" At one point, she paused to explain, in Chinese, additional cultural background for the text. Finally, she asked the students to ask each other questions on these topics, which they did, remaining in the target language.

In her lesson, she emphasized intensive reading, with line-by-line explication, of a prescribed text. This is consistent with traditional Chinese teaching. She modified her approach, however, in several ways. First, she carefully interspersed reading with oral language, allowing her students opportunities to map the written language to spoken language. This was a clear manifestation of her belief in connecting speaking to reading. Secondly, she added meaningful activities that connected the content of the lesson to the students' lives. The entire class was conducted in Chinese, apart from the translation exercise and the explanation in English mentioned above. The class went very smoothly and she appeared very confident. Overall, the lesson was highly consistent with her description of her methods and the values she holds.

**Tang Jiajia.** Tang Jiajia teaches three levels of Chinese in an urban public high school in a mid-sized city in the Midwest. I became aware of her through my ongoing contact with the

school and we have worked together on some curriculum projects. She grew up in rural northern China and studied psychology and then completed an MA in curriculum and instruction. After working in China for a couple of years, she immigrated to the United States and then accepted her current position as a CFL teacher. At the time of the interview, she had been teaching there for three years. We talked in a café near her school. It was a bit noisy but we had a relaxed conversation. She seemed to enjoy talking about her journey to becoming a CFL teacher and her self-deprecating sense of humor added a liveliness to her stories. After several months of waiting for permission from her district, I observed her teaching in the late spring.

*Theme: Searching for a literacy pedagogy: confronting a challenge.* Tang *Laoshi's* first job after completing her master's degree was as a full-time "class advisor" (班主任 *bānzhǔrèn*) in an international school, a private high school in Beijing designed to prepare students to study at universities abroad. In addition to completing an IB curriculum, the students were expected to participate in resume-enhancing extra-curricular activities. Tang *Laoshi's* job, as she describes it, was a combination of "academic advisor, and counselor and social worker" all rolled into one. She describes having to explain the curriculum to parents and students, organize activities, and help students with personal problems. After a few years, she was exhausted by the heavy workload.

When she first arrived in the United States, she was presented with an unexpected opportunity to teach Chinese in a local high school. She immediately found that her students required a flexible approach, particularly to teaching literacy. She describes the high school as an "inner city school," in which only about a third of the students intend to enroll in university. She discovered right away that most of her students were unlikely to do much homework and some did not expect to exert much effort in class. "These ordinary kids, they want to learn Chinese

culture, [but] they don't want to write Chinese characters every day, then if you teach Chinese characters the first year, you will scare them off." The students were more enthusiastic about speaking Chinese and learning about Chinese culture than learning to read and write. She began searching for ways to adapt her pedagogy and materials to motivate them and meet their needs.

***Theme: Reading for Growth and Pleasure***

Tang *Laoshi* reports that she always liked school and learning. "At that time, I thought going to school was especially great. Right, time at school was especially fun.[...] I wanted to be student. [...] right, time spent learning new things was happy."

Tang *Laoshi* remembers learning to read as a natural, not stressful process. Her mother pointed out characters to her, on the bus, on the street and asking her "how many characters there do you know? What character is that? Read it for me." At school, her teachers had her memorize vocabulary and lesson texts and assigned character copying as homework. She does not remember it as arduous. She and her classmates played character games in the schoolyard, writing characters on each other's backs and guessing the words. She generally remembers going to school and learning to read as fun.

She did not have much access to reading materials. When she was in elementary school in the early 90s, there were not many books available to her. In the summertime, she remembers reading ahead in the textbooks for the next year. Books for children started becoming more prevalent in her village a few years later. She remembers her brother, who is five or six years younger, reading picture books and story books. There were no newspapers in the village. Later, she read legends and fairy tales and even the swordplay novels that were popular at that time. Her parents did not read much but she remembers sharing a swordplay novel with her father. She had more access to books after she enrolled in high school, a boarding school in a larger town.

## Going to the Library in Boarding School

Abstract

S: Did you **miss** home?

J: Maybe at first, then, soon it was fine. I think I was a person who liked school life.

Orientation

S: So, did you like to read at school?

J: Yes. We high school students, our high school had a library, but that library, it did not have, that is, I feel that **during our time, the quality of rural education was not high**, and you cannot say there were organized efforts or any thoughts of teaching students to go read a lot, there were not. But the school would say from dinner time at five to seven in the evening, during the two hours of self-directed study time, you could go to the library.

Complicating Action with **Evaluative Comments**

J: I remember at that time I used to go to the library to read, the library would only have a few students, our entire school had about 30 classes, with about 50 students per class, about 1600 or 1700, that is, even in a school that big, there would not be more than five kids reading in the library!

S: Really!

J: Really! Most people would go do their homework, **who would go read? Nobody read books.**

S: But you went.

J: Yes, I went.

S: Why?

J: I don't know. **I just felt that the things they had in there were great, I just liked those printed words.** I would go, and take a small notebook, ah, and would copy, copy some small passage, after reading it I would copy a while, copy a poem, you read, ah, you think, ah, this is really not bad.

S: So what types of books did you like to read at that time?

J: At that time, I liked to read poetry, and...

S: Tang poems? What type? Chinese poetry?

J: Modern. The ones published then were modern poems, right.

S: Was there an author you especially liked?

J: No. I think there wasn't at that time. I did not see that many. I read for a year, just going occasionally for a bit, going for a bit, [laughs] **I was a bad student, those who don't want to study, just go do that [laughs].**

Tang *Laoshi* laughs and calls herself a bad student for going to the library to look for interesting things to read rather than working on her homework. This vignette reveals a sense of curiosity, a desire to know something beyond the highly restricted content of the assigned textbooks. She wanted something interesting to read so she used her homework time to go to the library. She does not explain why she behaved differently than most of the others. Somewhere she got the idea that books contained "things in there that were great." In any case, she was willing to be different and pursue her own individual interests.

The copying activity reflects a scarcity of resources but also a way of engaging with text. At that time, books were expensive and students living in boarding schools probably had neither the cash nor the opportunity to go to bookstores. Copying favorite passages into a notebook was a way of "owning" a text. It also resonates with the notion, in tradition Chinese cultures of

learning, that rereading, reciting, and copying text are all ways of going deeper into a text, of seeking greater understanding. I remember students in university in the early 80s copying passages of English classics, as well as Chinese poems, into flimsy, cheap notebooks. Sometimes they would show me the texts they had copied. “Look, this is the Declaration of Independence!”

At a different moment in the interview, she mentions other experiences in reading for pleasure. She read the swordplay novels so popular at the time. She also mentions that she tried to read Mark Twain but did not like it, because it was too hard to understand. Her descriptions of her younger self radiate with a sense of joy in reading and especially in learning.

*Theme: Chinese literacy and cultural identity.*

#### Learning Calligraphy

Orientation

S: Did you learn brush calligraphy as a child?

J: No.

S: You did not?

J: When I was working in Beijing, on the weekends I went to the Children’s Palace

<sup>21</sup>Because on the weekends, I did not have much else to do, so I went to the Children’s Palace.

Complicating Action With **Evaluative Comments**

J: One time, just, quite by chance, I discovered that the Children’s Palace had a calligraphy teacher teaching those children, then I asked her, “Teacher, I want to

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<sup>21</sup> Children’s Palaces are organizations similar to community centers for children. Commonly found in most Chinese cities, they usually offer activities and extracurricular classes for children in art, dance, calligraphy, etc.

come, will you accept me?” The teacher said, “come!” So I went with those children and studied for a year, spent half a day every weekend, **so I know a little bit...** · “

Coda

S: So, you seem to like writing brush calligraphy, is that right? Do you still practice?

J: Now I don't have time, right. [...]when I see [my students] write like this, I say “you are not bad.” After I say that, they insist that I go learn more right away. I say “This is all that I can teach you.” They say, “teacher quickly go learn [more calligraphy], then come back to teach us.”

Tang *Laoshi* implies that learning calligraphy was not an option for her when she was growing up. Her desire to learn was still strong, however, after she became an adult and she was even willing to join a children's class. She appears to have enjoyed it, as she continued for a full year. She ends this little story with a comment about her students' reaction, rather than a response to the question about herself. She appears to have gained much satisfaction in successfully leading her students to enjoy this traditional literacy practice.

She is modest about her own abilities. This is a reflection of the tradition in China of practicing for many years before assuming expertise. Although Tang *Laoshi* may actually be quite skilled at calligraphy, she might think it presumptuous to describe herself that way.

***Theme: Bottom-up skills: building up literacy in a traditional Chinese model.*** In describing her early schooling, Tang *Laoshi* recalls copying characters with Pinyin on top. She enjoyed her copying assignments so much that her mother was surprised. “Heavens, Ah, this child is special!” Her teachers started by teaching Pinyin and simple, unitary characters. Correct stroke order was expected.



In her own teaching, she starts first year students with simple, unitary pictographic characters, such as 人 [*rén* person], and shows the students how these are reshaped as radicals in other characters. When she focuses on reading with third year students, she has them look for patterns, finding characters with the same radicals and comparing the meanings. She focuses on semantic radicals and does not usually teach phonetic radicals because she thinks the students do not have enough of a foundation to see the patterns of phonetic radicals.

She does not assign much reading outside the textbook, although she occasionally finds a newspaper article or other material to present to them. She says her students find authentic materials very difficult.

***Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.*** In her efforts to motivate her students, she incorporates cultural items and activities whenever practical. She found calligraphy lessons especially engaging for her students.

### My Students Can Do Calligraphy!

Abstract

S: Have you ever exposed them to brush calligraphy writing?

J: Yes! Do you want to see? We have pictures! [She brings out her cellphone and shows me pictures of her students' calligraphy.]

Complicating Action and Evaluative Comments

S: Do you teach them to write brush calligraphy? [...]

J: Right, they wrote this, this is “自足常乐” (*zì zú cháng lè*) [those who are content are forever happy]

S: Not bad, very well written, so pretty, Ah, 马到成功 (*mǎ dào chéng gōng*) [the horse

arrives with success], what, the year of the horse, this is good, very good, this really has energy!

J: But I did not teach this, he wrote it himself, then, [...] but you will feel that **it has a bit of the feeling of brush calligraphy**, you want to see his, how he starts the stroke, how he ends the stroke, it will have a bit of this style to it.

S: Right, it has a bit of...a learned technique, this one looks more like a painting [looking a stylized, decorated version of the character for rabbit]

J: This is painted, why did he paint it, because he, he feels that writing with a brush is especially difficult, **he felt very sad about it.**

S: But this looks great.

J: Later I said, I said you go look for, you go on the internet and enter 'rabbit' into baidu [search engine], you can search for some images, it will show you a lot of them, I said, you pick one you like and then write [copy] that, a, so he wrote this, so **he felt happy**. [...]

S: So why did you think of this approach?

J: When I arrived here, when I came here, I brought a little, these brushes, ah, then those things, **originally I thought I would just let them experience it a bit**, then **they really liked it**. But you don't have so many materials here. Later, we had a foundation, that is [they] said if, you, a teacher wants to do a project, not part of the usual funding, [we] can support it, you can apply, we will give you up to five hundred dollars, then I asked about what we wanted to do. If you want to do this you have to fill in this form, to apply for one, if you want to do something, then they said, ok. I said I wanted to practice calligraphy. I asked for the form, filled out the form,

submitted it, it was approved, it was approved in November.

S: So you bought some brushes, calligraphy paper, etc.

J: Yes, I bought some brushes, calligraphy paper, ink, then got started, because we wrote every two weeks, the first time we wrote [calligraphy], [we] wrote one character, we first practiced the basic brush stroke order, that is to say how you hold the brush. I want to see how you start each stroke, how your brush travels, and how you complete each stroke. Then I want to see your structure, you cannot make a mess, you need to write each character in a square shape, then go on. I told them about some fundamentals. After they had practiced two sessions, then I said, ok, for these lessons, you need to write a piece [of calligraphy]. What piece? Whatever animal you are, you write that character, or the animal that you like best, so they wrote. Then the second time you need to choose a four character idiom, an idiom you like, [such as], ‘the horse arrives with success.’

Resolution and Evaluative Comment

**J: It was a little difficult, but most of them liked it.**

In this story, she draws on a cultural identity practice to motivate students. She was very proud of this and excited about her students’ achievements. Some of the works were quite artistic. Her initial intent was just to let them to experience a bit of brush calligraphy, and it seems that she was surprised at how much they liked it.

She frames the story as an effort to share something fun with her students but the details reveal an appreciation for the aesthetics and skills of calligraphy. She relates how she carefully introduced them to the basic skills of brush strokes and coached them to write characters that are square and balanced. In describing the work of a student who initially struggled with calligraphy,

she makes a distinction between to write [寫 xiě], and to draw or paint [畫 huà]. This is a key concept within the tradition of Chinese brush calligraphy. Properly executed calligraphy is “written” with confident, decisive brush strokes. If strokes are outlined and then filled in, backfilled, or touched up in any way, the work is considered drawn or painted not “written,” in other words, not calligraphy.

The unfolding of this story reveals strong empathy for her students. Perhaps her ability to draw out her students’ individual interests was developed during her experiences as a guidance counselor in China. She shows great flexibility and creativity in adapting the assignments to meet their interests and abilities. For the student who struggled with brush writing, she advised him to find something he liked to copy as a drawing. She even suggested that he search on the internet (using a Chinese search engine, rather than Google!) She was careful to introduce them to the fundamental skills and aesthetic parameters of traditional calligraphy but her primary goal here seems to be to have them develop a positive affect toward writing characters.

A subplot here is Tang *Laoshi*’s growth as a professional in an American school setting. She successfully navigated the bureaucratic procedures to obtain a grant for this project. Her recounting of the steps she pursued is an indication of her sense of achievement here.

In her search for a literacy pedagogy that works for this group of inner city students, Tang *Laoshi* has established a clear priority on grounding literacy in spoken language. Her insistence upon spoken communication skills is based in part upon her own frustration with the way she was taught English.

Like most students in her generation, Tang *Laoshi* first started learning English in junior high school. They learned by repeating after the teacher. “In our time, the teacher read aloud, and we repeated, you had to repeat with the teacher, for example if the teacher said “A” you said

“A”, the teacher said “B” you said “B”. They memorized vocabulary and texts and studied grammar. She found it hard at first, but later it got easier. “I struggled for three months, then, [...] one day I suddenly woke up, after I woke up, I felt that English was very simple. But later I felt that English was hard.” In graduate school, she found it difficult to transfer what she had learned to authentic texts. “Those sentence structures were especially complicated. It seems that that they did not have the patterns of the ones you studied before, then [you] say ‘heavens, ah, this actually is a bit difficult!’”

In her secondary school and college English classes, they memorized dialogues but seldom practiced meaningful conversations. She did not realize at the time what they were missing.

### I was dumbfounded

Abstract

Later, I learned this myself,

Orientation

that is after struggling the first time, [...] I had already studied three years in junior high school, three years in high school, I studied for six years, then I studied [it] in college for two years, eight or nine years of English,

Complicating Action

Then one time I went to listen to a class of a classmate in the English department, a class in their department taught by a foreign teacher. The foreign teacher was giving class and asking questions, seeing who could answer. **I could not keep up at all. I completely did not understand what they were doing. At that time, I was dumbfounded.** Later when I went to graduate school and wanted to go abroad to study, the foreign teacher asked,

“when are you going, ah, what school...” **Heavens, ah!** You hear that, you know that will...you understand and you want to respond, at that time **you think you studied language up to this point, and speaking out from here is a different thing! [laughs]**”

Tang *Laoshi* laments that the English training she received did not prepare her for deciphering authentic text or using oral language in a spontaneous, interpersonal context. She remembers that she found memorizing English dialogues useful but then she was “dumbfounded” when she discovered that she could not express herself in an authentic conversation.

In her own teaching, she has made an effort to give her students the foundation in meaningful oral communication that she did not get. She tells her students “speaking, in our class, this is number one. I don’t care if you get a hundred on the test, if you cannot speak in Chinese, if you have studied with me for one year and a Chinese person asks you, asks you three to five questions, and you cannot answer, then you are not good enough.”

Spoken language is heavily prioritized over literacy in her classes. “You cannot do [written] exercises every day, I feel that doing written exercises will kill the nature of language. So I don’t give a lot of homework, but we speak a lot.”

This does not mean that she does not teach reading and writing but finding the right balance is not always easy.

### I forgot to teach reading!

Orientation

S: Oh, right, right, so the method you use to teach now is...

J: That is to say your first step, you want, I think is more balance, but the first step is to speak first, you speak and then go do reading.

## Complicating Action and **Evaluative Comments**

J: Then, that is why I like this second year class, that is because **the current second year class was especially obedient at that time**, that is [when] I said you need to speak freely, they really did it like that. Then they really did practice each time, then.... Because at that time [...] it seems it was my second year teaching. [...] Then, I remember I did not have much experience. Then, it seems that, **without my noticing**, that whole year, teaching second year students that year, the whole year, that class, it seems that I did not teach reading. Then later, when we were about to finish, that is about to take the final exam, **I was so foolish!** I said “heavens ah! [laughs] I cannot only test....” It seems that for the second year class I had suddenly forgotten about this, because they were so obedient every day. **Then you think you are making progress every day...**

S: and then?

J: I said “heavens! How would I test their reading? What should I do?” There were two semesters left before the final exam! Ok! That day I stood in the classroom holding a short passage, probably about ten sentences, a self-introduction, that type, with Pinyin, and then, underneath was [a set of] six or seven questions, “ok, you all read this essay and then answer some, I will give you a time limit, see if you can answer.” And they could all do it. Right.

Coda

S: So what conclusions did you draw from that experience?

**J: I feel that if your spoken language is good, then you can read. That is... at this type of low level it is no problem...with spoken language, when you give Pinyin,**

**you will have no problem.**

Tang *Laoshi* laughs at herself in this story, reflecting both a sense of self-awareness and an indication that the story is especially meaningful to her. She put so much emphasis on spoken language that she did not give them much reading and writing practice that year. As a result, she says that class was particularly good at speaking. Presumably to satisfy the requirements of the school, she needed to include some reading in the final exam. The exercise she describes includes giving Pinyin next to each character. The students knew the oral language content well and that they could recognize the words in Pinyin. She goes on later to say that they could also recognize some characters, especially the simple, unitary ones.

In addition to emphasizing oral language, she also makes efforts to teach her students to use language in different contexts. She noticed that her students were adept at responding to practiced, familiar phrases but were unable to respond when confronting language in an unfamiliar context. She sought out training in TPRS<sup>22</sup> (Teaching Proficiency through Reading & Storytelling) and incorporated storytelling into her lessons to give them language in more contexts. After studying a topic, she creates a story with them, “then the language in that story will have a lot that they are not familiar with, then things they don’t know, I add that in there.”

Her goal is to teach her students to respond to spoken language in an immediate, natural fashion. “I say if you cannot answer a question in five seconds, [...] then you get no points. They say, teacher why is it like that? I say do you think that in life [people] have a lot of patience to wait for you?”

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<sup>22</sup> TPR Storytelling is a method developed by Blaine Ray, based on James Asher’s Total Physical Response method, that uses storytelling and acting out stories to practice language. See <http://tprstories.com/what-is-tprs/>.



This is not to say that she does not teach reading and writing. She says she wants them to learn to communicate, to express themselves, to tell their stories, both in spoken language and in writing. Her approach is to emphasize spoken language first, with writing in Pinyin and characters with Pinyin, and then transition to characters without Pinyin only after the students are confident with the spoken phrases. “I give Pinyin but I [also] remove the Pinyin so we learn, [...] then when [they] have learned [the characters], and everyone’s spoken language is very fluent, [...] then we take away the Pinyin.” She starts gradually removing some of the Pinyin in second year and requires third year students to start reading characters without Pinyin. She tells her students that if they want to study Chinese in college or go to China someday they must learn to read characters.

Tang *Laoshi*’s emphasis on spoken language first, with a delayed introduction to characters, is consistent with the position of some CFL experts that students should acquire a foundation in spoken Chinese, with support from Pinyin, before attempting to read characters without scaffolding from Pinyin (for example, Everson, 2011). This approach is grounded in second language acquisition theory. As discussed in Chapter II, however, other researchers have found that many teachers and students prefer to introduce characters from the beginning (Ye, 2013). The question of the sequence and timing of the introduction of characters versus Pinyin remains controversial among CFL experts. Tang *Laoshi* may not be aware of this research but, through trial and error, has astutely observed the benefit of establishing a foundation in spoken Chinese before requiring students to read characters.

Tang *Laoshi* seems very attuned to individual differences among her students. When she shows authentic videos, some students are very engaged while others play games on cellphones. In a description of a storytelling exercise, she notes that some students enjoy it whereas others

don't. The ones who like it tell her it helps them learn quickly. The ones who don't like the method seem fearful of answering comprehension questions about new material. "They don't like uncertainty, they feel they are in a dangerous situation, they don't want you to check on understanding." She attributes this to personality differences and different learning styles.

Tang *Laoshi* reports that the biggest challenge that she faces is that her students vary so much in ability to recognize characters. This makes it difficult to design assignments that everyone can participate in. "The kids that are not that motivated, [...] they may be a bit lazy and right away use the Pinyin, [...] then for those kids who say 'I must learn this well,' they will decide on their own to not look at the Pinyin."

On the day that I observed, Tang *Laoshi* had prepared a lesson on directional location phrases. She started with a warmup exercise in which she asked, in Chinese, for the location of specific students in the class. The students then wrote their responses, e.g. \_\_\_ is behind me, or \_\_\_ is on my left, in Pinyin, on individual white boards. She then showed them slides with pictures of her family home in China and her home in the United States. She asked the group and then individuals general questions about the homes, e.g. how many rooms, how many levels, then questions about the location of specific objects, to elicit locative phrases, e.g. where is the TV; in front of the couch. She gave them a graphic organizer on locative phrases to work on in pairs and then gave them each a piece of paper and asked them to draw a picture of their home, label the rooms and objects, then describe it to their neighbor. Tang *Laoshi* circulated among the students, giving feedback and encouragement. She responded to student requests for additional vocabulary for their drawings. She pointed out to me that some students labeled their drawings with characters and others with only Pinyin. She explained that the school had insisted upon

combining second and third year Chinese in the same room. This exacerbates the difficulties in meeting the needs of a wider range of abilities and motivation.

This sequence of activities was a well thought out way of introducing authentic context, using real homes in China and in the United States, and guiding students to make subtle cultural comparisons using simple language. The activities included meaningful communication and student-centered learning. She connected literacy to spoken communication and incorporated a flexible approach to writing to accommodate different levels of ability. The lesson was taught primarily in Chinese, with a few interjections in English. The teacher was calm and confident despite the variation in student engagement and the loud noise from the inadequate fans turned on to cool the overheated classroom.

**Jin Yulan.** Jin Yulan teaches in a private school in a large mid-Atlantic city. She had taught there for three years at the time of the interview. Prior to that she had taught for two years in a public school in the same city as a Hanban-sponsored volunteer teacher. She grew up in southwest China where she studied Chinese literature as an undergraduate. She then completed an MA in TCSL (teaching Chinese as a second language) at a prestigious university in central China. I had met her when I gave a training workshop at a university in a mid-Atlantic state. Later, I reconnected with her through a friend who works in that state, and she agreed to allow me to interview her and observe her teaching.

*Theme: Searching for a literacy pedagogy: confronting a challenge.* Jin Laoshi first came to the United States to teach in a public school in a large city. She enjoyed the teaching and received highly positive evaluations for her work. She initially thought all was going well but then began to have nagging doubts.

## My Students Told Me

She told this story as a response to a question asking for an example of a lesson that did not go well.

### Orientation and **Evaluative Comments**

I cannot think of a specific lesson, but I will think of, oh, right, right, right, I will think of that class, a class like a Chinese one class, [...] I myself also just thought, wow, [I] just followed the teaching method used to teach in university, the method in which I had learned myself, **I thought, wow, our students are learning quickly**, in only one trimester we had learned a lot of things, then, but, **I felt that these students, they were very--that, they, I felt, were not especially certain**,

### Complicating Action and **Evaluative Comments**

Then, one time I just sat down, I said, "ok we're not going to teach anything today, so let me tell you how, can you tell me how you feel right now, can you tell me, you know, how do you think about our Chinese going so far." Because at that time, that first year **I was very frank with my students**, and I said, this is also my learning too, so I am learning with you guys, so you have to let me know how you feel, so I can adjust it better, so, **I am very grateful to those students who were so open**, to say we're lost, you know, like it's too fast, and like a, it's too much, we don't feel like we know those vocab, a, yet, and then we start a new one, then it's just like snowball, and it is just too much, then I just felt there, that is to say,

### Coda

**I look back**, actually **it was that I was using my teacher centered**, because I felt that what I had cover it, the students should have learned, **actually it's two different**

concepts, what you teach from what they learn, can be totally different, so, that class, during that period, you say that frustration, **I felt that, oh, I worked so hard**, I prepared my lessons every day, prepared, you see my powerpoints were so pretty! [ laughs ] , and the activities I did were so well done, but how did they still feel that, but that was because **[I] was still restricted to my own perspective**, I thought, OK · I covered this , I did it, [but] those students...

This story describes a pivotal point in Jin *Laoshi's* development as a teacher. She identifies this as the moment when she realized that the teaching methods that she had taken for granted in her previous teaching experiences were not working for her students. She worked hard to do a good job for her students. She created pretty Powerpoints and interactive classroom activities. She covered all of the material in class. Then she was shocked to learn that her students were lost. She mentions at another point in the conversation that she realized later, after taking a graduate course in assessment, that the assessments she was using to evaluate their literacy acquisition were not accurate. The students were able to cram for the tests but they were not absorbing the material. The feedback indicated that the students did not feel that they were actually acquiring the content. The teacher assumed that, because she had covered the content and the students were able to pass the tests, the students were learning.

Her intuition that something was not quite right reflects a great sensitivity to the student perspective. Her focus here is not only on student motivation; she is looking for more than cooperativeness. She wants her students to have a sense of achievement. Asking them for honest feedback pushes them to reflect upon their own learning and indicates a strong value placed on student satisfaction.

The coda reflects an awareness Jin *Laoshi* acquired during her U.S. MA program. As she looks back now, she realizes that her approach at that time was heavily teacher-centered and did not take the student perspective into consideration. The training led her to reflect upon her teaching and gain a greater awareness of the perspective of her students.

She realized that she was following a pedagogy similar to that she had experienced in learning English. “No matter what a person does, you always, you just start with what you know, because that is how you learned second language, so you just go explain [it] like that, right, right, right, but you base it on your own learning experience.” Jin *Laoshi* describes her experiences learning English in secondary school and college as focused on translation, vocabulary memorization, and grammar drills.

She initially thought her teaching was good but then started to feel “something’s missing, it’s like, I feel like, I am trying, there’s a part, a piece is missed from the puzzle.” She observed French and Spanish classes taught by colleagues and discovered that they used very different methods. Eventually she decided to pursue an MA degree in foreign language teaching in the United States. “I decided to go get some understanding, that is, of some methods, ah, theory, ah of foreign language teaching in the United States [...] I need to systematically learn this thing.” The coursework gave her new perspectives on her teaching. “I would connect to my previous experiences, whether successful or not successful, I would, now I felt that I had a framework, I had a reference point [...] that is to really connect theory and practice together.”

***Theme: Reading for pleasure and personal growth.*** Jin *Laoshi* recalls learning to read as a fun experience. She says her mother remembers her being very inquisitive about reading, always asking questions when she was preschool age; “what is that word?” She enjoyed learning to read at school. “I liked Chinese class, because I myself am verbal, so I just, I liked to read

things, because I felt, if I recognize characters, recognize a lot, then I can read a lot of things, then I can be more independent in my study.” Reading for knowledge is a skill she continues to appreciate as an adult. While studying for an MA in the United States, she read many academic papers in English. She found it very challenging--“my hair was falling out”—but rewarding.

She also enjoys reading for pleasure. Her parents encouraged her to read, even extracurricular materials. “When I was young at home, at that time it was very tight, counting the budget for each person, but my mom never saw buying books as, ah budget, [...] so from when I was little, I could buy all kinds of books.” She especially liked to read children’s magazines. She recounts going back to China recently to help her parents move and finding a large stash of her old magazines. “[They] had collected so many of that [magazine] called “youth arts.” It is still published! Because my mom subscribed to it for me every year, then, it was essays written by youth, then the stories, ah, [...] I read a variety...” In junior high school she enjoyed reading the Harry Potter books (in translation) and discussing them with her friends, but in high school she was too focused on her studies to do much extracurricular reading. As an adult, she now enjoys Chinese novels, especially modern, avant-garde writers.

***Theme: Chinese Literacy and Cultural Identity***

Like the other participants, Jin *Laoshi* expresses an appreciation for the beauty of calligraphy and well-written characters. As a child, however, she found calligraphy lessons tedious. She describes her childhood self as very social and physically active. At the time, she says, she did not see the point of sitting still and practicing calligraphy when she would rather be with her friends!

In her current teaching, she exposes her students to good calligraphy, but she puts more emphasis on the cultural perspectives embedded in the literacy lessons she prepares. In the lesson

I observed, she had her students read a text on the “Three Friends of Winter,” three plants—pine, bamboo, and plum—that are used as symbols in Chinese literature for the virtues of steadfastness, perseverance, and resilience, and complete written and oral activities related to the text. Jin *Laoshi* extended the content to develop a comparative lesson on virtues in Chinese and American culture. She led the students in a discussion on modesty and other virtues in the United States and China. She then asked them to read and discuss in pairs nine scenarios and decide whether each scenario would be considered polite in the United States or in China. For example, one scenario was “wearing a hat in class” while another was “when eating, planting one’s chopsticks upright in the bowl.” After discussing these scenarios in pairs, they reported their findings to the class and engaged in a lively discussion of social mores in Chinese.

For Jin *Laoshi*, using literacy lessons like this to raise student awareness of Chinese culture is a high priority. She recognizes that not all of her students will continue studying Chinese, but she hopes that all will come away with an appreciation for cultural differences. “I hope they, during the process of learning this language, [...] the thing I value most is, during this four years of learning Chinese, you actually understand the Chinese culture better, and you feel, a, you have a more open mind.”

***Theme: Bottom-up skills: building up literacy in a traditional Chinese model.*** Jin *Laoshi* remembers being taught character decoding explicitly as a child. She learned the character structures, the strokes, stroke order, and copied characters over and over. The practice was effective but she does remember sometimes writing the wrong character for homophonic words.

After the pivotal moment described earlier in which Jin *Laoshi* discovered her students were not learning as quickly as she had thought, she realized that the students were memorizing



characters for the tests but not really learning them. She also found that she had “overestimated the students’ [ability] with Chinese characters” but they actually needed more practice and more training on how to decompose the characters. She now provides more explicit instruction in decoding. She believes this information is critical for students, so much so that it warrants giving some explanations in English, rather than Chinese, even though this violates the ACTFL guidelines for teaching at least 90 percent in the target language.

She starts by teaching the numbers, just as she was taught, and gives instruction on strokes, structures, semantic and phonetic radicals. She expects her students to practice writing characters and to memorize some of the characters. Each year, the students learn to write over 100 new characters from memory and to recognize about twice that many. She tests their memory using dictation.

She teaches stroke order but does not dwell on it. “I tell them from the beginning that the stroke order, is for [their] own benefit, because [...] stroke order was developed by Chinese people for like thousand years, [...] they discovered this is the most efficient way to write this character [...], you know, logically, and beautifully.”

In the lesson I observed, she pointed out the semantic and phonetic radicals for several new characters. For example, she called the students’ attention to the semantic and phonetic radicals in the character for pine tree. 木[Wood/tree mù] + 公 [public gōng] = 松 [pine sòng].

***Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.*** Jin *Laoshi* reports that, based on the coursework she took in the United States and reflection upon her teaching, she has adapted her teaching to incorporate more meaningful communication, student-centered learning, sociocultural methods, inductive learning, and top-down reading skills.

*Meaningful communication.* In her training in the United States, Jin *Laoshi* became more aware of the impact of different types of language teaching upon language acquisition.

### Mom and Dad Learn Different English

Orientation

S: Do your parents speak English?

Y: No, um.

S: Have they run into it in their jobs?

Y: No, my mom works in a hospital, so, ah, because she wanted [...] a promotion, she had to take a test on medical English, but, she also did not, it was all memorizing those vocab, [but] **she could not put [them] into a sentence**, it was like this. My dad did not study, oh, my dad, he used to drive a tour bus, that is, sometimes he would have those foreign guests, so he could speak some. My mom and my dad were two different types [of learners], my mom was academic school, academic school, you know, start with phonetic alphabet, then grammar. **My dad just directly, that is communicative, could speak directly**, [laughs] that is “Hi! No English!” “bye!” “Thank you!”

S: So whose English is better?

Complicating Action and **Evaluative Comments**

Y: Now they are about the same, but maybe it is personality.... Two years ago my mom and dad came to see us. Then when we went to New York, to have fun together, we were in Uniqlo in New York. Then I said to my mom and dad, this is so big, ok, you wait here a bit, I will go try on some clothes, and the result was I came back and my dad said he was already shopped out, he had already cashed out. I [said] “how did you manage that? How did you, how did you buy?” He said, I just went there, I just told

her, when I got there I just said this,” then he used a gesture [points], then he just said where [he wanted] to go, then just pointed and she pointed him to the dressing room, he thought it fit, then he said, ah, he just did it like this, he just said there, just told her, he, so he successfully purchase [laughs].

Coda

Y: **so it depends on personality**, a bit, hmm.

In this humorous vignette about her parents, Jin *Laoshi* reveals a sophisticated awareness of the relationship between language function and language learning. Her mother studied grammar and vocabulary but had very little experience with producing communicative language. Her father, on the other hand, did not study but simply used useful phrases to interact. Consequently, her father is better able to communicate, using his limited English, than her mother, who may actually have a better understanding of English grammar.

Jin *Laoshi* recalls that her English lessons were not so communicative. She was excited at the time about learning English, “It’s a new language. I mean, how cool is that, you can talk another language.” In retrospect, however, she realizes that they spent a lot of time on meaningless drill. She remembers, for example, matching articles to words like “ruler” and “Frisbee,” two words she says “I never get a chance to use!” [laughs].

In her U.S. graduate program, Jin *Laoshi* absorbed the importance of meaningful interaction with language as a critical requirement for language acquisition. She carefully designs her lessons to connect the content to student lives in a meaningful way. In classroom discussions, she asks the students to evaluate the content of their reading in terms of their own lives. For example, on the day I observed, she asked the students to discuss whether modesty is considered important in the United States. She often assigns the students projects in which they

need to express themselves on a topic related to the theme of the unit. In these assignments, the students are asked to connect the topic to their own experiences or interests.

She creates meaningful simulations in which students can use literacy purposefully. One exercise involves a virtual tour of a Chinese mall, where they have to read the signs to find certain locations and items in a scavenger hunt exercise. During a unit on health and Chinese medicine, she presented them with a problem to solve. One student in the group is ill and needs medicine. They cannot get to a pharmacy but can only look through the labels of a Chinese medicine kit to find something that will help their classmate feel better. The students cannot read everything on the labels but have to look for words they recognize and extrapolate the information they need.

*Sociocultural Theory.* She found that sociocultural theory resonated deeply with her and has incorporated related pedagogy into her teaching. She said that she had always been a verbal, social person, even as a child and implied that this is one reason the approach appeals to her. “Oh, I’m a believer of sociocultural theory, I believe you know kids have to work together, [...] so a lot of the time, when they do a reading task, I work in groups, work in pairs.”

During the classroom observation, I noted several examples of this. In a vocabulary review exercise using Quizlet, she had the students help each other recognize the characters. Later in the lesson, students worked in pairs to discuss social scenarios. Finally, the students worked again in pairs to guess the meanings of new terms in a text on virtues. During these exercises, Jin *Laoshi* walked around the room and reminded the students to work together.

*Student-centered learning.* The biggest difference Jin *Laoshi* observed in her U.S. pedagogical training was the concept of student-centered teaching. She came to understand in her coursework that, when she had taught university students in China, “it was very teacher-centered,

like that, I was this—blah blah blah, then showed a powerpoint, then the students practiced by themselves, gave a test the next day...” She realized later that this approach did not work well with U.S. high school students.

Through her coursework, she learned to design activities that give students greater ownership of their own learning. She expects her students to set goals and track their own progress. She provides resources they can use on their own, including a textbook with helpful grammatical explanations that students can access if they miss class or need extra information. Each student has a Google drive folder in which they maintain a “learning portfolio” with their projects, including short films, presentations, essays, etc. They “can see what they did when they were freshmen,[...], then they will have sense of achievement, [...] every time they go into that [...] folder , they will say, ah, that was cute, I did that two years ago, then, but I can...”

She defines student-centered in part as being sensitive to the different needs of different students. In her school, the students in Chinese are either in a “regular” track, in which the language requirements are less rigorous, or an “advanced track,” which is intended to prepare students to transition to university-level Chinese classes. She requires the students in the “advanced” track to write some characters from memory and advance toward more challenging reading and writing assignments. The students in the “regular” track are expected to focus more on recognizing characters but do not necessarily have to write as many from memory. She is also sensitive to individual personality differences. She notes that some of her students are bolder than others.

The most important goal, she says, is for students to find satisfaction with their progress. “They themselves, ah, the things they learn, they can speak and can read, they themselves, this is the biggest for them, right, sense of achievement.” She finds it rewarding when students evaluate

her class as challenging but satisfying. “When the students do evaluations for Chinese class, they say Chinese class is very challenging but she makes it very, you know, manageable and very interesting and engaging, then I feel, ah, quite good.”

*Using Inductive Learning.* In the area of teaching literacy, a shift to more student-centered learning has meant introducing inductive teaching methods. Her current approach with beginning students is to start with two or three weeks of spoken language only, with Pinyin. After the students have some preliminary familiarity with the spoken language, she starts teaching Chinese characters, starting with the common structures. She provides explicit, direct instruction on the significance of the radicals. Although this introduction is deductive, direct instruction, she also incorporates some inductive learning into the process. “When I introduce a new character to them, I will ask them, this character, you have a guess, that is, which radical, then they will say, ah, this is the sun, so you then say, that is related to what, ok [...] morning.” She refers to the first character in the word for “morning [早上 *zǎoshàng* morning]. “Then they will slowly [...] know that Chinese makes sense.” Sometimes she shows them the traditional forms of simplified characters, so that they can see the richer information in the original form. Although she often explains the components in traditional terms, she also encourages students to develop their own idiosyncratic explanations or small stories to help them remember the characters.

When the students have acquired a threshold number of characters, usually by Chinese 3 or 4, she encourages them to look for patterns, including the patterns related to phonetic radicals. For example, “[when] we are teaching this—the 作 *zuò* in 工作 [*gōngzuò* work] and 昨 *zuó* in 昨天 [*zuótiān* yesterday], they will recognize, oh, those two are the same! [...] [they] discover, oh,

[they] are both pronounced as you know – zuo.” She surmises that the threshold number for recognizing patterns in phonetic radicals is about 500.

*Top-Down Reading Skills.* In addition to learning the characters, an additional challenge faced by learners of Chinese is understanding words formed by new combinations of familiar characters. “When the characters they already recognize are used together to make a new vocab, a compound word, for example, two characters they have already learned before, [they] [...] they can read it out loud, but [they] don’t know the meaning.” Jin *Laoshi* addresses this problem by teaching her students to consider the contexts of the terms used and hypothesize about the probable meanings of the words.

“Chinese 5, the ability we stress more now is to say, when they are reading an essay, that is to say it is scan and skim.” She gives them techniques for reading authentic materials that include unfamiliar characters. “I have very consciously cultivated their ability to hypothesize. [...] I say take a guess, what does this mean, [...] I feel, this ability to hypothesize is very important, it is a, what is it called, metacognitive ability.”

Jin *Laoshi* believes that the ability to hypothesize does not come naturally to all students but is something that needs to be explicitly cultivated. She designs lessons to give students practice with hypothesizing and inferring. These skills are especially important in working with authentic materials. When confronted with authentic reading materials, students of Chinese often feel overwhelmed by the number of unfamiliar words. Jin *Laoshi* trains her students from the beginning to be accustomed to picking out what they do know and infer information from context. “I tell them, you don’t need to know everything, you just need to pick out, for example, I give them a menu, you can pick out the chicken dish on this menu, or just pick out the price for the water.” With authentic reading or listening, she adjusts the task to the students’ proficiency

level. “I tell them, the question I am asking you is the one you should know, so, I am not going to ask the stuff you haven’t learned yet, so, [...] ok, it’s manageable.”

Jin *Laoshi* starts a reading lesson with pre-reading exercises and some warm-up activities. For example, before reading a short essay about a Ming Dynasty traditional Chinese medicine doctor, she first led them in a discussion about Chinese medicine, asking them to brainstorm together in Chinese about what they knew or assumed already about Chinese medicine.

The next step in a typical lesson is guided reading. She asks the students to read through the piece as well as they can. Then she gives them guided questions about the reading to answer. For the lower level students, the questions are in English. For Chinese V students, the questions are in Chinese. Then she asks the students to work in pairs to answer the questions. In some cases, the information is in the piece itself. In other instances, the students need to hypothesize. She often asks them to “summarize the meaning of the story” and discuss it as a group. For stories related to idioms or folk sayings, she sometimes asks whether there is an equivalent saying or proverb in English. For example, she taught the story of “Six Blind Men Touching an Elephant.” She said her students found the concept odd at first. “What a sketch name!” [laugh] They asked her why would someone want to touch an elephant? [laugh] When she asked them to infer the cultural perspective of the story, a student at first thought that it was about the importance of teamwork. She gradually led them to understand that the moral of this story, in a Chinese cultural context, is the importance of seeing “the big picture.”

Jin *Laoshi* applied her knowledge of meaningful language teaching and inductive learning approaches to teaching top-down reading strategies in a unit she designed based on the famous Chinese folk tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, often called the “Tale of the



Butterfly Lovers.” In this tale of star-crossed lovers, a young woman goes to boarding school dressed as a boy. She and a classmate fall in love but are prevented from marrying. In the end, both die tragically and are transformed into butterflies together. The story has been retold in countless plays, operas, music, and films. Jin *Laoshi* used guided questions and classroom discussions to connect the reading to contemporary issues, particularly equality between the sexes and education for girls as well as to examinations of the language function of persuasion. “If you’re Liang Shanbo, how do you convince Zhu Yingtai’s parents?”

Jin Laoshi also had her students do some research on China today and speculate on whether a tragic story like “Butterfly Lovers” could happen in China now. They discussed the problems of the imbalance of males and females in China and the problems faced by some rural girls in getting an education. She used this topic to relate the content studied to the real world while also giving her students practice in the language function of narrating a story. In reading and retelling stories, she also raises her students’ awareness of genre and trains them in the use of more formal register as well as other formal writing conventions.

**Li Yan.** Li Yan teaches second grade in a Chinese immersion program in an affluent suburb of a large city of the upper Southwest. The school has a dual language immersion program in kindergarten through fifth grade. The students spend half of each day in Chinese immersion class and half of the day in English medium class. At the time of the interview, she was teaching second grade for her second year. Previously, she taught fourth grade in the same program. She grew up in southwest China, where she studied Teaching Chinese as a Second Language as an undergraduate. She then came to the United States where she completed an MA in educational psychology and educational technology. In her graduate program, she focused on curriculum design but after graduation, she ended up getting a job with a Chinese immersion

elementary school. I was introduced to her by a colleague who recommended Li *Laoshi* as a thoughtful teacher who might have some interesting perspectives on teaching literacy. She graciously agreed to participate in an interview and her school approved of the observation. We talked before school started, during her breaks and during recess. Our conversations took place in her classroom, in the teacher's breakroom and on the playground.

***Theme: Searching for a literacy pedagogy: confronting a challenge.*** “As far as my teaching Chinese, myself, I do feel that it is absolutely that reading and writing is definitely very difficult.” She complains of the lack of standardized assessments and literacy targets for immersion students and notes that this leads to inconsistency. The teachers in her program have struggled to determine the most appropriate literacy requirements and curriculum pacing for their students and ensure articulation from one grade to the next. She has researched the benchmarks and assessments for English literacy acquisition for the students in her program and has been working for several years on building a comparable plan for Chinese literacy.

***Theme: Reading for pleasure and personal growth.*** Li *Laoshi* enjoyed reading as a child. Her parents subscribed to a children's magazine for her that she read every day. There weren't many children's books in the house so she read the books her parents owned, which were mostly stories about Chairman Mao and other revolutionary heroes. She remembers her parents and teachers encouraging her to read. She did not care much for graphic novels, “I did not understand who was talking first and who talked next!” As a teenager she had fun reading translations of Harry Potter with her friends but did not have time for much extracurricular reading. Later, as an adult, she loved reading the “Life of Pi” in English. Her favorites are books with magic or fantasy. In her current teaching, she encourages her students to write imaginative

stories and share them with each other. She also keeps story books in the classroom that the students can choose to read on their own when they have finished assignments.

*Theme: Chinese literacy and cultural identity*

I Chose to Learn Calligraphy

Abstract

S: Did you learn brush calligraphy as a child?

Y: I did.

Complicating Action and **Evaluative Comments**

S: Was it required at school or did you want for that yourself?

Y: **I asked for it for myself.** At that time I was in sixth grade[...] Then, I felt that I **wanted to learn**, then, because in China, it is [usually] very young children who learn calligraphy, so I was usually learning with children who were much younger than I was, five or six years old, then I was the oldest, so...

S: so how did you feel?

Y: I did not mind, because I felt, **for me, I was the type that really liked to learn.** I remember that this was something I wanted to learn so I went to learn it [...], so I did not have any feeling that, I even, **I was very self-confident, because I was better than all of them**, because they were all so young, ah [laughs], then, so, I felt it was pretty great, then I studied it about two years, then...

S: You stopped studying it later?

Y: Yes, because later, my school work was not light anymore, so I didn't [study it] anymore.

Coda

S: So do you write calligraphy now?

Y: Yes, sometimes I do. **This is a part of Chinese culture**, so sometimes I will make some project time to write, write some things [in brush calligraphy].

Li *Laoshi* portrays herself here as a self-disciplined child determined to learn something she valued. She also identifies calligraphy as an essential component of Chinese literacy. She shares this appreciation for Chinese calligraphy with her students but does not usually give calligraphy lessons in class, due to the pressures of covering other required curriculum. She does teach calligraphy to an afterschool group.

Li *Laoshi* incorporates cultural products and practices into her literacy lessons. She designed a series of culture lessons that she has embedded in her Chinese language arts curriculum. One of the units she teaches tells the story of Chinese characters. She guides the students in discussions examining early pictographic, oracle bone characters and has them do activities that show them how characters, although evolved from pictographic images, are not pictures but standardized symbols. Another unit focuses on the motifs found in Chinese decorative arts, including clothing, architecture and other objects.

Li *Laoshi* encourages her students to write about the cultural items they have studied in class. Each student chooses a topic related to China and writes a small ‘chapter book’ about it. The topics include legendary figures such as the Monkey King and Mulan, as well as Chinese schools, supermarkets and other aspects of contemporary life in China. The students choose four research questions related to the topic, e.g. “where does the Monkey King live?” and find the information with guidance from the teacher. The booklets each have a cover, a table of contents, and a chapter for each question. The students write simple sentences, such as “The Monkey King’s home is on *Huaguo* Mountain. They illustrate the books and read them aloud to each

other. Li *Laoshi* designed this activity to enable students to use writing skills to express themselves and explore Chinese culture.

*Theme: Bottom-up skills: building up literacy in a traditional Chinese model.*

I Needed Help From Grandma

Abstract

S: When you were young, during that time, are there any memories that stick out?

Y: As for a story, I just remember one time, [I had to] write from memory and could not do it.

Complicating Action and Evaluative Comments

Then I was kept [after school] by the teacher, then it was [laughs] memorize, memorize, memorize.

S: What character was it? Do you remember?

Y: I don't remember. Then there was math, then Chinese, then other lessons

S: Writing from memory, was it dictation?

Y. Right, dictation. Later, my grandma was a teacher, so she, that is, **I could not keep up**, then, it was, I was younger than the others in my grade, I had not gone to kindergarten, I went directly from preschool to first grade.

S: How old were you when you started first grade?

Y: I started first grade when I was five, so there were a lot of things I had not learned. **So I could not keep up** in a lot [of content], and my grandma gave me extra lessons every evening. "We need to write this character so many times, then what character is this?" So, it was like that, writing over and over again, memorizing by writing [characters] many times. **There was no giving students complete information on**

**this character, getting to know it from many angles, so that is a difference [from now].**

S: What type of teacher was your grandma?

Y: Elementary school teacher

S: Elementary school teacher!

Y: She taught, it was also elementary school Chinese.

S: Not bad!

Coda

Y: **There is pressure!** [laughs]

S: Pressure! [laughs]. So now that you are a teacher do you think of your grandma before...

Y: Yes! Yes! **But [I] feel that the pedagogy now is different from that before.** [Now] we have students do more, ah, feel...**students have more opportunities to discover different ways of learning, and then can go find the special abilities that suit them, and learn a,...I am, that is it is not that all students are the same, so I feel it is more diverse.**

At another point in the conversation, Li *Laoshi* related that she did an undergraduate practicum teaching assignment in an elementary school in a village. She found it exhausting and swore she would never become a teacher. She laughs now at the irony of becoming an elementary school teacher, following in her grandma's footsteps.

In this story, she shows how school did not always come easily to her. She had to work hard to overcome difficulties. Later in the conversation, she talks about her philosophy of learning. "I think that every person, no matter how intelligent they are, they will encounter

difficulties, or they will have times of struggle, they must, but I feel that the process of learning is in how you overcome difficulties and solve problems.”

She remembers learning literacy in school as a process of memorizing characters, mainly by extensive copying, then dictation, memorizing texts, and writing compositions on topics assigned by the teacher, such as “the teacher I like” and “my favorite day.” When she started learning English in the fifth grade, the process was similar. She remembers memorizing text, vocabulary dictation, sentence practice, homework, reading comprehension questions. She struggled with English but enjoyed it more after coming to the United States.

She recognizes the limits of the way she was taught but appreciates the discipline it taught her. “I feel that, the traditional model [I experienced] before, helped me build a good foundation [...] in good study habits, that is I feel, when you are learning knowledge, you need to remember some things.”

In her current teaching, she expects her students to work hard at basic skills and feels that some struggle is good for them. She requires them to memorize some characters and to do some copying. She also tries to help her students overcome their difficulties and to make learning engaging and interesting for them. She aims for a balance between the traditional Chinese model and what she perceives as the American way. “Because I feel that, I don’t completely approve of the American, that is to say, some teachers say, [...] let them play, play, play, but I think that learning has a degree of difficulty.” She prefers a combination of the two models. “I am quite grateful that I have two methods, and have not just been give one general idea of teaching and learning.”

***Theme: Reflecting and adapting; finding a literacy pedagogy that works for both teachers and students.*** After becoming an immersion teacher, Li *Laoshi* realized that immersion

Chinese for elementary school students requires different approaches than Chinese as a foreign language for older students. She has gradually concluded that, in working with young students learning content through a second language, her pedagogy needed to be grounded primarily in the principles of early childhood literacy rather than in foreign language teaching. She feels that her young students are learning to read and acquire content knowledge in the Chinese immersion class in ways that are similar to their learning process in their English-medium class. She also became aware that the students needed to achieve higher levels of language proficiency than simple interpersonal communication. “Because when I first started, I thought, [...] these students asking each other questions, asking ‘what color do you like, what animal do you like?’ [...] I thought they must be able to tell a story.” To find a pedagogy that would help her students reach higher levels of both spoken and written proficiency, she carefully researched the approaches used by the English teachers and sought out workshops and training on early childhood literacy. Gradually, she has found ways to adapt the methods used in English language arts to Chinese.

In her training and observations of English teachers, she learned about the English language arts curriculum practice of “word study” units, in which the students focus on a short list of key words for about two weeks, with games and activities each day related to those words, followed by an assessment at the end of the unit. She adapted this method to Chinese, preparing two-week units focusing on six to ten key words. To help the students practice, she designed a workbook with a practice page for each of the target characters, with grid sheets and models for copying. The practice sheets are very consistent with the traditional model of bottom up decoding in reading and writing, but Li *Laoshi* has added some student-centered activities. For example, the students evaluate their own handwriting and circle the characters they think look correct. Li *Laoshi* also created a separate workbook, “Secrets of Chinese characters,” which



includes sorting exercises, coloring exercises, and other activities that require the students to use inductive learning techniques to discover patterns in characters. On the day that I observed, she wrote a character incorrectly on the board and asked the students whether it was correct. She asked a student to come up to the board and correct it, then showed them similar characters and asked them to identify the shared element. As she rewrote the original character on the board, she had the students name the strokes as she wrote. This simple sequence combined both traditional focus on the bottom-up with opportunities for the students to analyze and discover patterns on their own.

Li *Laoshi* learned student-centered approaches and inductive techniques in her training in the United States. She says she has concluded that the end results of the traditional model of rote memorization and inductive learning may be similar in terms of remembering characters, but the inductive methods allow the students to “slowly become independent learners, whereas in the traditional model, the student “was a passive learner, who only learned what the teacher gave him, then he did not have much opportunity to think, so lacked this process of thinking, questioning, doubting then coming to his own conclusion.” Her appreciation for self-determination contrasts with a traditional Chinese cultures of learning but is not inconsistent with her perception of herself. She recalls that, in her youth, she studied hard for the required high-stakes tests, but “I love to learn, so I did not just study for the tests [...] I studied because I wanted to, so I think my personal thinking model and way of expressing myself may have helped me later in my curriculum design work.”

The second practice she adapted was that of “instant words.” After she discovered that the English teachers had lists of sight words for each grade that each student should recognize immediately by the end of the year, she began working with the other Chinese language teachers

to develop analogous lists for Chinese. This required extensive discussion and negotiation among the teachers to create draft lists.

The third area she cites as modeled after the English curriculum is that of the “writing workshop.” This method is a student-centered approach to teaching writing. There are variations on the model, but the basic structure usually starts with a mini-lesson by the teacher, e.g. on a specific feature of a writing genre, followed by 20 minutes of writing time for the students, followed by sharing. The students choose their topics and get feedback from each other, as well as from the teacher. Li *Laoshi* adapted this method for Chinese. She spends about a month on each writing unit, usually focused on a genre, e.g. persuasive writing or poetry. For each unit, the students practice using the vocabulary and structures to form spoken sentences and develop some confidence with the content before they start using it to write. Each day she gives a mini-lesson in a feature relevant to the genre, e.g. the difference between opinion and fact or what makes a rhyme. The students write for 20 minutes on their own then engage in reading aloud and discussing their writing. By the end of the unit, each student has produced a product, usually a book, such as the “chapter books” on Chinese culture mentioned previously. Li *Laoshi* schedules the units so that they follow the English teachers but lag behind for a week or two. This means that the students first hear the concepts introduced in English class, then in Chinese class.

On the day that I observed, Li *Laoshi* showed the class a series of four drawings by one classmate. She led the class in a discussion of the artist’s intent. What story was he telling? Then she had the students read their stories to each other and then asked individual pairs to retell the stories to the class. Occasionally, she corrected a grammar point or pronunciation.

The writing workshop is designed to give students ownership of their writing. She encourages them to think carefully about what they want to say and then find ways to express

themselves in Chinese. She requires them to take responsibility for figuring out how to write what they know how to say. “When they don’t know a word, they will look for it in my classroom [...] because I told them they need to find it for themselves.” On the wall, she has a poster with a list of suggestions for finding words they need, e.g. “look around the classroom, ask a friend, draw a picture.” She identifies this shift to more student-centered learning as the most significant change in her teaching since she started teaching in the United States. Because “I hope that the students can learn through more interesting ways, then can learn more things on their own initiative.”

The work on literacy and other content is demanding for the children and for the teacher, but Li *Laoshi* uses humor and careful transitions to keep the students focused. Kinesthetic breaks for singing and dancing and jokes keep the students upbeat. Li *Laoshi* adroitly uses language exercises and smooth transitions to maintain classroom management. She notes that immersion teachers, in addition to addressing the classroom management challenges common to all elementary school teachers, are responsible for teaching content (math and science in her case) as well as language, in a second language. As a result, they often feel overloaded. As a leader in literacy curriculum design in her school, Li *Laoshi* is committed to getting the support of the other teachers and implementing the standards gradually. She emphasizes that, “in implementing a program, first the main thing is that the teacher be comfortable, because you cannot have a teacher change everything at once.”

### **Summary for Chapter IV**

In this chapter, I have stayed close to the perspectives of the participants. Within the themes relevant to this study, I have foregrounded the stories and experiences of each of the teachers, emphasizing their voices. I hope that readers have perceived the unique voices of these

teachers and also the commonalities that they share. In the next chapter, I will zoom out to situate the experiences of these participants within a broader context of CFL teaching in the United States and identify insights from the results of this study that may shed light on some of the issues that CFL teachers face in teaching Chinese literacy.

## Chapter V Discussion and Findings

### Introduction

This study was motivated by a recognition of the difficulties of teaching literacy in Chinese as a foreign language. I have witnessed many debates, sometimes heated, among CFL teachers trying to arrive at a consensus on literacy goals for CFL students and the most effective approaches to achieving those goals. These debates are often bracketed by larger discussions of pedagogy and curriculum dominated by teachers of European languages.

The shift in recent decades toward proficiency-based instruction and assessment in foreign language means a focus on real life tasks. In foreign language literacy, this means interacting with authentic materials, usually defined as text created by and for native speakers. While the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (Board, 2015)<sup>23</sup>, acknowledge that reading proficiency may develop more slowly for learners of “languages with non-Roman writing systems” (p. 55), the goals outlined in the standards are for students to gradually develop the ability to complete tasks of increasing sophistication with authentic texts. Presentational writing expectations, as outlined in the Standards, assume that learners can complete the described tasks in a real life situation, that is, without the benefit of a reference tool.

When experts in foreign language pedagogy lecture on using cognates to extract information from authentic materials, the CFL teachers in the room listen politely. If only it were

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<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, these standards were developed by a committee organized by the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages, the leading professional organization in the United States of K-12 world language teachers. Many states use these standards as the primary reference for state world language standards. The 2015 edition is a substantial update of the 2006 standards. See [www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org).

that easy. The CFL teachers are painfully aware that proficiency achievements in literacy for CFL students consistently lag behind those of students of European languages, and they struggle to find ways to address this problem.

That struggle is rooted in the nature of the Chinese writing system itself; the deep, opaque orthography and the sheer number of characters required to achieve basic literacy are unavoidable challenges. This means that English-speaking learners of Chinese usually need more time to acquire reading and writing skills than do learners of alphabetic, European languages. English speakers learning Spanish, for example, can usually extract some basic information from authentic text after only a few months of instruction. Learners of Chinese typically cannot complete comparable reading tasks after an equivalent amount of instruction. For writing tasks, learners of European languages can typically master spelling conventions quickly and write what they have learned to say. Beginning learners of Chinese, however, may be able to use Pinyin to spell out what they can say but usually cannot use the authentic writing system—Chinese characters—to write much of the spoken language they have learned without scaffolding from a vocabulary list or other reference.

To address this problem, some CFL teachers lower expectations for reading and writing. They may simply offer students exposure to Chinese characters as a cultural experience, a taste of the Chinese writing system. Most do aim to teach their students to read and write Chinese but focus on reading simplified texts curated for learners and on building up slowly, a few characters in each lesson. While this approach is not without merit, it does not enable students to interact with authentic text. With regard to expectations for writing, CFL teachers often modify expectations to require only the ability to select and copy the characters needed to complete a task (e.g. by using a wordbank or by typing) or to write only a subset of characters from memory.

This puts Chinese language teaching out of step with other foreign language teaching and undermines the credibility of Chinese language programs. It also does not prepare students to transition to university-based or other programs designed to build toward advanced, professional level proficiency. The challenge, then, is to find ways to teach Chinese literacy that are more effective in helping students build real life literacy skills.

In the debates over the relative timing of the introduction of Pinyin and characters, character memorization, handwriting, typing, and other literacy pedagogy questions, I have observed that the native speakers from China who form the majority of CFL teachers in the United States express values and beliefs related to literacy that reflect personal experiences, expertise, and cultural values and practices. I believe that moving forward toward better solutions for teaching CFL literacy requires recognition of the rich cultural and personal history that CFL teachers bring to the discussion and a deeper understanding of the complex cognitions of CFL teachers on teaching literacy. This study is a step toward a better understanding of their voices.

In this study, I have worked with five CFL teachers who have generously shared their stories of learning and teaching literacy. These hardworking, dedicated teachers have overcome many challenges to become teachers of Chinese in the United States. Their dedication to literacy and learning has opened doors in their lives. Now they devote themselves to helping their students open doors through learning.

In this chapter, I will first address each of the three research questions and the components of the conceptual framework, giving my initial findings and the relationship of those findings to the literature. Because I have found that the conceptual framework needs a facet added to the composite lens, I will then introduce an additional construct proposed by Brandt

(1998), “Sponsors of Literacy,” which I believe affords a view of the data in a new light. This will be followed by reframed responses to the three research questions. Finally, I will comment on the implications and limitations of this study and offer suggestions for further investigation of this topic.

As addressed in Chapter II, “beliefs” are messy, slippery conceptual constructs that are difficult to fully capture or characterize. We can never know what others believe to any degree of certitude. Indeed, one might even argue that individuals themselves cannot always capture or articulate their own beliefs with clarity. Beliefs are tacit, often unarticulated, and not necessarily static. As a result, I have no illusions that I have been able to fully reveal all of the elements of cognition that contribute to the “beliefs” of the teachers in this study. Importantly, however, by careful analysis of the data generated in this study, I believe I can offer significant insights into the cognitions of these teachers.

## **Research Questions**

**1. What do teachers of Chinese as a foreign language believe about teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers?** For the participants in this study, literacy has been a source of satisfaction and opportunity. As students themselves, they have been successful, and that success has allowed them to travel and pursue careers as teachers. In their academic experiences, superior literacy skills have enabled them to excel at high-stakes exams. The type of literacy rewarded on those exams, in English as well as in Chinese, has emphasized the intensive reading of text, to achieve a thorough understanding that enables the reader to extract deeper meanings and better describe those meanings through formal written language. Importantly, literacy has also been a source of enjoyment and personal satisfaction, and even, paradoxically, an escape from the rigors of schooling.



By closely examining the comments, classroom practices, and stories of the teachers in this study, I have been able to identify three salient principles on teaching CFL literacy. All of the teachers appear to share a belief in these principles, albeit to varying degrees. (a) The first is a belief in the importance of teaching basic skills in Chinese literacy, primarily through a traditional, bottom-up, teacher-centered approach to literacy instruction. (b) Second, all of the teachers appear to have a belief in the importance of nurturing an appreciation and respect for Chinese culture among their students. Chinese culture, in this context, encompasses the notion of literacy as emblematic of Chinese cultural identity. As a result, by teaching calligraphy and handwriting and exposing the students to literacy materials that reflect Chinese cultural values, the teachers believe they are promoting a positive attitude toward Chinese culture. (c) Third, the teachers are committed to fulfilling the obligations of “good teachers” within the traditional Chinese model, that is, as expert, caring, parental-like figures in the classroom. In teaching literacy, this role as the expert, caring teacher is expressed in the ways the teachers modify and adapt their teaching methods and curriculum to find a literacy pedagogy that works best for the students. As part of a larger mosaic of cognition on teaching, these three principles are in some ways overlapping. The commitment of each teacher to any of these principles also varies in practice. A detailed treatment of each of these principles is presented in the following section.

***(a) Teaching Chinese literacy requires a strong emphasis on bottom-up skills, building up step-by-step from basic character decoding.*** “For teaching reading in Chinese as a foreign language, our teachers [trained us] to use character, word, sentence, paragraph [字, 词, 句, 段 *zì, cí, jù, duàn*], [...] because this sequence is consistent with the way we learned Chinese.” – Wang *Laoshi*.

The traditional model of teaching literacy in China builds up slowly, one layer at a time, starting with strokes, then simple characters and character components, then words, followed by phrases and sentences and finally paragraphs. Students are expected to practice extensively and grasp each set of building blocks thoroughly before moving on to the next layer. That grasp is often assessed through tests of memorization and, at each step, the building blocks are studied in context through intensive reading of a text.

This model resonates deeply in the memories of the teachers. Wang *Laoshi* recounted in detail her first weeks of school, reciting “Little Tadpole Looks for His Mama” and learning the strokes to write characters, then simple characters, followed by more complex characters, then moving on to words, then sentences, then paragraphs. Each lesson focused on a text, several of which she can still retell. Wang *Laoshi* and the other teachers recall English classes following a similar model. Lin *Laoshi* remembers her English lessons in junior high school starting with the alphabet, then proceeding to learning a few words each day, then sentences, then short texts. The first text, she recalls, was something about a monkey and a crocodile. They memorized vocabulary and practiced target grammatical structures. They recited and memorized the texts and slowly build up to longer and more complex texts.

The teachers seem to appreciate the self-discipline and work ethic they developed through this process. All of the participants spent many hours in childhood copying characters, including during the summers. Lin *Laoshi* refers to getting her character copying and other homework done early each day in the summers so that she could go read with her friends in the afternoon. Tang *Laoshi* remembers impressing her mother with her enthusiasm for doing her character copying homework. Wang *Laoshi* recalls her older sisters and other family members correcting her copying homework. The teachers do not seem to have resented the effort and time

they devoted to practicing basic writing skills. For example, Wang *Laoshi* credits that daily practice with building muscle memory and improving her handwriting.

The teachers are proud of their ability to memorize text. Lin *Laoshi* recalls that she was good at the required memorized recitation exercises for English class. She never had to stay after school to repeat a memorization test. Wang *Laoshi* credits memorization and recitation with helping her remember English grammar. “I felt that after you recited it many times, your mouth became familiar [with it], you did not need to think whether to say I am or I was or I are, I is, [...] slowly it was practice makes perfect.” They are proud also of their histories of working hard to meet challenges. In Li *Laoshi*’s story about needing help when she first started school, she struggled at first, and then worked diligently, under her grandmother’s tutelage, to catch up with the other students and go on to excel. Lin *Laoshi* mentions how hardworking she and her classmates were in preparing for English exams. In the traditional model, learning is a serious business. Students are expected to make consistent effort and overcome difficulties. As Li *Laoshi* says, “every person, no matter how intelligent they are, they will encounter difficulties, or they will have times of struggle, they must, but I feel that the process of learning is in how you overcome difficulties and solve problems.”

In the stories told by the teachers in this study, they seem to have derived a sense of achievement and self-confidence from the traditional, building up approach. The model worked for them. Although they may now perceive some limitations to the traditional model, as discussed in research below, the process of gradually building up bottom-up literacy skills was deeply imprinted upon them and, it seems, is still a powerful image for them of what literacy schooling looks like.

All of the teachers provide instruction consistent with this model at least part of the time. As Wang *Laoshi* says “of course I go back to my instincts.” Jin *Laoshi* also notes that, at least before she sought out more training, “you just start with what you know, ... how you learned a second language , so you teach, right, right, based on your own learning experience.”

This means that when teaching reading, all include explicit instruction on character components, structure, and stroke order. They emphasize the importance of teaching strong skills in decoding individual characters, with a focus on semantic radicals. Some of the teachers also teach a few phonetic radicals. They emphasize gradual acquisition of characters and reading skills.

One salient variability among the teachers lies in a critical feature of the traditional model: extensive practice and memorization. As Wang *Laoshi* says, the common Chinese saying is “practice makes perfect.” In the traditional model, each step to acquire the building blocks of text is practiced extensively, and the next phase is not attempted until the students have firmly grasped the current one. The teachers in this study have chosen to adapt this requirement freely to meet what they perceive as the needs of their students. While all of the teachers provide Pinyin as scaffolding for reading characters and then gradually remove the scaffolding, they do so at different rates. Each also encourages their students to copy characters with correct stroke order and develop clear, attractive handwriting although some emphasize this more than others. Finally, some require their students to write substantial numbers of characters from memory and others minimize this requirement.

The teachers all include some intensive reading of texts in their lessons. This includes reading aloud, both in choral mode as a class and individually. In the high school classes, it usually also includes translation, to ensure that the students understand the text, and practice with

the vocabulary and grammatical structures in the text. These practices are consistent with the traditional model and the way English was taught in China when they were in school.

The findings here on beliefs and practices based on the traditional model of teaching literacy in China are consistent with the literature on CFL teachers and CFL teaching practices in the United States. As reviewed in Chapter II, accounts of teaching CFL literacy often describe traditional sequences and activities (e.g. I. C. Liu, 2012; D. Sun, 2010). Character copying, intensive reading of texts, choral recitation, and reading aloud, in a structured, repetitive sequence are common practices (Lo-Philip, 2014). Lü and Lavadenz (2014), in a study of the beliefs of 39 K-12 CFL teachers, found that the majority of the participants in their study “showed stronger beliefs in the bottom-up approach toward Chinese literacy learning and instruction,” and observations of the participants confirmed the dominance of bottom-up instruction in the classroom (p. 638). Many of the textbooks popular among CFL high school teachers from China also reinforce this traditional approach (e.g. *New Practical Chinese Reader* (e.g. *New Practical Chinese Reader*, 2003).

The teachers in this study appear to appreciate the foundational skills they acquired in their education in China and all make use of the traditional model in their classrooms, to varying extents, as described in Chapter 4. They also perceive, however, the shortcomings of the traditional model, particularly in teaching foreign language. Wang *Laoshi*, for example, remembers her disappointment when she discovered that, although she did well in English class, she had great difficulty in reading authentic English text. “This ability of mine was hard to transfer, I was not accustomed to reading this type of text.” Tang *Laoshi* also struggled with reading authentic English text. “It seems that that they did not have the patterns of the ones you studied before, then [you] say ‘heavens, ah, this actually is a bit difficult!’” Her story about being

“dumbfounded” when she tried to engage in conversation with a native speaker of English is also a critique of the English language training she had received. Jin *Laoshi*, in her humorous vignette about her parents shopping in the United States, also refers to an awareness of the distinction between learning decontextualized, textbook language, and communicative language.

Like the English classes the teachers took in secondary school, the traditional model of literacy education, as manifested in CFL instruction in the United States sometimes lacks a connection to real-life communicative skills and authentic materials. It is important to remember, however, that the traditional model has some features that offer clear benefits to learners, such as the careful attention to character decoding skills and practice in intensive reading that is necessary for reading comprehension in Chinese. In fact, studies on CFL reading comprehension have shown a strong correlation between the percentage of characters that the learner can accurately name and comprehension of a text (H. Shen & Jiang, 2013). Shen (2005) found that reading comprehension by Chinese learners decreased by two to four percent for each increase by one percent of unknown characters in the text. In her study of beginning readers, she concluded that when beginning CFL readers encounter unknown characters accounting for 10 percent of the characters in a text, reading comprehension is likely to fall to 58% (H. Shen, 2005). This study provides clear support for the teachers’ instinctive preference for well-rehearsed character decoding skills, character memorization, and intensive reading in Chinese.

Instruction in the traditional literacy fundamentals also helps students build intercultural competence related to literacy practices. Copying characters, working on handwriting, and reciting passages from memory give learners opportunities to experience Chinese literacy practices first hand. Learning the names of strokes and radicals allows learners to engage with the types of discourse that native speakers sometimes used to refer to characters. For example,

describing the characters of one's name over the phone often involves parsing the characters in terms of radicals. Conversations on handwriting are also not uncommon among native speakers. Exposure to traditional literacy practices in the classroom are “a means for socializing learners into cultural ideas of writing and literacy” (Lo-Philip, 2014, p. 248).

The traditions of memorization in Chinese cultures of learning have been problematized by some as mindless rote learning (Watkins, 2000). The emphasis on recitation and memorization in the traditional model is not intended to be mindless. In the traditional Confucian model, learners were expected not only to memorize the text but also to study it intensively, thinking deeply about the meaning of the text. Mindful practice and memorization are intended to develop thinking skills (L. Li, 2018), as illustrated by the Confucian quote “To learn and never think—that's delusion; but to think and never learn that is perilous indeed” (学而不思则罔，思而不学则殆 *xué ěr bù sī zé wǎng, sī ěr bù xué zé dài*) [translation by Hinton 1998 as quoted in (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p. 8)]. In this model, learners are expected to build a foundation of knowledge and skills before attempting to apply what they have learned to new contexts, before attempting to create. (Gorry, 2011). The process of intensive study is designed to gradually build independent thinking and a strong moral integrity. Song Dynasty Confucian scholar Zhu Xi said the goal of studying the classics “is to make students understand the meaning of moral principle through discussion, so that they can cultivate their own persons and then extend it to others” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p. 7).

The teachers in this study expressed frustration in attempting to follow the traditional model of teaching literacy, as many of their students seemed to struggle with the learning discipline demanded by this model. Jin *Laoshi*, in her story of the pivotal moment when she decided to rethink her approach to teaching, found that although her students were cooperative

and managed to complete the assignments she gave them, they were not actually absorbing the material. Some of the other teachers report encountering students who are uninterested in extensive recitation, copying or memorization. Most of the teachers have received training in which they were advised to avoid drills in favor of more engaging, even entertaining classroom activities. They express support for the goal of making learning engaging but their comments also reflect the traditional view that learning is a serious business that requires hard work. As Li *Laoshi* says, “learning has a degree of difficulty.” If, however, students do not undergo the rigorous process of building up layers of skills and knowledge, how will they arrive at a stage of literacy development in which they can think deeply about text, apply critical thinking skills and even exercise creativity? One way of looking at the struggle of CFL teachers to develop a literacy pedagogy that works for themselves and for their students may be as an effort to find ways to guide their students to a deeper understanding of Chinese text without necessarily proceeding through all of the stages of the traditional model. Whether deliberately or less consciously, the CFL teachers appear to be experimenting with adapting the traditional model, in combination with western pedagogy, to arrive at a learning model that gives their students not only knowledge but better thinking skills.

***(b) Teaching Chinese literacy means nurturing an appreciation for Chinese culture.***

The histories of all of the teachers show evidence of enculturation in the notion of literacy, particularly as represented in the writing system itself as emblematic of Chinese cultural identity. Wang *Laoshi*'s story of having her calligraphy chosen to adorn the family door at the lunar New Year Festival illustrates this beautifully. Having her couplets displayed on the front door brought her writing into a public space, where members of the community could evaluate her work



within the Chinese literacy tradition of connoisseurship of calligraphy. This achievement, in other words, made her a fully matriculated member of the literate class in Chinese society.

Wang *Laoshi's* subsequent story of her mother's admonishments about handwriting further illustrates the transmission of cultural values related to literacy. Her mother reminds her to write characters "upright" because "characters are like the person." One's handwriting is a reflection of one's moral integrity. Education and literacy, in the Confucius tradition, are intended not only to transmit knowledge but to impart values. By demonstrating good handwriting, Wang *Laoshi* presents herself as an "upstanding" literate Chinese person of strong moral integrity.

The histories of the other teachers also reflect enculturation in the role of literacy, and particularly calligraphy, as a "a badge of Chinese identity" (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006, p. 4). The teachers appear to view calligraphy skills as a hallmark of a literate Chinese identity and the lack of those skills as a deficit. Li *Laoshi* asked her parents for calligraphy lessons even though she was older than the other students in the class. Tang *Laoshi* enrolled in a children's calligraphy class as an adult, to make up for her lack of opportunity as a child. Lin *Laoshi* says that calligraphy lessons were not available to her as a child but now she hopes to find a calligraphy teacher in the United States so that she can learn. Jin *Laoshi* had some calligraphy lessons as a young child but found it tedious at that time. Now she wishes she had continued or could find an opportunity to learn as an adult. The common thread here is that all of the teachers appear to value calligraphy and good handwriting and associate these skills with a Chinese cultural identity as a literate person.

Directly or indirectly, the teachers convey this cultural value in their teaching. Although they do not necessarily require good handwriting, they call on students to attend to the aesthetics

of well-formed characters. Most of them have calligraphy on display in the classroom and have demonstrated or taught calligraphy in class or in after-class activities. Tang *Laoshi*, for example, uses calligraphy to engage students with writing and to motivate them to investigate Chinese characters more deeply.

The desire to share Chinese culture through literacy goes beyond writing characters. Jin *Laoshi* says that, above all, she hopes her students develop an appreciation and respect for Chinese culture. “The thing I value most is . during this four years of learning Chinese, you actually understand the Chinese culture better, and you feel, a, you have a more open mind.”<sup>24</sup> She chooses materials for literacy lessons, especially for her more advanced students, that offer opportunities for thoughtful cultural comparison. For example, In the lesson that I observed, the students discussed their perception of virtues in their own culture and compared those perceptions with what they had learned about virtues in China. This activity was part of a literacy lesson in which the students read an essay on three symbols of virtue in Chinese culture—the three “winter friends”—pine, bamboo, and plum. The activity allowed the students to look beyond the cultural product—the three plant symbols—and think more deeply about cultural values. The other teachers also introduce their students to cultural products and values through literacy, although perhaps not as extensively. Li *Laoshi*, for example, instructs her students to research and write about Chinese cultural products, such as the Monkey King. All of the teachers express strong hopes that, through their teaching, their students will develop a long-lasting, positive attitude toward Chinese culture.

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<sup>24</sup> As in Chapter IV, a wavy underline indicates that the quote has not been translated from Chinese but was originally spoken in English.

Studies of CFL teachers often echo this theme. CFL teachers show their students that “the beauty of Chinese characters is in proportion and balance” (Gao, 2010, p. 94). CFL teachers often use calligraphy, papercutting of Chinese characters, and other hands-on activities to engage students with spoken and written language and culture (Ferro, 2014; Gao, 2010; X. Liu, 2012). Participants in other studies also echoed Jin *Laoshi*'s remarks about teaching students to be more open to other cultures and to empathize with those from other cultures (Ferro, 2014; X. Liu, 2012). Teaching cultural content through reading, however, is often described as a challenge. Many CFL teachers complain of the lack of appropriate reading materials with Chinese cultural content. They find relevant authentic reading materials too difficult for the students and sometimes teach this content in English (J. Liao & Zhao, 2012). Despite this, Jin *Laoshi* and Li *Laoshi* demonstrate that teaching content through literacy activities in the target language is indeed possible.

*(c) Teaching Chinese literacy means serving as a caring, expert, parental-like figure for students.* The teachers in this study appear to embrace the traditional Chinese image of a teacher as a strict but compassionate guide and a strong leader who is both demanding and caring. In fact, in their stories about their schooling, they express gratitude for having had demanding teachers. Lin *Laoshi* remembers clearly her English teacher scolding her for a grammar mistake. She was shamed by the criticism but grateful for the teacher's diligent attention to English grammar. She implies that her teacher's strict demands arose from the teacher's caring attitude toward her students, the teacher's desire to ensure that her students succeeded. Jin *Laoshi* also mentioned her appreciation for her “strict” English teacher, whom she now counts as a friend. Wang *Laoshi* described in vivid detail her memories of her Chinese language arts teacher modeling how to write characters on the blackboard, saying “write with

me” and how strictly her teacher would chastise her for writing a character with incorrect stroke order. She also recalled, with a tone of admiration, her English teacher leading the class to recite English phrases, expecting all the students to memorize the phrases and the text. Clearly, the images in these memories of childhood teachers are of strict but caring figures. Importantly, these memories also reflect a respect for the confident expertise of their teachers. Lin *Laoshi* specifically cited her English teacher’s expertise in grammar, and all of the participants remembered how their Chinese language arts teachers were experts in handwriting, character components, and Chinese literature.

The participants’ descriptions of their relationships with their childhood teachers evoke the Confucian image of teacher as parental figure. The Chinese saying “My teacher for a day is a parent for a lifetime (一日为师，终身为父 *yīrì wéishī, zhōngshēn wéifù*)” encapsulates the reciprocal obligations of the ideal Chinese teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher provides “strong parental care” and the student gives “long-term respect and obedience” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 185).

In their comments on their own teaching, the participants emphasize their concern for their students’ learning and well-being. Tang *Laoshi*’s classes in the urban public school where she teaches include students who struggle in school as well as some who excel. She carefully modifies assignments when she determines that students need an individualized learning experience or extra encouragement. In the calligraphy project she did with her students, for example, she had one student who struggled. He grew discouraged with writing characters with a brush but he liked to draw, so she showed him how to use a Chinese search engine to find a painting that incorporated a Chinese character and use that as a model for an artwork. The student was pleased with his work. Tang *Laoshi* also uses differentiated assignments and grading

to encourage students who want to learn characters in their first year of study but allows others to go slow. Jin *Laoshi* also accommodates individual differences among her students, noting that some are hesitant and shy about speaking whereas others are outgoing. She tries to design activities that allow all of the students to experience success.

In teaching literacy, the teachers in this study have shown that they seek a balance between demanding excellence and demonstrating empathy for their students. The teachers expect the students to invest effort into learning characters. Lin *Laoshi* tells her students “If I use three words in a row that you do not know, you need to go home and relearn the vocabulary.” She tells them to figure out their own ways to memorize vocabulary and characters, whether it is making flashcards or some other method. Wang *Laoshi* has all of her students do dictation in class. She expects them to practice writing characters every day. She tries to keep practice exercises in class fun “but at the same time you cannot loosen up on practice, [and] you cannot say, allow Pinyin to substitute for [characters], [or] say, because Chinese characters are hard, so I will put Pinyin there, and always put it there, that is not acceptable.” Wang *Laoshi* says diligent practice pays off. For one year, she made her first year students annotate every character they wrote with Pinyin. In subsequent years, she dropped the practice because of the added burden in grading homework papers, but she notes that the students who followed that discipline ended up with better pronunciation and better reading skills than other cohorts. Li *Laoshi* also expects her students to work hard at writing. “They have to remember, and they have to write.” Otherwise, she says, they will not be able to learn new content. She acknowledges that learning to read and write Chinese is hard for her second graders, and she tries to help them but they also need to develop perseverance. “If they don’t have to work through some frustrations, they will not develop this ability.” The high school teachers also, try to avoid overloading their students. The

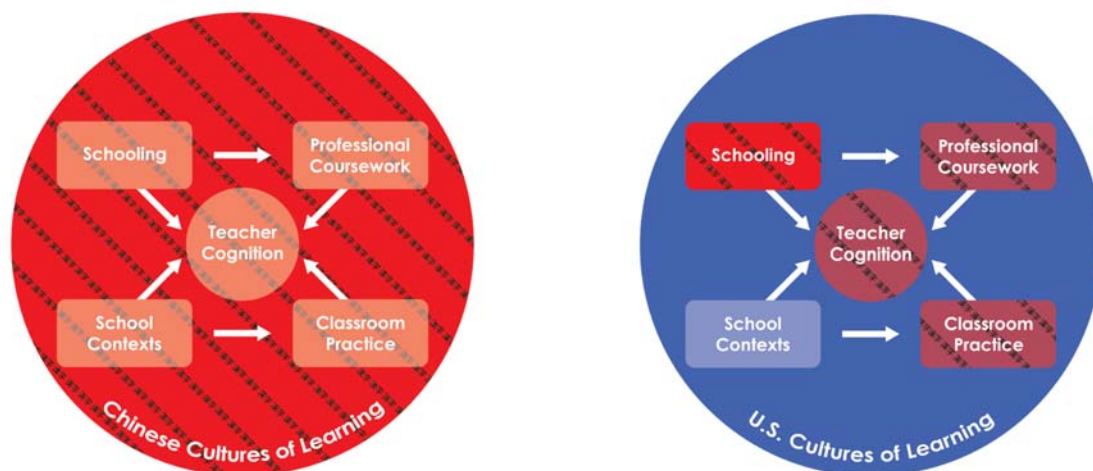
teachers note that their students have homework for other classes and other commitments in school. They all try to maintain a balance between high standards and realistic expectations for students.

The focus on caring for students is also consistent with traditional Chinese cultures of learning. The teachers in this study comment not only on specific learning goals for their students but also broader aspirations for their students' personal growth. They mention wanting their students to develop personal attributes such as resilience, independence, and open-mindedness toward other cultures. This is consistent with the traditional Chinese model, in which teachers are expected to “teach the book and teach the people how to live” (教书育人 *jiāoshū yùrén*); teachers teach content but also “moral insights and guidelines necessary for the proper functioning of society” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008, p. 187). The teachers' efforts to provide knowledge and guidance for all of their students, in a method that the students can absorb, can be seen as an extension of their identity as a good teacher in the traditional Chinese cultures of learning.

**2. Where do these beliefs come from? Conceptual framework and the data.** The conceptual framework for this study is particularly relevant to the second research question. The approach to data collection, particularly the interviews, was designed in accordance with a conceptual framework based on Borg's model for the sources and components of second language cognition, extended to include cultures of learning as a surrounding and underlying ethos that permeates their learning and teaching experiences. The conceptual framework assumes that the participants were surrounded with Chinese cultures of learning while growing up and becoming educated in China. They each brought their individual experiences of Chinese cultures

of learning with them when they came to the United States, where they were confronted with U.S. cultures of learning.

In Borg's model, four categories of experiences of language teachers impact teacher cognition: schooling, professional coursework, classroom practice, and school contexts. In the multi-faceted composite lens for this study, the surrounding cultures of learning permeate and help shape each of these categories of experiences. In this study, I found evidence of the influence of each of the four categories, as well as a profound influence of cultures of learning in the cognitions of the participants. All of the components of Borg's model for language teacher cognition, in this study, emerge in relief against a backdrop of cultures of learning. In describing their history and their current teaching, the teachers often, directly or indirectly, refer to cultural context.



*Figure 7: The cognition of Chinese teachers in China, as represented by the Borg model extended to incorporate the role of surrounding cultures of learning. In China and in the United States. Adapted from (Borg, 2003, p. 82).*

*i) Schooling (including learning experiences outside of school).* The participants all relate very similar memories of learning to read Chinese in school, with a standardized, teacher-led instruction building up from simple components to longer text. Their stories of learning English also consistently portray a teacher-led, bottom-up, systematic approach. They all recall liking school and generally did not object to the intensive copying and recitation work. It is not surprising that the participants have chosen careers as school teachers, as all report feeling successful at school. Even in the rare stories they tell of enduring chastisement for lack of perfection at school, they seem to respect and appreciate the rigorous demands of their teachers. Literacy and, by extension, schooling, offered life pathways and opportunities for these teachers that have led to their current careers as CFL teachers in the United States. As described under Research Question 1, the traditional model of literacy instruction is also evident in the teaching practices of the teachers.

In their comments on their own schooling experiences, both in and out of school, the teachers sometimes compare their experiences with what they perceive to be U.S. cultures of learning. Li *Laoshi*, for example, embraces many of the methods she learned in early childhood literacy but resists what she perceives as the American way of making learning “all fun.” She is grateful for the rigorous self-discipline she learned as a child. “That traditional model helped me get a good foundation, [...] with good study practices, [sometimes] when you are learning some knowledge, you need to memorize some things.” She sees her experimentation now as combining the best of both educational cultures. “I am quite grateful that I have these two types, not just one, that is...idea of teaching and learning.”

Outside of school, the teachers had very different experiences with literacy. For some, access to books was not easy. Books, for these participants, represented affluence and privilege.



Reading outside of school often meant exercising independence, even rebellion. Even for those with easier access to reading materials, reading outside of school meant access to imaginary worlds, escape from the routines of school. Although they all remember denying themselves reading for pleasure during the intensive preparation periods before exams, they also see reading outside of the prescribed texts for school as another way of learning. They mention improving vocabulary through reading English novels, for example.

These experiences of literacy outside of school may have given the teachers an alternative mental model of learning, a vision that looks quite different from literacy in school. It is possible that these alternative experiences have allowed the teachers, whether consciously or not, to consider other options for teaching their students literacy in class. Lin *Laoshi* loved free reading as a child. Is that one reason that she encourages her students to choose stories to read by themselves? The teachers appear to want their students to enjoy literacy and derive satisfaction from it, as the teachers also do in their own lives.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, studies of CFL teachers do note the evidence of traditional literacy pedagogy in CFL teaching in the United States (Ferro, 2014; I.-C. Liu & Sayer, 2016; I. C. Liu, 2012; Lü & Lavadenz, 2014; D. Sun, 2012). The literature on CFL teacher does not seem to address the influence of literacy experiences outside of school. One researcher did look at the out-of-school experiences of teachers of English as a foreign language in China. In student essays on learning literacy at home and at school, as well as on learning and reading English, the study found a diversity of literacy practices within different families and concluded, “while it is valid to say that all such students are likely to value Chinese literacy as an important form of participation in their own culture, the extent to which it will be associated with

pleasant childhood experiences and with close family relationships may vary considerably” (Parry & Su, 1998, p. 7).

*ii)Professional coursework.* Professional coursework does not figure prominently in most of the participants’ accounts of their development as teachers. All completed degrees in China in CFL, English teaching, or related fields. Several noted that the CFL pedagogy coursework in China reinforced the traditional model they were exposed to as children.

All of the participants have sought additional training in the United States. Most have had professional development training at school or have sought out workshops elsewhere. Some have found workshop training useful. Tang *Laoshi*, for example, has found that her students respond well to the TPRS approach she learned by attending a workshop.

Jin *Laoshi* and Li *Laoshi* also completed MA degrees in the United States. Jin *Laoshi* credits her graduate work in the United States with giving her an understanding of student-centered learning, proficiency assessment, and sociocultural theory, as well as a deeper understanding of communicative language teaching and other concepts that have transformed her teaching. She reports that the coursework discussions and readings helped her to connect theory and practice in a meaningful way. Li *Laoshi* learned useful theory and principles of curriculum development in her educational psychology degree in the United States but says she has acquired more readily applicable techniques during early childhood literacy training workshops and a teacher training program she attended one summer.

Several of the teachers commented that their training in China emphasized theory without direct connections to practice. Jin *Laoshi* drew a clear contrast in her description of her coursework in the United States, where she was encouraged to bring her teaching experiences to the fore in graduate school discussions of theory and practice. She noted also that, as a graduate

student in the United States, she was expected to actively engage in discussion with her teachers and classmates, rather than listening respectfully to her professor as she had in China. The experience confirmed for her the value of sociocultural learning.

The literature on the attitudes of CFL teachers toward the training they received in China is limited. As referred to in Chapter II, however, the existing literature has found that both degree programs and short-term training in China for CFL teachers planning to teach outside of China tend to emphasize theory. Graduates complain of inadequate pedagogical training and practical experiences in these programs (Attaran & Yishuai, 2015; Shi, 2010).

The participants' comments on training in the United States highlight educational experiences that involved critical reflection upon their own previously held beliefs, particularly in the case of Jin *Laoshi*, who described the impact of her U.S. graduate coursework on her thinking, "after studying, you have an awareness, that is to say, ah actually, what I used to do, ah, actually was right, or, what I did before actually was not right, then, ah you gradually reevaluate, this is a process."

The impact of educational experiences that include reflection on beliefs and practices is consistent with the findings of previous research on teacher cognition (Borg, 2011; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000). Portfolios produced by CFL teachers in teacher training programs also stress the impact of reflection on personal beliefs (e.g. W. Chen, 2013; Xia Wu, 2011). The teachers also praise short-term training on techniques that they subsequently tested and found effective in the classroom. Li *Laoshi*, with respect to her in-service training in early childhood literacy, and Tang *Laoshi's* comments on TPRS are especially salient. In these examples, the participants appear to have embraced the approaches and underlying principles of the training content. The impact of

learning practical pedagogical techniques is consistent with the studies showing that CFL teachers often perceive their previous training as deficient in that area.

*iii) Classroom practice.* All of the teachers credit direct experiences in the classroom with a profound impact upon their teaching and their cognitions about teaching. The teachers use the Chinese term *mōsuǒ* (摸索) (“to feel around for things”) almost as a leitmotif in their comments to describe the way that they use experimentation in the classroom to aid in their search for better ways to teach. Lin *Laoshi* is explicit in her perception of the value of classroom experience as shaping her approach to teaching Chinese. Jin *Laoshi*’s story of the pivotal moment when she realized that she needed to change her teaching is also an event that happened in the classroom. The teachers mention trying activities that did not work and building up a repertoire of techniques that they find effective in specific classroom contexts. They emphasize the need to find and strengthen techniques that work with specific groups of students. They see this process as strengthening their effectiveness in the classroom. All of the teachers refer to developing greater confidence over time through classroom experience.

The classroom is where each teacher’s embodiment of Chinese cultures of learning comes into contact with U.S. cultures of learning. They learn right away that, in most cases, they cannot expect their American students to invest as much time in intensive study and homework as they did in their youth. As they adjust expectations and experiment with different approaches, one might argue that, in some respects, they are absorbing or grafting on aspects of U.S. cultures of learning they find useful. In all of the teachers’ accounts of classroom practice, there is an interplay between Chinese cultures of learning and U.S. cultures of learning, evolving over time through classroom practice. The dominant approach used by most of the teachers is deeply grounded in Chinese cultures of learning, with a strong role for the teacher and an expectation of

effort on the part of the learner. This is mitigated, however, by the curiosity and open-mindedness of the teachers and most of all their strong desires to meet the needs of their students. While this may be understood as developing a hybrid approach, as described above by Li *Laoshi*, it can also be viewed as a reflection of the Chinese model of a good teacher as a parental figure, caring for the welfare of their students. Perhaps the teachers are redefining for themselves the concept of a “good teacher,” grounded in traditional Chinese culture but adapted and reshaped to be effective within U.S. cultures of learning.

The related literature on CFL teaching, as described in Chapter II and earlier in this chapter, describes challenges faced by CFL teachers in the classroom. Apart from the Lü and Lavadenz (2014) study reviewed in Chapter II, however, most of the studies of CFL teacher experiences in the classroom do not focus on literacy teaching.

*iv) School Contexts.* The participants all refer, directly or indirectly, to school contexts as a source of influence on their pedagogical decisions on literacy instruction, if not their beliefs. Some of the high school teachers work in schools that expect students to prepare for the AP or IB exams. This pressures teachers to invest more time in the types of literacy tasks tested in the exams. All are familiar with the literacy benchmarks in the standards, but they complain that the benchmarks themselves are not always explicit, for example, as to whether students need to write characters from memory. The teachers also complain that the discrepancies among the literacy requirements of different K-12 schools and universities makes it difficult for students to move from one high school to another and to move smoothly through articulated programs from K-12 to university. All of these external requirements are sometimes at odds with what the teachers perceive to be the students’ own goals. Lin *Laoshi* commented that her students want “practical and useful language.” Tang *Laoshi* noted that some of her students really just wanted to explore

Chinese culture and learn a few useful phrases. Jin *Laoshi* and her colleagues were able to address this issue by allowing students to enroll in a “regular” track for Chinese, with lower expectations for literacy, or an “advanced” track, for students aiming to perform well on the AP exam and continue Chinese in university classes.

The high school curriculum structure also has an impact on CFL teacher attitudes. In most of the high schools in this study, Chinese is an option among several foreign language electives. This means that the teachers worry about competing with other languages for enrollment. Tang *Laoshi*, for example, expressed concern that introducing characters too early would “scare off” the students. In most cases, the teachers appear to have good working relationships with foreign language teacher colleagues, but some hint at competition for students and resources. In Tang *Laoshi*'s case, the school decided to save funding by scheduling second and third year Chinese in her classroom at the same time. This presented significant challenges to her, but she has coped with good humor and creativity. Wang *Laoshi*'s school expected her to teach six levels of Chinese, with class sizes up to 33 students. She found this exhausting and difficult to sustain. The two participants in private schools appear to have easier access to teaching materials and other resources and find their students generally well-motivated. The public school teachers have more limited access to teaching materials, training, and other resources. They also feel a greater need to keep their students engaged and motivated. An additional school context factor is the degree of isolation of the CFL teachers. Jin *Laoshi* and Li *Laoshi* both expressed enthusiasm for working with the other CFL teachers in their schools, whereas the other teachers do not have CFL colleagues in their schools and complain of facing difficult pedagogical decisions alone.

The findings here are mostly consistent with other studies of CFL teachers. Several studies have documented the difficulties faced by CFL teachers from China in adapting to U.S. school settings (e.g. Gao, 2010; Hanson, 2013). Some studies cite teacher complaints that the lack of a high-stakes exam deprives Chinese language classes of a source of legitimacy (Hanson, 2013), while others track with the comments in this study about the pressures of preparing for AP or IP exams (I.-C. Liu & Sayer, 2016). Other studies have also noted the need for teachers to adjust literacy expectations for U.S. students who are less willing to memorize characters (Gao, 2010; Hanson, 2013). One area of divergence between the study participants and the literature is the lack of complaints about classroom management challenges, which does arise frequently in studies of K-12 CFL teachers. Even the teachers with more variation in ability in their classes were more concerned with meeting the varied needs of their students than with any behavior issues that otherwise might have prevented them from managing their classrooms smoothly.

School contexts also bring the contrast between Chinese and U.S. cultures of learning into sharp relief. In China, English is a required course; in the United States the Chinese teachers have to compete for students with other languages and other elective courses. In some cases, this means demanding less memorization and adding more fun activities to the curriculum. On the other hand, the teachers preparing students for AP or IB exams feel pressured to push the students harder, partly in order to support the reputation and implied legitimacy of the Chinese language program. These teachers understand well what it takes to do test preparation; they all experienced an educational system that excels at this. In their new environment, however, some of them now question the value of those exams and the standards required by some universities. Their doubts may reflect a reevaluation of the test-oriented system they were educated in. The

contrast in U.S. and Chinese cultures of learning is present, then, not only in the classroom but also in the institutional environment.

**3. How do the teachers view the relationship between their beliefs and their Chinese literacy classroom practices?** The participants identify teaching literacy as a major challenge. They recognize the difficulties their students face in learning to read and write Chinese. At the same time, they are also aware of how Chinese is perceived in the United States in comparison with more commonly taught European languages. As Wang *Laoshi* notes, “in comparison with other languages, French, Spanish, it really is, the reading and writing in Chinese, it really is a bit more difficult.”

In recognition of that difficulty, the teachers in this study all emphasize a strong belief in the need for teachers to adapt, to serve the needs of their students and, by implication, the institutions in which they teach. To adapt to the needs of their students, they experiment with the balance of written and spoken language skills and explore different approaches that keep students engaged and help them progress toward literacy goals. They adjust the pace of introducing characters and the balances between the number of characters students must recognize and the number they must write from memory. Although they recognize the difficulties their students face in learning to read and write Chinese, they try to make the learning process engaging and accessible. They try to help their students perceive attainable goals in Chinese literacy and then guide the students in building confidence by achieving those goals.

***Opening the door to adaptation and modification.*** In describing these choices, the teachers emphasize first and foremost their desire to meet the needs of their students. Although some of the goals are driven by the schools, the teachers see their role as helping the students achieve those goals. They adjust their teaching, not only to meet the needs of each class in the



context of that specific school, but also to meet the needs of individual students. Several of the participants mentioned developing modified lessons and activities to help individual students who struggled with reading Chinese. They all seemed attuned to the variability among their students, which some attributed to personality and others to academic goals. All devise creative activities to motivate students and keep them engaged. These include hands-on activities such as calligraphy and lessons that connect literacy content to students' lives.

Some of the experimentation and adaptation by the participants may be viewed as a feature of the typical professional growth of many teachers who begin to experiment and modify their teaching after they have a few years of experience. Additionally, it might be fair to assume that the teachers in this study all share a level of risk-tolerance and curiosity, as evidenced by their willingness to move to a foreign country. Adventurous personalities and open-mindedness may contribute to their willingness to experiment in the classroom. The evidence collected in this study indicates, however, that the decision-making process underlying these choices is also grounded in two salient components of teacher cognition. First, the fundamental belief, as described in Research Question 1, that a good teacher is a parental-like figure, both expert and caring, and that teachers are expert in Chinese literacy and in ways of acquiring that literacy. To care for the students' needs, however, and to allow the students to gain a sense of achievement, the teachers appear to recognize that they must modify and adapt the traditional model of literacy schooling most familiar to them. Second, the teachers appear to exhibit a confidence in their authority and ability to make changes. A frequent In Vivo code that emerged as a leitmotif in all of the interviews was the Chinese term *ziji* [自己], usually translated as "myself" or "self." In some contexts, the emphasis is on self-reliance. They describe figuring out how to memorize material by themselves or getting themselves to school. In many of their stories, the teachers

describe themselves as exercising independent agency over their lives, even as children. Lin *Laoshi*, for example, described how she decided to attend a different, more academic junior high school than that attended by most of her classmates. “I decided myself to go to that junior high school outside [the neighborhood].” Li *Laoshi* decided that she wanted calligraphy lessons and asked her parents for them. Tang *Laoshi* decided to break away from her classmates and go to the library during study time.

This evidence of independent agency is most salient in the stories that take place outside of schooling. In Lin *Laoshi*'s stories about reading graphic novels in the street or at her neighbors' house, adults are not present; the children choose on their own what and where to read. Later, she describes choosing reading materials that were a little risky, an adventurous decision she made on her own. Wang *Laoshi* also mentions choosing on her own to read Russian novels. Li *Laoshi* mentions hanging out in the bookstore, reading children's books on her own. All of these teachers ended up traveling outside of China and, finally, moving to the United States. So, perhaps it is not surprising that they share a willingness to act with their own impetus. It is possible, however, that this willingness to make choices that may not fit a prescribed model supports their efforts to be experimental in the classroom.

In their search for classroom practices that work, they emphasize their individual efforts to develop materials and methods. Li *Laoshi* developed literacy materials for her students on her own and then shared them with her colleagues at the immersion school. Lin *Laoshi* emphasizes that part of the satisfaction of being a teacher is creating new materials each year. This sentiment is echoed by the other teachers. They also describe being the primary decision makers in choosing textbooks, determining the number of characters students must memorize, and other policies for their students.

This willingness to make decisions for their students, including choices that may differ from the way they were taught, may be grounded both in the traditional construct of an expert and caring teacher and also in a willingness to be independent.

The extent to which the teachers diverge from traditional models of teaching Chinese literacy and the options they choose vary. The following is a discussion of some of the adaptations and modifications that the teachers have developed

***Adaptation and modification: student-centered learning.*** In their accounts of adapting to teaching in the United States, several of the teachers mention adopting more student-centered teaching. The phrase “student-centered” is based upon a constructivist view of learning, in which learners “construct their understanding of the world as a product of their actions on the world” (Mascolo, 2009, p. 2). The student-centered paradigm often also draws on Vygotskian sociocultural theory and assumes that the construction of knowledge is facilitated by interaction between learners (Mascolo, 2009). “Student-centered” is contrasted with teacher-centered pedagogy, which assumes that knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the student. It is assumed that teacher-centered pedagogy is based upon an empiricist model, in which knowledge is developed through sensory impressions (Mascolo, 2009). The traditional Chinese model is highly teacher-centered. Knowledge is assumed to come from books, mediated and presented by teachers.

The teachers in this study use the phrase “student-centered” to refer to a range of classroom activities. Lin *Laoshi* highlighted student-centered teaching as the most significant change in her teaching over the past few years. She explained that she now often has the students lead vocabulary review and other classroom activities. On the day I observed, the students invented questions to ask each other about the text they were reading, including questions that

connected the content to their own lives. In my observations of the other teachers, I also found students sometimes taking the lead in some activities. In *Wang Laoshi's* class, for example, the students generated the vocabulary terms for a quiz.

One key feature of student-centered, constructivist teaching is to connect new content to existing knowledge. *Tang Laoshi* asked the students questions about their homes, as preparation for an exercise in comparing houses and reviewing locative phrases. *Lin Laoshi* started a discussion about career plans and then let the students take over to build their own conversations.

Most of the teachers have had minimal training, if any, in student-centered pedagogy. They refer to it enthusiastically but appear to experiment with it somewhat tentatively. The student-centered activities that I observed or those that were described to me were mainly brief and embedded within lessons structured primarily for teacher-centered pedagogy. *Li Laoshi* and *Jin Laoshi*, however, made more extensive use of student-centered techniques. *Li Laoshi's* second graders choose their own topics for writing small books. She gives them resources but they must do their own research. She also helps them learn techniques for finding the vocabulary they need. *Li Laoshi* says she wants her students to become “independent learners.” *Jin Laoshi* designs sociocultural activities so that her students have to work together to find the information they need to complete tasks. She also assigns her students projects for which they have to conduct their own research and complete a product in Chinese.

Another common feature of student-centered pedagogy is the inclusion of inductive learning. “Students are presented with examples of the content to be learned and are encouraged to identify the rule of behavior embedded in the content” (Hancock, Bray, & Nason, 2003, p. 367). Several of the teachers used pattern-finding techniques to teach radicals. *Wang Laoshi* and the other teachers described or demonstrated activities in which they asked the students to

identify common semantic radicals in groups of characters and hypothesize on the meanings of the radicals. They sometimes even use this method to help students attend to phonetic radicals. They all agree that phonetic radicals are less reliable but still useful, especially as students acquire a larger corpus of characters.

These pattern-finding activities related to radicals are examples of student-centered, inductive learning applied to bottom-up decoding skills. Lü and Lavadenz (2014) associated bottom-up reading instruction with teacher-centered pedagogy. In their survey, for example, the item starting “we should teach students how to use semantic radicals...” was coded bottom-up/teacher-centered, in contrast with “the best way to learn to write Chinese characters, in fact, is through a lot of reading and writing activities through ‘unconscious’ learning” (Lü & Lavadenz, 2014, p. 639). While they correctly associated bottom-up pedagogy with the traditional, teacher-centered model of Chinese literacy teaching, they did not allow for the possibility of student-centered methods used to facilitate learners in constructing their own knowledge of bottom-up decoding skills.

*Adaptation and modification: top-down reading strategies.* The participants in this study experiment with literacy teaching strategies that encourage students to focus more on the meaning and context of the material rather than bottom-up decoding. All of the teachers encourage their students to connect the content of their Chinese reading to their own lives. I observed several discussions in classrooms examining the context of the reading assignment, often as an opportunity to compare U.S. and Chinese society and culture. Some of the teachers also call their students’ attention to genre, particularly the differences between colloquial and formal genres of writing.

These activities are consistent with what is often referred to as “top-down reading” strategies. The phrase “top-down reading” originally arose from psycholinguistic studies which demonstrated that reading is not typically a linear sequence of decoding letters and words in a strictly left-to-right (for Latin alphabet languages), bottom-up process. Fluent readers move back and forth across text to process chunks of text, using complex, overlapping mental actions such as “predicting” and “sampling” to connect the text with “the knowledge they bring to it” and to construct meaning (Eskey, 2005). Reading in a holistic fashion implies focus on the meaning and purpose of the text as a whole and within a larger context. In a pedagogical context, “top-down” typically refers to teaching strategies, such as scanning, skimming, and hypothesizing the meaning of unfamiliar words, to help beginning readers learn to find meaning. Instruction in top-down reading also usually includes practice in identifying genre and considering the purpose, authorship, audience, and social context of the text.

Most of the teachers in this study did not use the term “top-down” or give explicit explanations for including related activities in their teaching. Two of the participants, however, teach top-down strategies more extensively and purposefully. Li *Laoshi* structures her writing curriculum for her second graders around units based on genre. She teaches key features of each genre and has her students practice writing in that genre. In class discussions of student work, the students identify the intent of the author (often a classmate) and express their reactions to the work.

Jin *Laoshi* emphasizes her purposeful efforts to teach top-down reading strategies to her students. She requires them to skim and scan text for information. She gives them simulated real-life situations in which they must extract information from text that includes many unfamiliar characters surrounding ones they might recognize. For example, in an exercise described in the

previous chapter, she asked the students to find medicine for a sick classmate by deciphering relevant information from unfamiliar labels. Jin *Laoshi* deliberately nurtures top-down reading strategies through guided exercises. She has her students hypothesize on the possible meanings of new terms highlighted in red in a text, then discuss the text, complete graphic organizers on the main ideas of the text, and work together to answer guided reading questions. She also gives her students practice in recognizing genres and using different narrative functions and registers. In all of these lessons, she designs activities to stimulate the students to think deeply about the content of their reading and connect that content to their own lives and their understanding of Chinese culture.

Jin *Laoshi*'s deliberate efforts to nurture metacognitive skills and higher level thinking are not at the cost of neglecting bottom-up skills. Her students learn character components and memorize characters. In the lesson I observed, Jin *Laoshi* drew the students' attention to the radicals composing a new character. She also had them play games to practice the vocabulary from the text. Jin *Laoshi* used a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies to help her students comprehend the text and connect the content to their own lives.

The combination of bottom-up and top-down skills, demonstrated most purposefully in Li *Laoshi* and Jin *Laoshi*'s classes, is consistent with the interactive model of reading, in which "successful reading entails a balanced interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing skills" (Eskey, 2005, p. 565). Fluent readers have been found to have "superior strategies for comprehending and remembering large units of text" but also better performance on "context-free word recognition" (Stanovich, 1980, p. 64). From a pedagogical perspective, this means that learners need practice and instruction in both bottom-up and top-down reading strategies, as well as the metacognitive awareness on when and how to use these strategies (Eskey, 2005).

*Adaptation and modification: free reading for enjoyment.* While teachers can help students learn reading strategies, ultimately “people learn to read, and to read better, by reading” (Eskey, 2005, p. 574). Motivating students to read more is a key task for an effective reading teacher. This often means finding texts that are interesting to students and also at an accessible level of difficulty. Eskey advises teachers to keep a range of appropriate texts available for students to choose from and respond to, effectively offering a classroom “literacy club” (Eskey, 2005, p. 575). Some of the teachers in this study experiment with approaches that echo this suggestion. Lin *Laoshi*, for example, has a set of graded readers, “chapter books,” that she encourages her students to borrow and read at their own pace. She asks the students to give her a short oral report on their reading. She has observed that this experience seems to build the students’ confidence in reading. While this is reminiscent of the “extensive reading” English classes sometimes offered to advanced English learners in Chinese high schools and colleges, Lin *Laoshi*’s approach includes more free choice and appears designed to foster enjoyment of reading Chinese. Li *Laoshi* also encourages her students to read extensively in their free moments and keeps graded readers in the room for the students to choose from freely.

The findings in this study that relate to the challenges faced by the teachers in teaching literacy and their reactions to those challenges, including experimentation and adaptation in adjusting literacy goals, sequencing of instruction, and curriculum content are consistent with previous literature (Y.-Y. Chiang, 2010; Cui, 2014; W. Dai, 2012; Duff et al., 2013; Everson, 2009; Ferro, 2014; I. C. Liu, 2012; X. Liu, 2012; Helen H Shen, 2013; Ye, 2011).

What I have attempted to offer here is a more in-depth analysis of the choices for adaptation and modification made by the teachers to make their CFL literacy teaching more effective, and even more importantly, the cognition underlying those choices. The adaptations



made by the participants in this study might be seen in some ways as adapting to U.S. cultures of learning. The teachers all draw from the traditional model of bottom-up literacy instruction but modify the model for their U.S. students. To varying degrees, the teachers apply student-centered approaches and top-down or interactive reading strategies to their teaching. These are methods often promoted in U.S. schools. By adopting some approaches associated with western education and finding ways to relate to their students, the teachers can be seen as creating a hybrid cultural space in their classrooms. Within that hybrid space the teachers maintain their role as an expert and caring teacher, a model of confident expertise, and a dignified representative of Chinese culture (Jin & Cortazzi, 2008).

### **Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy"**

Thus far, we have looked at the data through the lens of Borg's model, extended to encompass the role of underlying cultures of learning. This lens views literacy as a cultural product, a feature of language used by and among individuals. The lens also focuses primarily on the interactions between teachers and students, albeit within a social context that does include schools as institutions. While this lens offers a useful view of the cognitions of CFL teachers in teaching literacy, it may not explain the whole story. Are there other ways of looking at, for example, the teacher's personal histories of interacting with literacy and how those unique histories might help shape their teaching? An alternative way of looking at this story might include a view of literacy as something of value controlled by social institutions, as well as individuals, and the interaction between teachers and students as a process of negotiating for a share of that value.

Deborah Brandt has proposed "sponsors of literacy" as a construct that situates literacy within a discourse of power. Literacy, in this schema, is "like land, a valued commodity in this

economy, a key resource in gaining profit and edge” (1995, p. 169). Literacy opens doors to opportunity, economic and social. This explains, says Brandt, both “the lengths people will go to secure literacy for themselves or their children” and also “why the powerful work so persistently to conscript and ration the powers of literacy” (p. 169). Sponsors of literacy are “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166). Sponsors of literacy who facilitate or regulate access to literacy in the United States today might include industry, school-funding systems, families, the companies that produce standardized tests, and other entities both human and institutional. Literacy in this schema means more than basic skills in reading and writing but a broader range of knowledge akin to cultural capital. Access to literacy, then, has critical implications for social equality, and examining literacy sponsorship offers a view that may “expose more fully how unequal literacy chances relate to systems of unequal subsidy and reward for literacy” (p. 172).

In China, as in the United States, literacy has historically served as an instrument of power, both a potent springboard for jumping up the levels of socioeconomic status and a defensive perimeter preventing the unwashed from threatening the privileged classes. The official examination system in dynastic China was a “sponsor” that both enabled and rationed access to literacy-enabled status. The high-stakes college entrance exam in China today serves a similar function, to restrict access to elite universities but also to dangle the promise of potential advantage.

Brandt’s construct acknowledges the power of literacy sponsorship to “enable an older generation to pass its literacy resources onto another” (1998, p. 178). In China, that passage of literacy resources has maintained some literacy traditions for over 2,000 years. The power of

literacy sponsorship to sustain tradition can also be “maladaptive because it teaches forms of literacy that oftentimes are in the process of being overtaken by new political realities and by ascendant forms of literacy” (p. 178). As in most of the world, texting and other digital forms of communication have had a tremendous impact upon everyday discourse in China. As Jin *Laoshi* says, we now communicate “fingers to fingers.” Juxtaposed against literacy traditions that span centuries and are viewed as signifiers of cultural identity, new forms of literacy expand the options for teaching literacy to U.S. learners, which may present difficult choices to the teachers. Which sponsors are to be given more influence in those decisions?

For the participants in this study, the sponsors of literacy in their lives have included the government-prescribed curriculum and exam systems, textbook publishers, the street environment, publishers of novels and magazines, school libraries, friends, book rental peddlers, their families, potential employers, and others. Most of these sponsors, it can be assumed, either promoted or governed access to literacy that could provide pathways to wider opportunity and greater economic comfort for these teachers. Indeed, their success in navigating through the educational system to attend university and graduate school and, eventually, to travel abroad is evidence that the participants were able to take advantage of the sponsors offering access to literacy and pass through the gateways governed by sponsors restricting access.

During this journey, they also found ways to use literacy for more personal purposes. Brandt refers to the “potential of the sponsored to divert sponsors’ resources toward ulterior projects” for themselves (1998, p. 179). Brandt’s examples are mostly adults using knowledge learned from employers or from church to pursue personal projects. In this study, we might look at the participants’ childhood experiences of pursuing literacy outside of school as stories of diverting sponsors’ resources. In these stories, rather than applying literacy to preparing for the

high-stakes exams that could funnel them into pathways serving the institutional sponsors of literacy in their society, they used literacy to access imaginary worlds, adventure, and social interaction. Through this lens, the childhood selves of these teachers found openings within the highly regulated, exam-oriented system governed by the sponsors of literacy in China, and they used those openings to exercise agency, to divert literacy for their own needs.

Using this construct, then, allows us to see the childhood experiences of the teachers as asserting individual creativity and agency within a highly regulated system of literacy. Brandt's view of literacy as an economic value highlights the issue of fairness. Most of the teachers describe lack of access to literacy materials in their childhoods and either explicitly or indirectly compare that access with that of others more privileged. They may have a tacit awareness that individual agency, even within a highly regulated system, can be a step toward addressing inequity.

As adult teachers, they may now draw on these experiences and feelings, either consciously or not, to make choices for their students. Brandt cautions, "we haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy's buyers and sellers" (1998, p. 183). The teacher's role, in her view, is to help students negotiate among sponsors of literacy. She warns that this does not mean that teachers "prepare students more efficiently for the job markets they must enter" (p. 183). While students may seek literacy for employment or other economic purposes, they may also have other interests. Brand calls on teachers to be aware of their own interests in promoting or regulating literacy and be honest brokers in helping their students.

Applying the theory of sponsors of literacy to CFL teaching in the United States means accepting the premise that learning Chinese has or could have an economic value, directly or indirectly, to the students and that promoting or restricting that literacy might have some economic value, broadly defined, to other entities – the “sponsors” of that literacy. From this perspective, we can identify industry, commerce, and the government as entities that seek expertise in Chinese. Public education authorities may perceive an economic value to the community in increasing capacity in Chinese. This certainly has been reinforced by the federal government, in the identification of Chinese as a strategic language and the funding of programs to promote the teaching of Chinese, e.g. Flagship, Startalk, etc. The Chinese government, primarily via Hanban, sponsors Chinese language programs in the United States, to promote good will toward China and an appreciation of Chinese culture. Sponsors concerned with US-China relations, on both sides, have an economic and political interest in American students learning Chinese, to promote better relations, or sometimes in restricting the types of Chinese literacy taught, to prevent students from becoming too positive (or naïve) in their attitudes towards China.

Textbook publishers and exam publishers, e.g. College Board (AP Chinese), have a stake in promoting the pursuit of Chinese literacy. Schools, particularly private schools, may see Chinese as a way to enhance their reputations and therefore attract powerful patrons and tuition-paying students. Parents and students may see Chinese as economically valuable. The teachers at private schools in this study recount comments by parents and students about learning Chinese to enhance their career opportunities. Other language teachers in the schools either support Chinese programs, as a fellow world language, or undermine recruitment for Chinese classes to protect enrollment in existing language classes. The Chinese heritage community and heritage weekend

schools also sponsor Chinese literacy and encourage their children to become literate in Chinese to sustain their cultural heritage more than for economic incentives.

Amidst all of these multiple sponsors with overlapping and sometimes conflicting agendas, the teachers themselves also have their own interests to protect. CFL teachers need to maintain enrollment in Chinese classes to protect their jobs. They also may feel pressured to produce students who excel on AP or other standardized exams, to maintain the legitimacy of their Chinese program. At the same time, they may feel obligations to the students, derived in part from the parental-like role of teachers in China. This sense of obligation may include a sense of fairness. Tang *Laoshi* and Wang *Laoshi*, for example, are both keenly aware that their students lack the advantages of students in suburban and private schools. Tang *Laoshi* modifies her curriculum to meet what she sees as the needs of her students. Her students are less interested in achieving high levels of Chinese literacy and do not see themselves pursuing relevant careers. But they do want to experience and enjoy Chinese language and culture. She applied for a grant to get materials for them to learn calligraphy. One way of viewing that event is that she negotiated with sponsors of literacy—the school—to improve access to literacy for her students, in a type of literacy that they wanted. Brandt's construct of sponsors of literacy allows us to see interactions of this type as teachers exercising individual agency, as perhaps they did for themselves in their own youth, to help their students negotiate for the literacy they need. The lesson, according to Brandt, is that teachers need to be cognizant of their own interests as sponsors of literacy and, like Tang *Laoshi*, find thoughtful ways to assist their students.

### **Research Questions Revisited**

**What do teachers of Chinese as a foreign language believe about teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers?** The teachers in this study share a strong commitment to helping their students engage with literacy in Chinese. They also appear committed to inspiring in their students an appreciation for Chinese culture through literacy experiences. In an educational system where the goals for literacy in Chinese vary and sometimes shift, often dictated by the requirements of different institutional and individual sponsors, the teachers believe they have an obligation, as expert and caring teachers in the traditional Chinese mode, to help their students understand and then achieve those goals. In choosing pedagogy for Chinese literacy, the teachers appear to believe strongly in the importance of giving students foundational skills in bottom-up reading strategies. They also see a need to add experiences that make literacy more meaningful for their students. These experiences sometimes include top-down reading strategies and free-choice reading for enjoyment. To varying degrees, they also value nurturing self-regulated, lifelong learners through the use of student-centered pedagogy.

**Where do these beliefs come from?** The cognitions of CFL teachers on teaching literacy are influenced by the four components of Borg's model of language teacher cognition—schooling (including learning outside of school), professional coursework, school contexts, and classroom practice, all of which are shaped, and sometimes stand in stark relief against, a surrounding culture of learning. The traditional model of teaching literacy in China, often presented as the most representative manifestation of Chinese cultures of learning, plays a powerful role in shaping the thinking of CFL teachers on teaching literacy. The teachers also bring with them a history of exercising personal agency to navigate among and negotiate with sponsors of literacy in China to acquire and utilize the literacy they need.

**How do the teachers view the relationship between their beliefs and their Chinese literacy classroom practices?** The teachers appear to believe in the need to adapt their CFL literacy curriculum and pedagogy to suit the needs of specific groups of students in specific schools, while maintaining a solid footing in the fundamentals of the traditional Chinese model, including the role of the teacher as a caring expert. As they gain experience teaching in the United States, they also gain a better understanding, whether explicit or not, of the sponsors of Chinese literacy in this country and how to negotiate among those sponsors for themselves and for their students.

### **Implications of Study**

The impetus for this study was a recognition of the difficulties CFL teachers face in teaching Chinese literacy to American K-12 students. As experts, sponsors, and others in the field, including the students themselves, offer suggestions to CFL teachers on what literacy to teach and how to teach it, it seems that the perspective of the teachers is sometimes lost in the conversation. That perspective includes deeper, tacit beliefs that may have a profound impact upon the way teachers view teaching CFL literacy and how they teach it in the classroom. This study is an attempt to bring some of those less apparent beliefs and cognitions to light in the hope that the conversations on how to improve CFL literacy instruction in the United States will become more insightful.

The teachers in this study bring with them beliefs and expertise on Chinese literacy that are deeply influenced by a traditional model of literacy pedagogy that heavily stresses bottom-up decoding skills. Certainly, there is strong evidence that those decoding skills are essential in learning Chinese. As second language reading expert David Eskey (1998) said, “for me, a Chinese text contains no information, and neither my best top-down reading strategies nor any



amount of background knowledge on its subject will make me a successful reader of that text unless I take the trouble to learn to decode Chinese script” (p. 96). Within the schema of bottom-up decoding skills, however, it is possible to include additional pedagogy and content that could greatly benefit learners. For example, a few of the teachers in this study have experimented, albeit tentatively, with using student-centered pedagogy for teaching character components.

An additional modification that could improve the effectiveness of bottom-up decoding pedagogy for non-native speakers of Chinese is more pedagogical materials related to semantic radicals and the addition of a systematic introduction of phonetic radicals. Psycholinguistic studies have shown that native fluent readers may make greater use of phonetic radicals than semantic radicals in reading and that increased sensitivity to phonetic radicals correlates to increased reading skills in children (Hanley, 2007; Y. Li & Zhang, 2016; Z. Zhang, 2009). Early childhood literacy instruction in China focuses on building characters with strokes and, to some extent, on semantic radicals. Instruction in phonetic radicals is usually minimal (Hanley, 2007). Native speakers appear to notice the patterns of sound-radical correlation naturally, with minimal explicit instruction, presumably relying upon oral fluency to enhance recognition of characters with familiar phonetic radicals. CFL teachers, having learned in Chinese schools, have little experience of teaching phonetic radicals. This may contribute to their reluctance to teach phonetic radicals. A few CFL educators, however, have recently suggested that CFL pedagogy include greater attention to phonetic radicals (Y. Li & Zhang, 2016).

In addition to enriching traditional bottom-up instruction with research-based pedagogical techniques, we may be able to improve the effectiveness of CFL literacy instruction with the thoughtful inclusion of teaching based upon interactive models of reading. This would

mean combining top-down reading pedagogy with bottom-up skills to help learners achieve “a balanced interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing skills” (Eskey, 2005, p. 565).

Top-down reading skills are especially helpful for interacting with reading materials that include content unfamiliar to the reader. Indeed, the ACTFL standards recommend prioritizing top-down strategies: “In learners’ second language, educators need to first activate top-down strategies so learners understand the overall meaning and context before using bottom-up strategies to refine their initial understanding” (Board, 2015). Most authentic reading materials in Chinese contain characters and vocabulary terms, as well as cultural content, that are unfamiliar to beginning readers. Top-down skills can enable a beginning reader to extract useful information from authentic materials, such as in the exercise *Jin Laoshi* did when she had her students read medicine packages. Skills for using authentic materials would also enable students to interact with a broader range of genres, including new forms of digital text. Some of the teachers in this study have made efforts to experiment with new forms of text in their classrooms, but these activities have been limited. Training in pedagogy for top-down reading skills would help the teachers design engaging activities to promote Chinese multiliteracies in the classroom.

Most CFL teachers from China have little experience with top-down reading pedagogy, particularly with the types of strategies that involve hypothesizing or other types of student-centered learning in which students need to construct meaning on their own or in sociocultural activities without direct instruction from the teacher. These approaches contrast with the teacher-centered, direct instruction model typically associated with Chinese cultures of learning.

The two teachers in this study who completed graduate education in the United States are more familiar with student-centered pedagogy and with top-down reading pedagogy and have

been better able to incorporate these into their teaching. Jin *Laoshi* notes explicitly that her U.S. graduate training pushed her to reflect more deeply on her own educational experiences and values. As teacher education experts design both degree-based and short-term training in literacy pedagogy for CFL teachers from China, it may be worthwhile to consider including activities requiring reflection on one's own personal and cultural history of learning and teaching. One activity that might be useful is to assign trainees to write personal literacy narratives on their experiences in learning to read and write and in using those skills both in school and for more personal purposes. This activity has been used effectively in teacher training programs to promote reflection on personal histories with literacy and attitudes toward teaching literacy (Clark & Medina, 2000; MacPhee & Sanden, 2016).

It may be useful for CFL teachers to have opportunities to reflect not only on their personal literacy histories but also on the role of traditional Chinese cultures of learning, in both their own schooling and their experiences in teaching. This needs to be done in a way that values and respects the contributions of that model to teaching literacy. Any reforms or new initiatives in teaching CFL literacy need to avoid problematizing the cultural background of the teachers but look instead to creating a hybrid cultural space in which both traditional Chinese cultures of learning and the constructivist, student-centered pedagogy often characterized as “western” can coexist. Other researchers have also called for what Wen Ma terms a “middle ground” between student-centeredness and teacher-directedness”(Ma, 2014, p. 176), or classroom spaces that allow teachers to maintain or reshape their own Chinese cultural identities while incorporating new pedagogies (Enns-Kananen & Wang, 2016; Ferro, 2014).

My suggestion here is that this hybrid or “middle ground” approach be fostered specifically in the space for teaching CFL literacy. Based on the findings of this study, I am

suggesting that CFL teachers be trained in ways that allow for traditional, bottom-up skills-based instruction to be combined, in a balanced, thoughtful way, with top-down reading pedagogy and student-centered learning. This approach could allow CFL teachers to develop CFL literacy pedagogy that is more effective for students and, as Li *Laoshi* puts it, “comfortable” for the teachers.

Experiences in reflection on their own personal and cultural history with literacy might also help CFL teachers contribute to the dialogue among university and K-12 teachers about questions such as when and how many characters to ask students to recognize or write from memory and when and how to use Pinyin. What is often missing from these discussions is a thoughtful recognition of the cultural weight of these decisions and the degree to which these issues impact upon the cultural identity of the teachers. Teachers might also benefit from education in the construct of sponsors of literacy and reflection upon the sponsors of literacy in their lives as well as in those of their students.

The above recommendations have focused primarily on teacher training and curriculum content. I would suggest also that research on pedagogical techniques in CFL literacy and acquisition, particularly research on classroom effectiveness, should take into consideration the cultural background and belief systems of the instructors. Experimental techniques are unlikely to be implemented as conceived if the instructors are not committed to and well trained in the intervention to be applied.

### **Limitations of Study**

In approaching this question in a qualitative fashion, I have focused intently upon the voices of five individuals. While they each have a unique history, their stories reveal some common themes. The findings here may be applicable to other CFL teachers and certainly

suggest topics to explore when working with CFL teachers on improving CFL literacy pedagogy. It is important to remember, however, that this group might differ from other CFL teachers with different backgrounds.

All of the participants in this study are female, raised in China and educated in China at least through the bachelor's degree level. They are all K-12 teachers, with only one elementary school teacher. It is possible that male teachers, those from other Chinese-speaking areas, heritage speakers and non-native Chinese speakers from the United States, or those with other backgrounds view teaching CFL literacy differently. University-level faculty and other elementary school teachers might also have other views.

The methods in this study relied upon triangulation among interviews, observations, and lesson plans. For practical reasons, the observations and lesson plans were snapshots at times of convenience. It is possible that observations over longer periods and more extensive collection of lesson plans might have generated more thorough insights.

In eliciting stories of childhood literacy development, I focused more on reading than writing. In response to my questions on writing, the participants had less to offer. It is possible that reframing questions differently might have elicited more information in that area.

This study did not focus on generational differences. All but one of the participants are around 30 years old. The exception is about ten years older. Older teachers from China and the new generation of teachers now completing their training may have different beliefs.

### **Further Thoughts**

This study is but one minor step in the pursuit of the knowledge needed to develop more effective pedagogy and pedagogical training for CFL literacy in the United States. Some additional research areas that might generate useful data include: a deeper investigation of the

individual histories of writing outside of school; teachers' use of literacy textbooks and curriculum; an in-depth investigation of the washback of AP and IB exams on CFL literacy curriculum and pedagogy. Different groups of CFL teachers also warrant attention. This study included only one elementary school Chinese immersion teacher. Her voice added depth and a unique perspective to this study. Additional studies of the cognition of immersion teachers on teaching CFL literacy could be useful to the rapidly growing number of Chinese immersion programs. A new generation of young teachers from China are starting to arrive in the United States. They are from a generation of digital natives; texting and other forms of digital literacy play a dominant role in their literacy history. They have also experienced educational reforms in China that experimented with communicative language teaching in English classes and promoted extensive reading outside of class. Are the sponsors of literacy different for their generation? How have Chinese cultures of learning evolved for their generation? Other groups of CFL teachers that need to be included in the conversations on CFL literacy pedagogy include non-native speakers of Chinese, heritage speakers, and teachers from Taiwan and elsewhere. They also have expertise and perspectives that can enrich the discussion. Finally, a careful analysis of the sponsors of CFL literacy in the United States and the impact of those sponsors might also offer a new dimension to the difficult decisions on CFL pedagogy and curriculum that must be addressed.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Letter of Consent

### Adult Consent Form

**Name of Study: Beliefs of Teachers of Chinese on Teaching Chinese Literacy to English Speakers**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Department of Curriculum and Teaching at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the beliefs and cognitions of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language on teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers. We hope that a better understanding of the ways teachers think about teaching literacy and the beliefs teachers hold about Chinese literacy may contribute to efforts by teachers, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers to improve was of teaching Chinese literacy to English speakers.

#### PROCEDURES

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. These will be semi-structured conversations in which you will be asked about your experiences in learning to read and write Chinese, learning to read and write English, and teaching Chinese to English speakers. The interviews will be conducted in English or Chinese, according to your preference. Each interview should take about one hour. We will have these conversations in a quiet place convenient to you. This might be a classroom or a coffee shop or other location, depending on your preference.

The interviews will be audio recorded. The recording is necessary so that I may have an accurate record of the conversations and can review them in detail. You may ask to have the audio recorder turned off at any time during the interview if you feel uncomfortable. The audio recordings will be stored on an encrypted laptop or an encrypted external hard drive in a locked cabinet. I will transcribe the recorded interviews myself. Only I (Sheree Willis) and my advisor will have access to the recordings. In the transcription of the recordings, you will be identified by a pseudonym and only I and my advisor may know your true identity. The recordings will be destroyed one year after the research project is completed. If you wish, I will share a copy of the transcript with you and you may make any corrections you feel necessary.

In addition to the interviews, I would like to ask you to give me at least one lesson plan that includes a literacy lesson. The lesson plan does not need to be formal. It can simply be notes on the lesson sequence and it can be in either English or Chinese.

I would also like your permission to observe you giving a literacy lesson in your classroom. I will not record the observation and will only take notes on your teaching, not on the students. I will ask permission from you school in advance and will follow your school or district's policies in this activity. I suggest that you or the school, based on relevant school or district policies, inform your students that I am a researcher conducting research on teaching Chinese literacy and that I will be in the classroom only to observe the teacher not the students.



Any email or other correspondence or notes related to the project that include your name or other identifying information will also be stored on an encrypted drive and/or locked in a cabinet and destroyed one year after the study is completed.

#### RISKS

The content of the interview should cause no more discomfort that you would experience in daily life.

#### BENEFITS

There will be no payments or direct tangible benefits to participants in this study. You may find, however, the process of discussing issues related to teaching literacy an interesting exercise in reflection that could benefit your teaching. We hope that the understandings developed through this study will be helpful to teachers and others who are working on improving Chinese literacy pedagogy and teacher training.

#### PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher(s) will use a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future."

#### REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

#### CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Sheree Willis, Regnier Hall Suite 370, 12610 Quivira Rd., Overland Park, KS 66213

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the researchers may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researchers listed at the end of this consent form.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human







## Appendix B: Translation Sample

### Excerpt from Chinese transcript

比如说我们过年的时候会写对联啊，平时，像我们家里，都会，自己都会去写对联。然后，自己都会去写，有可能还会贴我们自己写的。因为在中国我觉得是。。他们是一直觉得如果自己的孩子可以写到很好的对联，字写得好的话，是一种很值得骄傲的事情。对，所以，有时候我的父母甚至会用我姐姐的汉字，就是书法写得很好，汉字写得很好，甚至于会说“看你们谁写更好”，谁。。写出对联的时候，汉字写得好，就把它贴在门上，真的就是我们家的对联。有一年是我的！就是我，好像是我上高中以后，那一年是用了我的字，

### English Translation

for example, at Chinese New Year we would write couplet hangings. Usually, like in my family, everyone would, each go write some couplets. Then, each would write some themselves, and maybe what we wrote would get hung up. Because in China, I feel that...they always felt that if your own child could write a really good couplet, with well written characters, it would be something to be proud of. Right, therefore, sometimes my parents would even use my older sisters' characters. Their calligraphy was very good, with well-written characters, and they would even say, "See if any of you can write even better." Who...when writing couplets, if the characters are well written, it could be hung up on the front door, it really was our family's couplet. One year it was mine! It was me, seems like it was after I started high school.

That year, they used my characters.



## Appendix C: Coding Examples

Examples of codes from first and second cycle coding

First Cycle Coding: VAB coding (with In Vivo coding embedded, where appropriate)			Second Cycle Coding	Final Analysis
Excerpt from Transcript (Translated into English)	VAB code	Comment	Initial Pattern Code: Theme	Final Theme
(after asking volunteer to write a character similar to a previous one on the board) - 哪 [nǎ-which or where] T: models stroke order with names of strokes; asks students how to read it (choral response); then how to write the Pinyin; then asks for difference between 那 and 哪, student choral response - there is no square. T: laughs; What is this? This is a mouth, the mouth radical. When we ask questions what do we use? You use your mouth, so there is a mouth.	V: radical awareness	classroom observation; asked students for ideas, did not always just tell them	Building Up in Student-Centered Fashion	Bottom-up Skills: Building Up Literacy in a Traditional Chinese Model
I feel like this process lets them gradually become an independent learner, that is this process of independent, self-regulated study, unlike that original teaching method, they were passive learners, they would only say, they would only learn what the teacher gave them, then they did not have so many opportunities to think, so they lacked that process of thinking, questioning, doubting, then arriving at their own conclusions	V: inductive learning	student-centered	Inductive Learning: Inductive Learning for Literacy	Reflecting and Adapting: Finding a Literacy Pedagogy That Works for Both Teachers and Students
Now I like it more and more, that is when you teach, you gradually, you yourself, you will always create some new things each year	A: Enjoying teaching	relates to satisfaction in searching for better ways to adapt pedagogy	Adaptation: Teachers Must Adapt	Reflecting and Adapting: Finding a Literacy Pedagogy That Works for Both Teachers and Students
I always quite liked writing characters [when I was young]	A: liked writing characters	in context of developing good handwriting	Cultural Identity: Chinese Literacy is Bound to Identity	Chinese Literacy and Cultural Identity
[after describing activities to teach radicals] the students asked "teacher what is that horizontal stroke, with vertical strokes added there, is that 'vegetable'? [...] a lot of vegetable [characters] have that, then I [showed them] the grass radical. They were a bit more sensitized, as long as they are sensitized to chinese characters, then later on it will be easier for them	B: practice with radicals increasing student awareness of character components		Building Up: Building up Skills from the Fundamentals	Bottom-up Skills: Building Up Literacy in a Traditional Chinese Model
[about Total Physical Response Storytelling ] Some kids like this method, somekids don't, right. But because the students have different learning styles. Some students say "teacher I like this method, I think I can learn quickly" [...] especially the students who like spoken language, [...] but [some] like reading better, they don't like this uncertainty, feeling like they are in a 'dangerous situation', they don't want you to 'check on understanding'	B: teachers need to accommodate individual differences among students		Motivating: Motivate Students by Meeting Individual Needs	Reflecting and Adapting: Finding a Literacy Pedagogy That Works for Both Teachers and Students