

## **Identifying and contextualising the key issues**

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**Abstract:** This chapter reviews current research on the intercultural component of language education and discusses its relevance for Chinese language teaching and learning. Basic concepts such as culture, identity and the very word ‘intercultural’ are problematized. The chapter highlights four aspects of Chinese language education: Chinese language ‘worlds’, diverse contexts, identities of learners, and identities of teachers. Based on these diverse and changing elements within Chinese language education a perspective of ‘interculturality’ is advocated. Other chapters in this volume investigate and address, in turn, questions pertaining to Chinese language education in relation to ‘interculturality’.

### **Introduction**

*Interculturality in Chinese Language Education* is located within the growing interest in learning Mandarin Chinese and the wider social contexts from which it springs around the world. An increasing number of initiatives at all levels of the curriculum of Chinese language education are taking place, promoted by Chinese authorities and/or local organisations and institutions. According to the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, commonly referred to as Hanban, the *Confucius Institute Annual Development Report 2014* claimed that there were 1.11 million registered students in Confucius Institutes worldwide (Hanban, 2015). In addition, there has been corresponding interest in the improvement of Chinese teacher education and teachers’ professional development.

Teaching the Chinese language also requires teaching about China, ‘Chinese worlds’ and the Chinese themselves. In spite of being described as a “monochrome forest”

in the ‘West’ (Cheng, 2008), China is an extremely diverse country of 1.3 billion inhabitants, comprising very different social, ethnic and linguistic groups. People from Yining (northwest of China in the Mongolian Uplands), Qiqihar (in the north-eastern part of the country) or Nanning (southern China) may have very little in common with each other, even though they share the same nationality. Indeed, one does not need to change regions to experience diversity in China: in Beijing, for instance, one can easily meet people from a wide range of provinces in a different district or even on a different street. Another example of the diverse nature of China is the pronounced variations in language and dialect. Minhong Yu, the Founder and Chairman of the renowned company New Oriental Education & Technology Group in China, the largest provider of private educational services in the country, does not have Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) as his first language and many think that he speaks it ‘badly’. Tinghe Jin, the co-editor of this book, is from Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province in China, whose first language is *Wenzhouhua* 温州话 (Wenzhounese) and second language is Mandarin.

Additionally, the concept of culture – as in the phrase ‘Chinese culture’ – has often been the main emphasis of Chinese language education, providing students with facts about China and instructions about how to meet Chinese people and to behave like a Chinese person. This has often created a ‘cultural taxidermy’ of the Chinese, which leads to narrow perceptions of Chinese people. ‘Chinese culture’, like all cultures, is not a fixed entity and is constantly evolving. Throughout its history, the Middle Kingdom has always been influenced by the ‘other’. For instance, the toggle-and-loop button, which we often call the *Chinese knot button*, came with the Mongolians and Kublai Khan (1215-1294) (Chu 2013, p. 31) .

In the 2010s and beyond, Chinese language education should invest in teaching interculturality between China and the rest of the world, where the rest of the world

includes ‘the West’ but also ‘Chinese worlds’ – different regions of Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, among others. But how does one teach interculturality in relation to Chinese, especially if one wants to move beyond limited, fixed and somewhat essentialised understandings of culture? In this volume interculturality refers to encounters between individuals who are from different national, regional and social spheres, who are interested in questioning their views and opinions of the ‘other’ and the ‘self’ in order to construct a space of diversity, social justice, and more ‘transparent’ encounters. In relation to China, this means ‘show[ing] that there is not one unique way of thinking in China and to recognize the fact that China did not stop thinking in Ancient times, or when Western modernity was introduced to her’ (Cheng, 2007, p. 164). China, just like any other country, is a rich and complex place, with very diverse people. How can one effectively include China in its entirety in Chinese language education?

In this chapter, we discuss Chinese language ‘worlds’, diverse contexts, identities of learners and the identities of teachers in order to highlight diverse and changing elements within Chinese language education. The discussions are characterised by current research on the intercultural component of language education in relation to Chinese language education. Based on this, interculturality has come to be seen as the key feature of Chinese language education. We ask the question of how one can develop interculturality in the context of Chinese language education by discussing critically concepts such as culture, identity and ‘the intercultural’. A summary of how other chapters in this volume contribute to interculturality in Chinese language education is also provided.

### **Chinese language ‘worlds’**

In 2013 the British national daily newspaper *The Guardian* (5 Dec. 2013) featured an

article that listed eight of the biggest challenges for a native English speaker to learn Mandarin:

1. You'll find the writing baffling ...
2. ... and the tones a nightmare
3. Mistakes can be filthy
4. Progress will be glacial
5. You won't be able to text message
6. Good teachers are in short supply
7. In any case, most of the people don't speak it ...
8. ... and nor do their leaders.

These comments may exaggerate the challenges of learning Mandarin in order to serve their purpose of creating an entertaining and eye-catching story, but they also contribute towards reinforcing older stereotypes that propagate the 'distancing' of Chinese. Earlier, Jordan and Walton (1987) described Chinese as a 'truly foreign language' owing to the perceived linguistic and cultural differences. However, one Chinese Studies lecturer has been reported as saying that while the script and tonal system are difficult, they hold the potential for enjoyment:

It really appeals to kids, they find the different characters fun and grasp the different tones well; it's like singing for them. The more we demystify the language, the more people will learn it. At the moment it is still seen as exotic and a bit strange, which can put people off. But that's changing (BBC News, 17 Jan. 2006).

When discussing Europeans' attempts to learn Mandarin, it is almost always related to the cultural, social and political issues that arise. In this BBC News interview, 'strange', 'exotic' and 'demystify' are used to imply these socio-political-cultural dimensions.

Chinese has not been a fixed and static language from ancient times to the postmodern era. There is a substantial literature in Chinese describing the evolution of Chinese characters and calligraphy, which shows how Chinese is embedded in specific

cultural, historical and global geo-political settings. For example, with regard to the word ‘country’ or ‘state’, which in Chinese is ‘*guo* 国’ or ‘*guojia* 国家’, in early versions the character ‘国’ contained a radical ‘或’, which referred to people with weapons to protect their city. This character reveals how cultural intuition or memory may be forged defensively through a struggle to achieve safety. Thus, Chinese characters bring a different way of thinking about language. In contrast, when the same word ‘country’ is used in England it connotes an idyllic rural landscape and traditional way of life signified by rolling hills, attractive woodland and green fields with sheep and cattle grazing peacefully. Therefore, to understand the character ‘国’ fully requires sensitivity to cultural and historical associations.

Chinese, like many other languages, has considerable diversity in its spoken dialect forms as well as the number of distinct languages used in provinces, districts and small clusters of villages. According to Yuan (2001), there are seven main groups of dialects in China: Beifanghua (Mandarin), Wu, Xiang, Gan, Kejia (Hakka), Yue (Cantonese) and Min. For example, Cantonese, which is spoken in Guangdong Province and Hong Kong, constitutes a major language. As non-Cantonese languages increasingly move into this province, Mandarin is becoming more established and very few people are now monolingual Cantonese speakers. Within this province there are other languages too, such as Hokkien, Teochew and Hakka. Linguistic diversity has been a political issue in Guangdong since 2011 when the national and provincial government passed the Guangdong National Language Regulations (广东省国家通用语言文字规定), which made it legally mandatory for all public services, mainstream broadcasting and official activities to be conducted in *Putonghua* (People’s Government of Guangdong Province, 2011). The move provoked widespread public concern in Guangdong province and beyond as the regulations were perceived as an attempt to destroy Cantonese culture, as

reported in some media, for example Dwnews (22 Dec. 2011). Another Chinese language, *Wenzhouhua* 温州话, is spoken in Wenzhou city in Zhejiang Province. Its etymological history derives from a branch of Wu Chinese and it is in effect a distinct language that includes influences from Min Chinese. Despite the close geographical proximity of these languages, *Wenzhouhua* 温州话 and variants of Wu and Min are not mutually intelligible, either with each other or Mandarin. Zhu and Li (2014: 328) commented that ‘Modern Chinese comprises eight mutually unintelligible varieties, based on historical connections and geographical distribution’ and ‘Mandarin is the English name for the northern variety of Chinese’. However, elsewhere such ‘dialects’ would be recognized as distinct languages in their own right albeit with significant influence from Mandarin, which itself exists with variants such as that used in Sichuan. An analogous situation would be to describe Romanian, Portuguese, Catalan and French, as ‘dialects’ rather than recognizing them as distinct languages even though they share some commonality. Starr (2009: 67) described Chinese ‘dialects’ as ‘mutually unintelligible and much further apart than languages such as Norwegian and Swedish, for example’.

Mandarin Chinese, called *Putonghua* 普通话 in Chinese meaning ‘common speech’, is the official national language of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which was identified by the Chinese government in 1949 when the PRC was established. The issue of what to call the language is important because throughout the post-War and post-Liberation period ‘common speech’ reflected the political emphasis of the founders of the People’s Republic. Mandarin also includes spoken Chinese in Taiwan and Singapore. There are a variety of Chinese terms meaning Mandarin as different regional and political differences contain geographic and cultural elements, such as *huayu* 华语 (literally ‘Chinese language’) used in Singapore (also in Taiwan and Malaysia) referring to Chinese heritage (Duff et al. 2013: 4) and in Taiwan, Mandarin is called ‘national language’

*Guoyu* 国语 (Newnham, 1971: 50-61). Two forms of Chinese characters are currently used, simplified and traditional. Simplified characters are used in mainland China and traditional characters in Taiwan and Hong Kong. The PRC published the ‘Chinese Character Simplification Scheme’ (汉字简化方案) in 1956 and the ‘Pinyin scheme’ in 1958. While Pinyin was recognized internationally in 1982, it was not until 2009 that a similar level of official recognition arose in Taiwan.

Blommaert and Rampton (2011) have discussed superdiversity within a language and argued that language is increasingly denationalized. For example, in London more than one hundred languages are spoken including Mandarin, Cantonese and other Chinese languages and/or dialects. Chinese is no longer an exotic and distant language confined to a small number of specialists but it is spoken by an increasingly visible number of Chinese students, both overseas Chinese and visiting Chinese, in many university campuses across the USA, Australia, the UK and other countries in Europe. The presence of Chinese outside China is a significant context when considering interculturality within learning Mandarin. Based on these characteristics of Chinese language ‘worlds’, modern pedagogical methods continue to explore new approaches, such as Moloney & Xu’s (2016a) collection of studies exploring innovative pedagogy for teaching and learning Chinese.

### **Diverse contexts of Chinese language education**

The movement of the Chinese diaspora around the world is not a new phenomenon (Barabantseva, 2011; Kuhn, 2008). ‘The Encyclopaedia of the Chinese Overseas’ (Pan, 1998) identifies this diverse development of the Chinese diaspora in history. For example, the Chinese community in Canada is the one of the largest overseas Chinese communities and the Chinese community in the UK has been expanding significantly in size and

diversity. According to Office for National Statistics (2015), in 2014 the official estimate of migrants coming to Britain from China was 39,000, equivalent to 7% of all immigrants in Britain. There were 92,353 (up 8,240 or +10%, on the year of 2014) entry clearance visas granted, excluding visitor and transit visas to the UK, for people from Mainland China in the year ending September 2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Among these overseas Chinese communities, in order to teach the next generations who were born abroad Chinese languages and to maintain Chinese cultural traditions, Chinese complementary schools (see chapter by Wang, Chapter 7, this volume) or Chinese community schools (See Chapter by Ganassin, Chapter 6, this volume) were developed (Zhu Hua & Li Wei, 2014) (see also community-supported out-of-school programmes in chapter by Pan and Wang, Chapter 4, this volume). In the UK, these schools are where British born Chinese children have learned Chinese language and culture supplementary to their mainstream education (Francis et al., 2009; Li and Zhu, 2011) since the early twentieth century (Mau et al., 2009). The majority of immigrants in the early twentieth century were Cantonese speaking rather than Mandarin speaking. An increasing number of these schools introduced Mandarin to reflect the growing sense among British Cantonese families that their children should learn Mandarin (Li & Zhu 2011; Wang 2015).

The increasingly visible role of these schools has attracted studies on Chinese (including Cantonese) as heritage languages (e.g., Mau et al. 2009; Francis et al. 2010). Li (2014) conducted a study that focused on complex linguistic and cultural features within the learning of Chinese in British complementary schools. His study explored interactions between teachers and students in relation to their linguistic knowledge and social-cultural experiences through which they constructed their identities. He proposed that teachers and students can learn through their different sources of knowledge and their



intercultural differences. Other studies, such as Li and Pu's (2010) research, have introduced intercultural competence to Chinese Heritage Language Education in Chinese complementary schools in the US context.

Added to this phenomenon is the increasing number of Chinese students studying abroad. According to China Education Online and Uxuan education (2016), the total number of Chinese students studying abroad reached 523,700 in 2015, an increase of 63,900 on the number of students in 2014. Between 2014 to 2015, the top countries for Chinese students' overseas higher education were the USA, Australia, the UK and Canada (China Education Online and Uxuan education 2016). For example, China is now the highest ranking non-EU country sending students to UK universities (UKCISA, 2016). These students bring a variety of Chinese dialects and related languages onto campuses.

A further context for expansion within the learning of Chinese has been that of Confucius Institutes. Supported by Hanban, branches of the Confucius Institute aim to promote and support the teaching and learning of Mandarin outside China. While Confucius Institutes are associated with universities providing both traditional language degrees and professional training for adult learners, Chinese classrooms are developed within schools to connect the university to school provision, in turn serving the needs of young students' learning of Chinese. By December 2015 the number of institutes had expanded to 500 with 1000 Confucius Classrooms in 134 countries and regions (Hanban 2017). Confucius Institutes are relevant to the context of Chinese language education, not only because of their wider development, but also owing to their role in the global spread of Chinese 'soft power' (see Park, 2013; Yang, 2010). Similar to the British Council or Alliance Françaises, which are long-established examples, the attempt to secure influence through promoting an ideal national culture through language teaching is not new.

As China becomes increasingly established as a global superpower politically and economically, the need to learn Chinese is also increasing, for example BBC News (24 Dec. 2009) reported that a Bolivian market trader felt learning Mandarin was necessary. This means that the rise in the number of people learning Chinese is not only the result of government initiatives but continues to expand through individual interests and needs. A recent development has been the arrival of commercially structured schools offering Chinese language in combination with cultural/recreational courses, such as the ‘Meridian Chinese Studies’ group (Meridian Chinese Studies, 2017). Another development is of non-Chinese students who are studying Chinese in China taking part in study abroad programmes (see chapter by Wang and Guo, Chapter 3, this volume). In this way, the context of teaching and learning Chinese worldwide is becoming diverse and complex, and indeed, is changing.

### **Learners of Chinese: who are they?**

Within various contexts of Chinese language education it has become clear that learners of Chinese do not constitute a homogeneous group (see, for example, chapter by Ganassin, Chapter 6, this volume; Jin, 2016). The variety of Chinese language learners across countries has been identified by Lo Bianco (2011), who raises the pedagogical issue of placing language too closely to ‘foreign’ places and people while students of Chinese themselves come from multilingual and multicultural societies. The learning of Chinese should benefit from the global spread of Chinese communities, which ‘provide both native-speaker settings for the language, widespread variation in spoken language forms, local communicative norms and values, and pre-existing efforts of language maintenance’; in other words, the human capital within studies of Chinese (Lo Bianco, 2011: xvi).

In the Chinese proficiency competition for foreign college students in the UK regional final held in London in 2016, among European competitors there were two Asian participants, one from Japan and the other from Thailand. A question was raised among the audience towards the end of the event about whether these two contestants from Asian countries could take advantage of learning Chinese. This raises an issue about how learners' linguistic, ethnic and social backgrounds can positively contribute to their learning of Chinese. Studies concerning learners of Chinese can be found in Everson & Shen's (2010) collection. However, this collection is more concerned with cognitive and linguistic aspects rather than a social and cultural perspective. Indeed, teachers' lack of awareness of the value of students' multilingual repertoires contributing to pedagogical practice is not limited to the field of Chinese language education (see, for example Faneca et al., 2016). A growing number of studies have focused on students' experiences and identities in their intercultural encounters, for example students studying abroad (e.g., Jackson, 2014; Skyrme, 2014). Danison (2013) has pointed out that learners' linguistic and family backgrounds influenced their study culture in their language learning. Duff et al.'s (2013) study has drawn attention on learners of Chinese studying Chinese as their additional language. In her study, the researchers themselves were the research participants and their (auto)biographical accounts of learning Chinese and issues about identities, ideology, and narrativity were discussed. Although there exists a limited number of studies focusing on the 'intercultural' approach in teaching and learning Chinese, Moloney & Xu (2016) and Jin (2014) have shed light on the intercultural competence of university learners. Jin (2016) argues that approaches to teaching and learning Mandarin need to be more rooted in biographical, social and cultural understandings of learners' identities.

## **Being and becoming teachers of Chinese**

Being and becoming a teacher of Chinese, or any other subject, involves the development of a sense of self-belief and competence in their teaching. Cultural influences such as educational cultures play an important role in this development (Wang & Jensen, 2011). This echoes theories of ‘becoming’ and ‘being’ elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari (1994) within general socio-economic theory and by Britzman (1991) in the field of teacher education. By referring to ‘learning to teach’, Britzman (1991: 8) described a process of *becoming* as, ‘a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become’ (see also Jin and Moore, 2014). The lack of qualified Mandarin teachers is an active and ongoing concern in academic circles (Li, 2013; Wang & Higgins, 2008; Zhang & Li, 2010; Liu & Dervin, 2016), in public media (e.g., BBC News, 6 Jun. 2014) and at government level in the UK for example. Similar concerns are expressed in a study based in Taiwan (Chen & Hsin, 2011) and elsewhere (Orton, 2011; Wang, 2016). As teaching Chinese to non-native Chinese speakers is a relatively new subject, teachers of Chinese need to develop their awareness regarding who and where they teach. A growing number of teachers of Chinese are coming from China for example via Hanban programmes to teach Chinese outside China and there is also an increasing number of training opportunities for local teachers. ‘Language teachers, however, are a diverse group coming from multiple linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds’ (Moloney, 2013: 214).

A number of studies have focused on native Chinese teachers’ education in order to address issues around ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ Chinese language teachers abroad. For example, in Australia, Moloney (2013) has called for more support for native Chinese speaking teachers of Chinese at schools in order to help them become effectively engaged

with intercultural pedagogy. Moloney (2013) has emphasised teachers' own cultural and pedagogic backgrounds. In an earlier study conducted in Montreal, Quebec, in the context of teaching Chinese heritage language, Curdt-Christiansen (2006) analysed classroom discourses and identified that learning is a negotiation of cultural practices, also referring to teachers' experiences and cultural backgrounds. Teachers' prior experiences have also been highlighted by Wang & Du (2014) whose study investigated teachers' perspectives about their professional identities and views of the teacher-student relationship in Denmark. The changing contexts of teaching have been highlighted as key factors affecting teachers' views and identities. Wang et al. (2013) conducted a comparative study of Chinese Language Teacher Education Programmes by interviewing six language educators and six pre-service teachers in Beijing, Hong Kong and Sydney. They highlighted a need to develop an internationalised curriculum of Chinese language teacher education.

At the time of writing in 2017, this need is extended to a focus on interculturality, in which teachers' own backgrounds, their senses of identity and the co-construction of these with the 'other', can play a positive role in their overseas teaching and in classroom discursive activities. Zhang and Wang's chapter (Chapter 5) in this volume has shifted emphasis to non-native Chinese teachers from a university in Denmark, observing their learning and working experiences in relation to interculturality. Although research into non-native Chinese teachers is still limited, the number of those teachers and relevant training and education opportunities are increasing. A similar focus should also be placed on the wider school context, regional and national educational system, and global political and economic development, as teachers' professional identities are related to these wider contexts. Examples have been provided by Wang's (Chapter 7) and Pan and Wang's (Chapter 4) chapters in this volume who explore Chinese heritage teachers, the majority

of whom are volunteers and lack professional teaching experience and relevant training and development opportunities.

### **Interculturality in Chinese language education: what we ask**

Open a travel guide: usually you will find a brief lexicon which strangely enough concerns only certain boring and useless things: customs, mail, the hotel, the barber, the doctor, prices. Yet what is traveling? Meetings. The only lexicon that counts is the one which refers to the rendezvous. (Barthes 1982: 13).

As Barthes asserts in the opening quote to this section, interculturality should be more about meeting other people (what he calls ‘the rendezvous’) rather than accumulating ‘peculiar’ and ‘exotic’ knowledge about the ‘target’ culture.

Interculturality in this volume represents just this. It places emphasis on national, regional and social diversity (meaning: people) within the teaching and learning of Chinese, in which intercultural awareness, understanding and responsiveness of learners, from a critical and reflexive perspective, can be recognized and developed. This process is achieved through individuals questioning their views of the ‘other’ and the ‘self’, the wider discursive space and ideologies in their encounters. Thus, this notion of ‘interculturality’ stresses the importance of understanding the experiences and viewpoints of the people one meets, rather than merely acquiring ways of responding to people that one perceives as being essentially ‘different’ or ‘other’. As such the focus is placed on processes rather than the mere acquisition of cultural facts. Culture is viewed as fluid and dynamic and developing an holistic appreciation of interculturality as a broad outlook and sensibility is achieved through life-long learning processes (Dervin, 2010, 2011). Therefore, this requires the development of teachers’ sensitivity and awareness in order to recognise learners’ backgrounds and experiences and the wider social space in which

they have been involved.

By introducing the idea of ‘interculturality’ into Chinese language education, we ask the following questions:

- Can Chinese language education contribute to developing a form of intercultural competence which is critical and reflexive?
- Can Chinese language education help learners and users go beyond stereotypes and representations of the Chinese and the hidden ideologies behind them?
- How can one teach Chinese culture as a process rather than a product (beyond ‘cultural taxidermy’)?
- How can we train and educate teachers of Chinese (from China or elsewhere) to introduce work on interculturality in their lessons rather than mere cultural facts?

Thus, basic concepts such as culture, identity and the very word ‘intercultural’ are problematized. Systematic criticality towards these concepts and the ideologies that hide behind them is required. Furthermore, we call for an emphasis on both difference and similarity/interrelations in considering Chinese ‘culture’. Finally, as hinted at several times earlier in this chapter, there is a need to recognize the ‘diverse diversities’ negotiated between and within groups and individuals (processes) (Dervin, 2016).

Teaching and learning languages can never entirely be about language alone, but must include an awareness of social and cultural values, partly through developing communicative sensitivities and abilities. The inclusion of culture in the teaching and learning of Chinese has long been appreciated (e.g., Everson, 2011; Xing, 2006; Zhang & Li, 2010). In Wen & Grandin’s (2010) study, the discussion of culture in learning Chinese is based on cross-cultural communication skills. Although Danison (2013)

identified that teachers' definition of culture is implicit, the teachers' view of culture that emerged in his study tended to be fixed and emphasising difference, such as clearly distinguishing 'Chinese culture' from 'American culture'. However, a critical position has been taken on some interpretations of the concept of 'culture' and how 'culture' can be taught in the classroom (e.g., Kirkebæk et al., 2013). Zhu and Li's (2014: 334) study identified, in the context of Confucius Institutes and classrooms, that some teachers had only 'superficial' ideas about culture. Wang (Chapter 2) in this volume discusses 'culture' in language classrooms in the following three interconnected approaches by referring to Zhu (2014): a) teaching culture as content, b) teaching language-and-culture, and c) teaching culture through language (an intercultural approach). Moving towards an interculturality approach is a process of critically understanding the notion of culture in order to establish a non-essentialist view of culture. By using 'interculturality' rather than 'intercultural', the focus is placed on the processual dimension rather than on meetings between defined cultures (Lavanchy et al., 2011). Thus, an interculturality approach in teaching and learning Chinese means we move away from an information approach (Kirkebæk et al., 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2008) towards the more process-based approach to teaching 'culture', through which the learner can develop their understanding and question their thoughts and assumptions.

Within this cultural process of learning, the emphasis is very much on learners' identity and on that of those they encounter face-to-face or through learning material, which at one level may be related to the language the individual speaks in communication (Zhu, 2014). For example, '[f]luency in a heritage language is often used as a marker of the strength of one's orientation towards ethnicity of the community' (Zhu, 2014: 205). At another level, this identity may be influenced by perceptions of parents and the wider public about which Chinese language should be preferably taught and learned (Zhu Hua



& Li Wei, 2014), as shown in the analysis of ‘constructing native speakerism in a quest for the “perfect” Mandarin speaker’ in Ganassin’s chapter (Chapter 6) in this volume. In Zhu’s (2014) words, interculturality is about ‘doing’ cultural identities; engaging individuals in their interaction with culture; and possessing interactional resources to forge a cultural identity. In addition, it is necessary to be aware of the power imbalance of intercultural encounters, which can stimulate intercultural dialogue and thus lead students towards critical and reflexive thinking and questioning (Shi-Xu, 2001).

However, as Moloney & Xu (2016c) argue, the most prominent challenge that Chinese language education faces is its pedagogy. Teaching approaches to Chinese have shifted from teaching Chinese as a first language to teaching it as a second/additional language, along with associated shifts from the grammar-translation approach to audio-lingual and communicative/functional approaches (Cruickshank and Tsung, 2011: 217). Although these shifts have raised issues concerning the development of appropriate pedagogies for teaching Chinese, the traditional approach such as the grammar-translation method still remains as the main approach adopted by some teachers (Moloney & Xu, 2016c). Adding to this, there are some teachers who have sought to move towards an intercultural communicative approach to the teaching of Chinese, as reflected by materials designed for a beginners’ distance-learning Chinese course at the Open University in Britain (Álvarez, 2011). Kirkebæk et al.’s (2013) research has invited teachers to consider their own practice critically in order to understand how culture can be taught by linking it to different dimensions and contexts of their teaching. In order to develop teaching approaches, the active role of teachers in enhancing students’ intercultural learning is long appreciated (e.g., Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2005). As shown in the next section, in this volume, researchers and teachers from diverse contexts are moving towards interculturality in Chinese language education.

## About the volume

This volume presents global studies that promote intercultural awareness, dialogue and encounters – interculturality as a critical and reflexive force – in Chinese language education. Each of the chapters emphasizes the research context in which the study was conducted, discusses and examines the inclusion of interculturality in Chinese language education in various dimensions. They draw attention to the processes involved in intercultural exchanges within teaching and learning Chinese across different linguistic, regional and social backgrounds.

**Wang Jiayi's** chapter (Chapter 2) discusses how teachers can help university students to question cultural stereotypes, move beyond essentialist views and develop critical intercultural understanding through designed classroom activities. Her chapter reports and initiative of designing lessons by using textbooks and videos highlighting the value of students' own conflicting views and experiences in classroom teaching. The case study of teaching practice and the teacher's reflections on this exploratory pedagogical design provide insights on how to include interculturality into teaching of Chinese.

**Wang Jiayi and Guo Zhiyan's** chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on students' development of intercultural competence during their periods of study abroad. They feature 97 students from two British universities. Students' reflective reports across 6 years were collected and analysed. This study suggests that the development of intercultural competence is not a linear process; 'setbacks can occur'. The chapter further identifies factors that influence students' development of intercultural competence and argues that guidance about questioning stereotypes needs to be provided to students before their departure as well as during their stays in China. The same requirement is applied to teachers in order to help them to support students' development of intercultural competence through structured *critical* reflection.

**Pan Mengting and Wang Shujiao's** chapter (Chapter 4) explores how the teaching backgrounds of heritage language teachers influence their teaching Chinese in community-supported out-of-school programmes in Canada. By investigating six teachers' perspectives towards their teaching practices through questionnaires and interviews, this chapter identifies teachers' intercultural awareness and understating of different teaching approaches based on different educational contexts. They argue that teachers' prior teaching experience is an asset rather than an obstacle to their adaptation to their new teaching environment and the development of their teaching approaches. However, they call for greater community support, for instance from school management teams.

**Zhang Chun and Wang Danping's** chapter (Chapter 5) addresses the issue of non-native Chinese teachers who are Danish nationals teaching Chinese. They explore how two teachers changed their role as learners of Chinese to teachers of Chinese in Denmark. Drawing data from interviews, they state that identities are fluid and not fixed. Thus they highlight how the process of moving from a learner of Chinese to teacher of Chinese contributes to teachers' intercultural understanding of teaching Chinese.

**Sara Ganassin's** chapter (Chapter 6) explores the diversity of learners of Chinese and constructions of Chinese language within Mandarin community schooling in England. The chapter contrasts perspectives from teachers, pupils and parents and questions the simplified idea of 'Chinese culture' and the assumption of a homogeneous group of learners. She argues that learners' identities are not only tied to Mandarin; for example, many of her participants are native Cantonese speakers. This fact challenges the fixed idea of Chinese heritage language and native-speakerism.

**Wang Danlu**'s chapter (Chapter 7) also focuses on the context of Chinese heritage language education and examines how cultural activities have been used in London Chinese complementary schools and learners' attitudes towards these activities. She identifies that one of the biggest challenges when teaching Chinese is the requirement to meet the needs of learners who have a variety of linguistic abilities, motivations and learning objectives. Learners' attitudes towards cultural activities suggest that cultural activities should reflect the changing nature of 'Chinese culture' and recognize the complexity of young students' identities.

**Xu Huiling and Robyn Moloney**'s chapter (Chapter 8) also concern learners of Chinese heritage language. They draw on data from the perceptions of Chinese heritage language learners while undertaking a designed intercultural learning task. They argue that the voices of such learners need to be heard, and this can happen during their course through intercultural activities. The development of student identities becomes part of the activities as well as one of the outcomes. This development is an ongoing and critical process and is an emerging issue in the context of Chinese heritage language education for those learners whose Chinese language study has been effectively formed by their family backgrounds. They identify the positive possibilities of innovative and personally engaging pedagogy for interculturality in Chinese language education.

## **Conclusions**

We believe that the studies in this volume demonstrate a critical dimension towards teaching and learning Chinese. Interculturality is the complex and changing nature of Chinese language education as well as a critical pathway through which we consistently challenge our beliefs and assumptions. Without understanding this basis of the teaching and learning of Chinese, it can be difficult to see progress in the development of pedagogical approaches. We also emphasise that it is the people who are involved in

the process of teaching and learning who can have an active impact on this development. Therefore, the call for developing the understanding of learners and teachers, as well as how the wider social context influences their participation in learning and teaching, is prominent. Indeed, there is also a need to have greater support at the institutional level, such as from schools and universities, national level, for instance through educational policy, and from the international community, for example some organisations for teaching Chinese could develop teaching and learning materials in collaboration with teachers and educators internationally. From an interculturality perspective, these various elements are interconnected and the development of learning and teaching is a long-term and evolving process.

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