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Examining Mandarin Chinese teachers' cultural knowledge in relation to their capacity as successful teachers in the United States

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Abstract

Interest in providing Mandarin foreign language at K-12 schools in the United States has grown steadily since the language was identified as critical to the U.S. finance and social security. However, the shortage of qualified Mandarin teachers is widely recognized as the key bottleneck to building capacity in Mandarin education. Drawing from research on teacher learning and teaching as well as effective bilingual education, this paper highlights a specific challenge that might influence Mandarin teachers' capacity to carry out effective and successful teaching in the US classroom, that is, their implicit cultural knowledge of teaching. Data from a case study that examined a Mandarin classroom taught by two teachers from Taiwan illustrated how their actual classroom practices were mediated by their understandings of the culture of teaching in Taiwan and the United States. Some fundamental differences between the two cultures embedded in education might account for these teachers' frustration in teaching and limited language teaching in the classroom. The findings point to the need to engage Mandarin teachers with critical reflection of their own understanding of teaching in their countries of origin and the United States.

Introduction

Mandarin language education in the United States has received increasing attention since President Bush announced the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) in 2006, which identified Chinese as one of the languages critical to the US economy and security. In 2009, the 100,000 Strong nonprofit organization was launched in response to President Obama's appeal to have 100,000 Americans studying in China between 2010 and 2014. In 2015, President Obama announced the One Million Strong initiative, which seeks to increase the number of K-12 students learning Mandarin to one million by 2020. According to the One Million Strong website, the increase will be fivefold as currently about 200,000 K-12 students are learning Mandarin in the United States. Few would dispute the importance of teachers in this ambitious initiative. Researchers (e.g., Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001) have argued that the success of any ambitious education reform depends, to a large extent, on the qualifications and effectiveness of teachers. However, in the emerging field of teaching

Mandarin as a foreign language, few Mandarin speakers have gone through training to teach speakers of other languages because there has been little demand for them (Asia Society, 2005). As a result, the shortage of qualified Mandarin teachers is widely recognized as the key bottleneck to building capacity in Mandarin education because it poses significant challenges for schools intending to provide Mandarin programs (Asia Society, 2005; Asia Society & the College Board, 2008; Wang, 2007). In discussing increasing the supply of qualified Mandarin teachers, Wang (2007) identifies some barriers faced by the Mandarin speakers who come to the United States as immigrants, such as their legal status and tests of English proficiency. She further argues that this group's "understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices", although less visible, is critical in determining their success as Chinese teachers (p.43). There is paucity in literature that explores how the understandings of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices of Mandarin teachers who come to the United States as immigrants are linked to their actual classroom practices. My study is set up to address this paucity by ethnographically examining how actual classroom practices of two Mandarin teachers from Taiwan were mediated by their understandings of the US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices. My study highlights challenges that might influence Mandarin teachers' capacity to carry out effective and successful teaching in the US classroom and points to the need to engage Mandarin teachers with critical reflection of their own understanding of teaching in their countries of origin and the United States.

Mandarin teachers in the United States

Generally speaking, public schools recruit Mandarin teachers from traditional certification programs, accelerated certification programs, and guest teachers from China or Taiwan. Since it often takes many years of study for English speakers to achieve the expected proficiency in this language identified as super-hard by Foreign Service Institute (2009), the majority of the Mandarin teachers are those who received their formal education abroad and came to the United States as immigrants or international students (Wang, 2007). Recently, many states have a Memorandum of Understanding with China or Taiwan to bring guest teachers to alleviate the shortage of Mandarin language teachers in the United States. (Asia Society & the College Board, 2008). The number of the guest teachers from the Taiwanese government is relatively little, but the Chinese Guest Teacher Program, sponsored by the Hanban (Hanban/Confucius Institute) in China in a partnership with the College Board has placed around 1200 guest teachers in K-12 schools across 32 states to help thousands of US students since its inception in 2007 (The College Board, 2017). All the guest teachers have teaching certificates in China or Taiwan and have several years of teaching experience before they come to the United States. Guest teachers often receive two weeks of training on Mandarin pedagogy, US education and culture prior to their teaching in the United States. Since guest teachers are a short-term strategy in response to the teacher shortage issue, they usually work in host schools no longer than three years. In discussing what Mandarin teachers need to know in order to teach effectively, Xing (2006) argues that a successful and effective language teacher is someone who is "capable of integrating what to teach with how to teach and thereby pass on language competence to students and enable students to use it in communication" (p. 268). Therefore, Xing (2006) calls for a distinction between *Mandarin grammar* and *pedagogical*

grammar of Mandarin in the field of teaching Mandarin as a foreign language. Wang (2007) adds to the discussion by highlighting the need to examine foreign-educated Mandarin teachers' "understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices" because their understanding is critical in determining their success as Mandarin teachers in the United States. In a similar vein, Everson and Xiao (2008) argue that Mandarin teachers who go through educational systems in Mandarin-speaking countries often hold different views toward education and teaching practices from their American counterparts. They further suggest that many Mandarin programs in the United States run the risk of failing when their teachers do not have a good understanding of their teaching context, environment and school culture, and thus cannot match the goals, needs, and desires of students.

I argue that what Wang (2007) and Everson and Xiao (2008) highlight is similar to the cultural knowledge of teaching. It does not refer to the stereotypical and static Chinese cultural knowledge that enables teachers to teach Chinese holidays or tradition in the classroom. Rather, it refers to what Stigler and Hiebert (1999) define as the mental script that people from the same culture often share when envisioning what teaching and learning is like. Such a script is learned implicitly when one moves through school, and explains how classrooms run successfully because both teachers and students with the same script in mind know what to expect and what roles to play respectively. Stigler and Hiebert compare the math classrooms in Japan and the United States to suggest that different cultural scripts lead to teachers' different views toward the nature of learning, the role of teacher, and the seriousness of the lesson. Teaching, thus, is ultimately embedded in culture and is itself a cultural activity. Stigler and Hiebert further argue that it is important to investigate the cultural scripts that teachers are using in any educational reform and teachers' growing awareness of their cultural scripts might help them be more reflective of their teaching practices or choices. The field of literacy and language education has also seen a growing emphasis on the socio-cultural view of literacy practices and education, which contends that different cultures have different views of what literacy is and how it should be taught (e.g., Street, 1995). The socio-cultural view foregrounds the importance of examining teachers' cultural scripts (or beliefs, perceptions, understanding, knowledge, as defined differently in the literature) toward teaching and learning, especially when they teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Educational anthropology research on minority students' educational experience in the United States has drawn attention to the cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication styles between different groups and how such differences sometimes create conflicts that disadvantage minority students' learning, especially in the early grades, when teachers and students have different expectations of appropriateness in behavior or interaction (e.g., Erickson, 1993; Philips, 1983; Heath 1983; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1993). In other words, teachers' notions of effective literacy/language teaching and learning have important ramifications for students' learning.

Researchers in foreign language education have also started to investigate language teachers' perceptions of teachers' new roles and students' new roles as well as new teaching and learning when the field has experienced a dramatic shift toward more communicative, student-centered teaching and meaningful student engagement in the classroom since the 1970s (Brown, 2009; Horwitz, 1988; Schulz, 2001; Williams &

Burden, 1997). Earlier studies have utilized surveys to examine teachers' beliefs on isolated elements of L2 teaching, such as grammar instruction and error correction (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Levine, 2003; Schulz, 2001), and recent studies on teachers' beliefs have sought to understand L2 teachers' beliefs on what constitutes effective L2 teaching (Bell, 2005, Brown, 2009). This line of research builds upon the premise that language teachers' classroom actions and decisions are influenced by their beliefs and thus it is crucial to examine teachers' beliefs because it not only helps teachers become more aware of their teaching but also helps teacher educators identify challenges or difficulties that teachers might face when they are expected to implement new pedagogies. Previous research has drawn attention to a wide range of factors in shaping teachers' beliefs, including the role of culture, individuals' professional and life experiences as well as contextual factors, such as availability of resources, instructional setting, and curriculum mandates (Borg, 2003; Kissau, Algozzine, & Yon, 2013; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Tam, 2012). In addition, some beliefs rooted in culture are found to be hard to change (Wu, Palmer, & Field, 2011), and there were mismatches between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Hos & Kekec, 2014). More attention is needed to examine Mandarin teachers' cultural script of language teaching and learning, and the extent to which their script is in line with the script valued and demanded by US foreign language education. In the following paragraphs, I use Stiger and Hiebert's notion of cultural script to first discuss the script embraced by US foreign language education through examination of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, and then investigate the relationship between the US script and Mandarin teachers' cultural script of language learning and teaching.

Cultural script of language teaching and learning in the United States and mandarin teachers' cultural script of teaching and learning

Foreign language education in K-12 schools generally follows *ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the twenty-first Century* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996/2006). ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners (1998) translate the standards into performance indicators, which have offered guidance to program development and student assessment. Both the standards and performance guidelines are influenced by the dramatic shift in language teaching since the 1970s, which has moved away from grammar language teaching toward communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT is often regarded as an approach from the West since it originated in Europe and has drawn from research on sociolinguistics, discourse theory, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, and second language acquisition in the West (Hu, 2002; Xing, 2006). Although there are different interpretations of CLT, a number of pedagogical principles and practices can still be identified (for a succinct review of CLT, see Hu, 2002). For instance, advocates of CLT argue that teaching should not simply focus on grammatical competence, but rather on how students can use the target language to communicate. Effectiveness of communication often takes precedence over accuracy and fluency. CLT advocates also contend that students learn the target language best through meaningful negotiation with peers and teachers, and thus authoritative teacher talk is discouraged while collaborative learning is encouraged. Finally, advocates of CLT believe that language learning does not have to be drudgery, but can be a pleasant experience that integrates various language

games. Since principles of CLT guide the standards for foreign language education in the United States, it is without doubt that Mandarin teaching and learning should be aligned with the standards. One can easily identify CLT's influence when examining the STARTALK Chinese program, one of the best known programs funded by the NSLI for middle or high school students and professional development for teachers across the states. Key terms such as "student-centered," "communicative," "performance-oriented," "task-based," "interactive," "interesting and fun" are abundant throughout the publicity of the STARTALK Mandarin programs (STARTALK, 2007, 2008). I argue that these CLT-related terms embody US foreign language pedagogical expectations and thus can be referred to as the US script for foreign language education.

However, one needs to be cautious about the extent to which CLT is comparable to Mandarin teachers' cultural scripts of teaching. In fact, some studies have provided evidence that people from regions with a strong influence of Confucius philosophy often have different views toward language learning and teaching or schooling in general, in comparison to people in the West (Li, 2002, 2006; Hu, 2002; Moloney & Hu, 2015). For example, Confucian philosophy to schooling prioritizes the concept of benevolence, which "consists of control over oneself in conformity with the rules of propriety" (Zhao & Guo, 1990, cited in Li, 2002, p. 157). Schools are viewed as places for knowledge and discipline, and classroom pedagogies are more teacher-centered and text-bounded as teachers and texts are viewed as the authority of knowledge. In a study examining the pedagogical import of CLT-based English education reform in China in the late 1980s, Hu (2002) argues that the different ways in which literacy teaching, or education in general is perceived in the East and the West might account for the potential cultural resistance of local English teachers and students during the reform. To be more specific, learning and teaching in Chinese culture has long been seen as a serious undertaking because in the Confucian tradition, education is the means through which one can achieve upward mobility regardless of one's socioeconomic status. The idea of learning as an entertaining experience as emphasized in CLT is antithetical to Chinese view of education. In addition, Chinese education puts much emphasis on the moral aspects of learning, which encourage collective learning from the socially approved figures (i.e., teachers) but discourage individual self-expression or needs, which are prioritized in CLT. Since teachers are the models for their students to imitate, both teachers and students might not be comfortable with pedagogical practices that downplay teachers' roles and responsibilities and elevate students' status in class. Finally, Chinese emphasis on accurate interpretation and learning of texts is also in contrast with CLT's emphasis on effectiveness of communication. To sum up, Hu (2002) argues that CLT and traditional Chinese education value different teaching and learning qualities and it is dangerous for policy-makers to assume that a successful pedagogy in one context will also be successful in another context.

It is critical to investigate Mandarin teachers' cultural scripts of teaching and learning in relation to the CLT script demanded by the standards, and how their cultural scripts influence their capacity to carry out effective Mandarin teaching in the US classroom. As Lortie (1975) contends, how teachers teach is largely influenced by how they were taught when they were students. In other words, their views toward learning and teaching are often drawn from their own "apprenticeship of observation." Following Lortie, Pajares (1992) asserts that it is generally difficult for teachers to alter their belief

systems and to teach in a way that is different from how they were taught. Earlier studies on Chinese teachers' beliefs have highlighted the impact of Confucian culture on the ways they conceptualize their roles and their teaching. These teachers' teaching has been characterized as authoritarian, focusing on strict discipline and book knowledge (Gao & Watkins, 2002; Ho 2001; Moloney & Xu, 2015). Since Mandarin teachers' experiences in the Chinese educational systems play a very important role in shaping their cultural scripts, it might be especially challenging for teachers who receive their education predominately in China or Taiwan to implement CLT-based Mandarin education in the United States. To this date, only a handful of studies incorporate classroom observations to examine the (dis)connections between foreign language teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices (Hos & Kekec, 2014; Wang & Du, 2016). For these two studies, classroom observations were conducted to understand teachers' practices, but the observation data were generally presented as a side note to the data reporting teachers' beliefs and thus failed to give readers a more nuanced account of what exactly happened in the classrooms. Although the bulk of research has suggested different cultural scripts and the potential disjunctions in expectations and classroom practices, I argue that it is more germane to look at how these disjunctions actually play out in action. Data from a case study of two Mandarin teachers' cultural knowledge and pedagogical practices are presented below to provide an on-the-ground picture of how their interpretations of CLT and its applications to their teaching were mediated by their understandings of education in the United States and Taiwan, which in turn strongly impacted the ways these teachers taught. As Mandarin teachers' cultural knowledge of teaching and learning has not received much attention in the language education literature, it is hoped that the case study here helps reveal the importance of delving into Mandarin teachers' implicit cultural knowledge. The description of the research context and focal teachers is what I turn to next.

Research Context & Method

The study took place in an afterschool program that taught Mandarin-as-a foreign-language for non-heritage 1st and 2nd graders from in a city on the east coast, and was conducted primarily during September and December 2009. The program was in a non-for-profit cultural and art center serving a local community where a prestigious private university and a model elementary school are located. The class met once a week for 1.5 h and consisted of 9 students, who were from middle-class Anglo American backgrounds and attended the model elementary school during the day. I was hired as a curriculum advisor due to my professional training in language education in the fall semester of 2009. During that semester, the class was co-taught by two graduate students, whom I call Tracey and Bei-jen. Both of them are from Taiwan and they came to the United States for their Master's degree in education. Tracey and Bei-jen were both interested in teaching Mandarin in K-12 setting after graduation. While the after school program was not part of any teacher training programs at the time my research project was conducted, it later became a practicum site for graduate students pursuing their master's degree in language education at a nearby university. I provided advice on the curriculum that Tracey and Bei-jen developed and I also observed their class and provided theoretically informed feedback to them after the observations.

As I aimed to understand how teachers understood US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices where their US students were situated and how their understanding interacted with their actual teaching in the Mandarin class, I spent a prolonged period of time in my research site gathering data from multiple sources, including direct observation, participant observation, and teacher interviews. The site is ideal for my research because both teachers came to the United States as international students from Taiwan which has a culture rooted in broader Chinese culture. They were thus enculturated into a distinct Chinese culture that their students do not share.

I often arrived at the site together with the half an hour earlier to help set-up and stayed for an additional hour for clean-up and after-class debriefing. When I was in the class, I often sat in the back or on the side of the classroom, observing the class co-taught by the two teachers. They often divided the class time into two sessions and each teacher was responsible entirely for one session. In other words, the class worked more like two individual teachings, rather than one co-teaching, although the content of the two sessions was often related. Occasionally I was invited by the co-teachers to model in front of the students, distribute utensils to the students, or be a station leader during activity time. When I observed the class, I paid particular attention to teachers' instruction, their interactions with students and interactions among students. I also conducted two individual interviews with both teachers during the third week of the program to understand their teaching philosophies, their prior teaching experience and professional development in Taiwan and the United States, how they perceived their American students and American education in general, and how they interpreted their Chinese class in this context. Both interviews were around 1–1.5 h long. Since the program was the first afterschool program that offered Mandarin education for young children in the neighborhood, it attracted observers who were graduate students in language education and sought to become Mandarin teachers. I also interviewed a frequent class observer, who is also from Taiwan doing her Master's degree in TESOL, about her perceptions of the classroom and both teachers' teaching. The interview was about half an hour long. In addition, I had several informal and personal conversations with three one-time observers, again who are all from Taiwan pursuing their graduate degree in TESOL in the United States. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin and then translated to English by me. I focus my translation on content and for some culturally specific terms that I have difficulty in finding their English counterparts, I include the original terms that the interviewees used and put the possible English translation in parenthesis in this paper. Finally, I also had some casual talks and communication with parents, especially those who started the program, and our conversations provide insight for my interpretation of the data that I collected through classroom observation. This study is a result of at least 40 h of on-site participation and interviews from September to December 2009. Observational data and interview transcripts went through an iterative process of open coding, initial memos, focused coding, and integrative memos (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).

Researcher's positionality

I am proficient in both Mandarin and English and have received education in both Taiwan and the United States. Similar to the educational experience that Li (2005) describes, I also went through a "traditional, teacher-centered, code-emphasis instruction

(p. 13)” when I was in Taiwan. I also started to learn more about student-centered or social-constructive approaches to language learning and teaching later in my graduate studies in the United States. On one hand, I am fascinated by the ideas of engaging students and providing them with scaffolding in teaching, which tend to depreciate the traditional and teacher-centered approach in the language education. On the other hand, I see the value of traditional and teacher-centered teaching as it seems to give me a solid stepping stone to my later more advanced language learning. My personal educational trajectory is similar to the two Mandarin teachers that I work with since all of us came from Taiwan and to the United States for graduate degrees in education. Thus I view my bilingual/bicultural background as beneficial for data collection and analysis because it enables me to have a good understanding of their enculturational experience in Taiwan and acculturational experience in the United States. However, I had struggled with my double roles of an advisor and an ethnographer throughout the course of study. As an advisor, one of my responsibilities included offering theoretically informed guidance to both teachers on their teaching and lesson planning; however, as an ethnographer, I tried to be as non-intrusive as possible so the dynamics of the classroom can be maintained and documented. It seemed that the two roles had competing and fundamentally different orientations and thus gradually there were increasing moments when I was thrilled to see the rich data that one teacher had offered to my research, but was troubled to see as a program advisor. Toward the end of the study, I found that my role as an advisor gradually overrode my ethnographer role as I less and less identified with one teacher’s teaching. After countless struggles about the issue of “to tell” or “not to tell”, I eventually decided to assume my advisor role to explicitly address the problems of this teacher during some after-class debriefing time. It is very likely that the action that I chose to take would change teachers’ teaching practices, a change that some traditional ethnographers might aim to avoid, but my ethical concern for the sake of the students’ learning in this class outweighed my research concerns as a traditional ethnographer. What follows are detailed descriptions and analysis of Tracey and Bei-jen’s cultural scripts of teaching (cf., Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), their understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices (cf., Wang, 2007) in relation to their interpretations of CLT as well as other pedagogical practices in the class.

Teachers have different understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices, which are influenced by their prior experiences in Taiwan and the United States

Tracey had taught English and general subjects in elementary schools as a substitute teacher in Taiwan for four years before she came to the United States for her Master’s degree in TESOL. She had been in the United States for one year and was still doing her TESOL coursework by the time she started to teach this class. She attended Teachers’ College in Taiwan and is a certified teacher in elementary schools and kindergartens. She decided to come to the United States for a master’s degree because she wants to be a teacher trainer in the future. She started to teach Mandarin as a foreign language to adults in the United States after her first year of graduate study and her teaching in this after-school program for 1st and 2nd graders is her first classroom experience with American school-aged students. During her first interview about her

teaching experience in Taiwan and in the United States, Tracey mentioned that she found no differences in terms of her teaching in the two contexts since child development is universal, but she found that the expectations of students' classroom behaviors in two contexts seemed to differ. Her understanding of American parents is that "they view their children as children and thus they have great tolerance [for a] range of children's behaviors and not asking much from them." Even so, she did not think such American parental views of children would prevent her from holding the same expectation of her American students' classroom behaviors as she did of her students in Taiwan. She referred to one best-seller book "The essential 55: An award-winning educator's rules for discovering the successful student in every child" by Ron Clark (2003) to argue that what Clark demands from his students is similar to what the Taiwanese education has asked for, that is, manners, respect and discipline. According to Tracey, the reason why it became a best seller indicated that this line of thinking was not the common practice here, but it started to gain appreciation and attention in American society and thus she was confident that she could apply the same classroom management techniques to manage her Mandarin class. However, Tracey also recognized the language challenge that she would face when she implemented classroom rules that foster "abstract thinking" of manner, respect, or team work because she did not believe children could learn these abstract notions with their low Chinese proficiency and thus she would choose to talk in English whenever she needed to explain her rules or expectations.

With regard to her goals for this Mandarin classroom for younger learners, Tracey mentioned that the most important thing she would look for in her class was children's 品行 *Pinxing* (moral conduct), as manifested in whether or not children can follow the rules in class. She argued:

...when you are teaching the very young children, you are teaching them how to be a person; you are not just instructing knowledge. A child's behaviors will be molded into some fixed patterns by the third grade, and if by that time, s/he hasn't learned how to respect others, how to take turns, how to protect him/herself, how to follow the rules, s/he will remain the same as s/he enters the society. S/he won't be able to change because behaviors are more deeply rooted than knowledge. You can learn knowledge one year later, but if your good behaviors are not established early, then it's very difficult to establish them, and that's why in my class, the classroom behaviors are more important than knowledge learning (interview, 09/30/2009).

Tracey thought American education embodied a "free-style" of teaching philosophy that often ended up producing students of extreme behaviors. She also believed that moral education in the United States had been weak and thus she thought Chinese middle-ground philosophy with an emphasis on moral education could be beneficial to the Western system. For Tracey, the language class was not just about teaching and learning Mandarin, but more about teaching the students how to be someone with good morals. Thus, she prioritized moral learning over language learning in her class. Tracey's understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices seems to be influenced by Confucius thinking which emphasizes students' moral aspect of learning and teachers' responsibilities in cultivating such traits among their students. Using the Confucius thinking of education to examine American schools or parents in general, Tracey found that they place no constraints on young children's

development. It is not clear how Tracey obtained such understanding since she had not taught in American classrooms before and had just started to have more direct contact with American parents and children. However, she referred to Clark's book to support her perception that Americans generally do not and should practice what Clark and the Chinese culture embrace.

When asked about new knowledge that she had learned from her graduate study in the United States, she cited CLT, but she viewed it as only plausible for second language teaching, rather than foreign language teaching, as in the case of English in Taiwan or Mandarin in the United States. Therefore, she would not implement it in her teaching in either context, even though language education in both contexts embrace and promote it. She casted doubt on CLT because she was particularly worried that some of its central ideas (e.g., focus on student-centered activities that are fun and interesting) might give her students an impression that language classroom is somewhere they could come just for fun and did not need to follow teachers' rules. Since she already perceived the American classrooms as too free-style, she did not want to reinforce such a teaching style in her classroom. With such an interpretation of CLT and American education, she was skeptical about CLT's role in her classroom.

On the other hand, Bei-jen, who had a very different educational experience from Tracey, held a very different view toward American educational practices and sometimes she even implicitly embraced some of them. Although Bei-jen's undergraduate major and first Master's degree were in accounting, she had worked with young children on arts and crafts in a local art center in Taiwan where she first learned about Western educational philosophers (e.g., Maria Montessori, Waldorf Steiner, and Loris Malaguzzi). She decided to come to the United States for another Master's degree in early childhood education because she had wanted some formal educational training in working with children. During her course of study, she took classes on issues related to moral education in the United States and autism and often looked for chances to observe classes in schools that explicitly embraced some educational philosophies (e.g., Montessori). At the time of the study, she had already obtained her master's degree, had been in the United States for three years, had tutored privately four American children from different middle-class families, and was teaching Mandarin and art in a local kindergarten.

She described how American parents viewed their children differently from parents of Chinese culture as follows:

They really really respect kids. They treat them like very independent individuals, and they respect them, respect their right of independent thinking. So they listen. The time they listen is more than (the time) they ask him/her to do something. So you often hear American parents say, "oh really?" "What a good idea!" But parents of Chinese cultures seldom say so. It's usually like, "You do this. That's it. Don't do that."

She indicated in her interview that compared to the Chinese educational system, the American educational system that she understood, was better at fostering creativity among students and placed higher value on students' autonomy. She also found that many American parents and teachers were not hesitant to express their love toward the young children, a practice that she thought was rarely seen in Taiwanese context. She also talked about how a lot of aspects of teaching in Chinese culture conflicted with

American culture. For instance, the Chinese way of education often involved excessive practices and expected high accuracy in early stage of literacy learning, a way that she thought was contradictory to the American view of happy learning for children. Besides, the Chinese way of constructing knowledge is through rote memorization but the American way is through involving children with real-life activities. She also thought that the majority of kids here were much more active than those in Taiwan. From her personal experiences with some US classrooms and middle-class families, she realized that expressing personal ideas even at young ages was in fact encouraged in the United States. She noted that students in Taiwan spent more time listening to teachers' lectures while students here spent more time talking. As a result, she claimed that students in Taiwan developed calm personalities that helped them to stay focused in class to learn the correct knowledge whereas the US students developed more expressive personalities that eventually contributed to different perspectives in the society. She pointed out that two different educational systems might explain why the United States had been a leading country in designs and product development whereas Taiwan or China had been countries of product making. However, she still believed that some aspects of Chinese teaching might provide different insight for the education here in the United States, such as their approaches to math education or the emphasis on 禮貌 *Limao* (politeness or courtesy). When talking about how she would run her Chinese classroom in the US context, she believed that "the Mandarin language class should be like other classes that they (the American students) take" and thus she would strive to emulate the US classrooms that she understood as focusing on fun learning and much time for students to express their individual ideas.

To sum up, both teachers seemed to have very different understandings of the nature of education for young children, which were influenced by their prior educational and teaching experiences in Taiwan and the United States. Tracey, who went through formal teacher education in Taiwan, seemed to adopt a strong Confucius philosophy to education and was more skeptical about the US education. On the contrary, Bei-jen, who had more experiences with middle-class Anglo American parents and children seemed to embrace many aspects of American education, such as fostering autonomy and creative development among students. Interestingly, both teachers interpreted the Mandarin class that they co-taught differently. Tracey prioritized issue of respect and discipline over language development and Bei-jen prioritized issue of trust and confidence building over language development. As an advisor with a language education background, I tended to focus my attention on language issues in both lesson planning and lesson implementation. As a result, the three of us had divergent goals for this Mandarin classroom and the three of us needed to constantly work together to find a balance that all of us were happy with. I view this as a fruitful process since it indicated how different perspectives come into play and shape the Mandarin classroom. So far, I have discussed how both teachers have very different cultural understanding of teaching (cf. Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) as well as different "understanding of US socio-cultural-educational expectations and institutional practices (cf. Wang, 2007, p. 43)." Now I turn to my classroom observations, classroom observers' comments to show how teachers' cultural knowledge of teaching influenced their actual classroom practices in distinct ways.

Teachers' different understandings of their American students, classroom, or general American educational practices influence their teaching practices in distinct ways

As discussed earlier, Tracey viewed the most important thing for her class is students' Pinxing (moral conduct), which is manifested in whether or not children could follow the rules or commands in class. She argued that her notion of Pingxing is similar to Clark's (2004) emphasis on manners, respect and discipline among students. In practice, she made much effort to ensure that students sat well during her class and thus she often gave commands (mostly in English) that were implicitly related to manners, respect, and discipline. I have documented many instances when Tracey not only took time to ask students to sit well during her session, but she also approached kids whom she did not think sit well enough during Bei-jen's session and asked them to sit well. One of the three Mandarin songs that she taught in this class is called the "Sit well" song, and when she taught this song for the first time, she modeled herself to the students about what counted as "sit[ting] well" and told students that "every time we sing this song, you need to be quite quiet and sit well, okay?"

Throughout her teaching, Tracey viewed students' silence during some class time as a form of discipline, and thus she had high expectation of a quiet classroom when she was the lead teacher. Below are some examples of her typical classroom commands.

"Too noisy I don't like it. I like very quiet, v-e-r-y quiet."

"我說一二三, 你說請安靜 (I say one two three; you say please be quiet)."

"請安靜 means be quiet."

"S-h-i-i! I want very quiet."

"Whoever is the most quiet one can leave (today's class) first." "I want beautiful voice, okay?"

Students did not necessarily follow Tracey's commands and there seemed to be a miscommunication whenever Tracey asked for "beautiful voice." It was not until several classroom observations later that I finally realized why students became even more verbally active or started to sing whenever they heard Tracey's request for beautiful voice—they associated the term "beautiful voice" with song-singing, rather than quiet. This example shows how a straightforward lexical misunderstanding in fact reflects the underlying mismatch of expectations.

In terms of Tracey's interactions with students during the class, most of them were teacher initiates-student responds-teacher evaluates (I-R-E) participant structure when she presented the stimuli, asking students what they are, and gave verbal praise or confirmation to those who produced the right answers. She often made great effort to make sure that all students actively participated in this activity and she sometimes needed to stop the class to talk to individual students who did not participate verbally in this activity. Another distinct teaching practice of Tracey is her emphasis on students' collective participation in the classroom tasks. In particular, she often asked students to repeat after her in chorus or answer her questions in chorus. She considered students' collective responses as an important indicator to their level of attention and involvement. Since students rarely reached her expectations by responding to her in chorus, she became quite frustrated toward the middle of her teaching at the program. Her frustration further confirmed her belief that CLT-based teaching, which gives precedence over students' roles and interaction, would not work for her Mandarin

class because she could not imagine how her class could run successfully when her students could not even follow her requests as simple as responding to her questions in chorus. She interpreted her students' inability to follow her instructions as a reflection of freestyle American teaching, and thus she was seriously thinking to be stricter with her American students in her future teaching. For Tracey, the issue of whether or not students followed her order was prioritized because it implied if students gave full attention to her. She believed that only when students fully focused on the task could they learn something.

Bei-jen had a very different teaching style from Tracey, a difference that was recognized by both of the two teachers themselves, all the classroom observers and me. Aligning with her positive identification of US education's emphasis on individual creativity and autonomy, Bei-jen's classroom activities often offered many choices for her students to make. In many of her art-related activities, she gave students multiple options in terms of color of paper and pencils to work on, and she often went through each student for his or her choice. She especially liked to implement arts and crafts activities after which students created different individual pieces. Her practices seemed to correspond to her earlier critique of Chinese education, which she argued did not foster creativity and students ended up producing an identical product. Bei-jen also often created activities that required students to interact with each other, instead of with her, such as activities during which students asked each other what animals they liked or disliked and then reported their partners' answers to the class. As a result, there were more student talk and voices in her session, though not necessarily all about or in Mandarin, compared to Tracey's session. As one frequent observer from Taiwan who observed this class to fulfill her TESOL Master's degree course requirements put it, Bei-jen's teaching was more "authentic", "Americanized", "interactive" and "student-centered."

Bei-jen's interactions with students during the class or break also seem to manifest her understanding of middle-class US adult-child interactions, that is, a great deal of love and rule explanations. I documented many instances when Bei-jen hugged her students after they help collect the utensils or they do well in the language activities, an act that she identified as rare in Chinese education. The frequent observer also noticed Bei-jen's hugging and expressed her surprise to see it since it was quite unusual in Chinese educational contexts. In addition, Bei-jen tended to explain rules that she hopes children to follow. For instance, in a class when students used Chinese brushes and ink to draw and write some pictograms, Bei-jen imbedded her expectation of students' sitting well behavior in her explanation of cultural expectations of people doing calligraphy. The following excerpt shows how she managed to send her message to a group of students who were very excited about the coming activity.

Bei-jen just touched each student's hand using the animal hair on the Chinese brushes.

Students were excited about its texture and they were talking about how soft the hair was.

Some were talking in high pitch and thus it sounded like some were screaming.

Bei-jen: "Today we are going to do the Chinese calligraphy."

(I still heard some screaming-like voices coming out of some students from where I sat). Bei-jen: "When Chinese are writing, they are very quiet and they sit well. Can you sit well?"

Students shouted “YES” in chorus.

Bei-jen: Not like? Or like? (She posited many different weird positions, like crossing one leg over the other, or pretending humpbacked).

Students were laughing but all promised that they would not do so.

Bei-jen’s classroom management turned out to work well as students were trying to sit well and stay calm throughout the drawing and writing session. Before we planned this session, Tracey mentioned that we probably needed to collaborate well to maintain the class since she was worried that students might feel too excited about ink and brushes and thus spreading the ink all over the place. It turned out that Bei-jen “managed the class BEAUTIFULLY”, said one parent of a student who observed the class and who was also in language education profession.

Both teachers were aware that they had different teaching styles and expectations. During several after-class debriefing times when I asked them to reflect upon their own teaching and how their students responded to their teaching, Tracey often talked about her frustration with students’ behavioral problems and lack of attention (e.g., not answering her questions in chorus, not maintaining a quiet classroom). In response to Tracey’s concerns, Bei-jen often had comments like “As far as American children are concerned, I am fine (with that)” or “As far as my American students are concerned, I can accept this.” For her, as long as students’ talking was related to the activities currently under implementation, she was fine with a not fully silent classroom. In contrast, Tracey was not as receptive to students’ comments or talking on their experiences in participating in the activities and often viewed those comments as off-task behaviors. In my two informal talks with Bei-jen, she commented Tracey’s teaching as “teaching in a way that she (Tracey) taught her elementary students in Taiwan” and “No wonder kids here do not listen to her.” Tracey, on the other hand, thought Bei-jen had too much tolerance toward students’ behaviors and noises and it had been difficult for Tracey to see Bei-jen do little to address these issues. Tracey mentioned privately to me twice that if this was her own class, she would have stricter expectations of classroom order and how students followed the classroom rules. She mentioned both in her interview and her informal talk that she did not want to create an image for the children to think that they could behave differently simply because this is a class taught by foreign teachers, a common problem that she identified for those English classes for young children in Taiwan taught by native speakers from abroad. It is not clear about how and why she thought her American students would behave differently in her Mandarin class and in their regular American classes since later in one conversation, she admitted that she had not had many first-hand American classroom experiences before she started to teach this Mandarin class. Tracey prioritized the issue of order because it implies full attention from the students and she believed that only when students were fully focused on the task could they learn something. This is an example of how Tracey’s cultural beliefs mediated her classroom decisions and practices. As a result, Tracey did not think children were really learning Chinese in many of Bei-jen’s activities since many of her activities only involved individualized questions that ask children to choose one color or two that they want to work on, rather than group questions that require all students to produce all names of the colors in chorus.

Both teachers’ use of Mandarin was restricted to only vocabulary in their first few classes, but both started to use more Mandarin after several of my attempts to push for

more Mandarin in this class. Both teachers felt uncomfortable about my push because in their views, Mandarin and English played two very dichotomous roles that had very different functions. For Tracey, English is a language that can secure students' understanding of her commands and thus secure classroom order. As for Bei-jen, English is used to build trust with her students and help to maintain students' confidence in this class and thus too much Mandarin from her might deteriorate such relationship-building process and too much demand from students' Mandarin output might deteriorate their confidence.

Interestingly, different observers had different interpretations of Tracey and Bei-jen's teaching. One frequent observer thought Tracey's session gave her an impression that students were actually learning something while students seemed to be just playing and having some fun in Bei-jen's session, a comment similar to Tracey's view on her teaching and Bei-jen's teaching. However, she also commented that the Mandarin class seemed to be more like cultural enrichment program than language program since both the Mandarin inputs and outputs were surprisingly minimal, compared to the English-as-a-foreign language classroom for young learners that she is familiar with in Taiwan. She also identifies Tracey's teaching as "more like what we Taiwanese teachers would teach" and Bei-jen's teaching as "more like an American teacher" and thus more "student-centered." Another two observers who had experience of teaching in the United States, however, perceived the class somewhat differently. Both felt that although Bei-jen's sessions had less teacher talk and seemed to be in a chaos, students were given more chances to produce Mandarin that was meaningful to them. Specifically, they considered Bei-jen's role as a moderator who set the context for the students to learn while Tracey's role as an instructor who lectured on Mandarin. In the same vein, another one-time observer from Taiwan who worked as a coordinator of a local Mandarin teacher certification program suggested in the debriefing time that Mandarin teachers' ultimate goal as language teacher in the United States is to reach the stage when "it looks chaotic, but everything is under control" and students are learning something under such seemingly chaotic situation. It seems that all observers from Taiwan recognized the differences between US classrooms and Taiwanese classrooms in terms of overall classroom atmosphere, but had different views on whether or not students learn something under such atmosphere. Observers' diverse interpretations of teachers' teaching and students' learning in this afterschool program are valuable as they provide a window to better understand how people, even from the same culture, interpret differently what counts as good teaching and how the same practices are evaluated in very different ways based on individuals' level of enculturation, prior educational and current classroom experiences.

Although it requires further investigations (e.g., assessment) to see if students learned better with one teacher over the other, the case study has illustrated how teachers' understandings of the culture of teaching in Taiwan and the United States influenced their classroom teaching and thus pointed to the importance of involving teachers in examining their own understandings, beliefs, and practices. The study also suggests that the teacher (i.e., Tracey) who had gone through a teacher training program and taught in the Taiwanese educational system seemed to have a more rigid cultural script of learning and teaching, cast more doubt on CLT, and experience more frustration in her teaching in the United States.

Tracey's prior educational and teaching experiences are particularly similar to those of guest teachers as they are certified teachers and have at least three years of teaching experiences in either China or Taiwan. A New York Times post entitled "Guest-teaching Chinese, and learning America" delved into Chinese guest teachers' experiences in the United States and reported that "several other Chinese teachers said they had some difficulties adjusting to the informality of American schools after working in a country where students leap to attention when a teacher enters the room" (Dillon, 2010). Tracey and these guest teachers experienced similar frustration when teaching their American students, that is, their students did not follow the cultural script of learning that they were familiar with when they taught in Taiwan or China. Teachers in Taiwan or China are used to receiving full attention from students and classrooms are regarded as a place for formal learning, rather than informal ideas exchanges among students and teachers. While the focal classroom in the case study cannot be seen as indicative of regular Mandarin classrooms in the United States since it is an after-school program with a smaller number of younger learners and both teachers were from Taiwan rather than China, it does provide strong empirical evidence that both Mandarin teachers were aware of the different educational practices and expectations of students in the United States and Taiwan, and conducted their class according to their different notions of what counted as effective learning and teaching.

To recapitulate, Mandarin teachers in the United States are expected to carry out CLT-based instruction, which might be an innovative approach for many of them. In examining innovative policies that demand new teaching, Cohen and Barnes (1993a, 1993b) argue that such a demand would require extensive education for teachers because they would have to first unlearn much deeply rooted knowledge and beliefs so they can learn what the policies request and carry out the new pedagogy. Cohen and Barnes (1993a, 1993b) shed light on the unlearning and learning process of teachers in a reform and whether teachers are provided with resources or opportunities to facilitate their learning. However, little attention has been given to what aspects of unlearning and learning Mandarin teachers who receive basic education in Chinese educational systems need to go through before they can implement standards-based Mandarin foreign education in the United States and how they can be best supported during such process. Without assistance that attends to Mandarin teachers' experience and learning needs, their ability to teach in a way aligned with the standards might be weakened.

Implications and suggestions

More research should be conducted to examine the cultural views of education held by Mandarin teachers who come to the United States as immigrants, international students, or guest teachers, and the relationship between their cultural views and pedagogical practices. While surveys and interviews are widely used in research on teachers' beliefs (e.g., Barcelos, 2003; Brown, 2009; Kissau, Algozzine, & Yon, 2013), the ethnographic approach is helpful to capture the interaction between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Ethnographic research in bilingual education (e.g., Freeman, 2000) has suggested that ethnography as a methodological tool helps foster understanding of the dynamic interaction in the classroom and initiate meaningful conversations about the effectiveness of a language class. It is hoped that more studies will be conducted to delve into Mandarin teachers' teaching practices in relation to their cultural knowledge of education.

At a practical level, recruiting and training programs can offer Mandarin teachers opportunity to reflect upon their own notions of language education (e.g, through talking about their educational experiences, both in their home countries and in the United States). With intentional and guided comparison and contrast, teachers will develop an enhanced awareness of the cultural scripts that they bring with them and consequences for their educational decisions or practices. However, it should be noted that professional development for Mandarin teachers is not meant to assimilate them to the US values or strip off their Chinese values. They bring in valuable perspectives that enrich the US classrooms and help US students gain knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture. In fact, the Standards explicitly require the content of foreign language help foster students' understanding of the relationship among the practices, products, and perspectives of the culture studied (see Standard 2.1 & 2.2).

In a review article about change in teachers and teaching, Richardson & Placier (2001) point out that research has recently acknowledged that teachers' change is best facilitated through deep reflection on their own beliefs and practices, and dialogue with other teachers could assist with such process. Future professional development could provide Mandarin teachers with opportunities to examine their cultural scripts through dialogue with other Mandarin teachers, ESL teachers, foreign language teachers, or even content teachers in the schools where Mandarin teachers teach. Observations of various classes in the US educational setting can also be arranged for Mandarin teachers to gain perspectives of teaching and learning in the United States. Meanwhile, it is equally important for the teacher educators working with Mandarin teachers to help them come to an understanding that there is no single US education culture that can be applied to each US classroom. As the case study shows, two teachers have identified different US education cultures, neither of which is complete or representative. It will be fruitful if teachers remain open-minded and attentive to the ways that their American students might learn differently from the students in Taiwan or China.

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