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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on our inquiry into how language teachers' identities relate to their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence. In the study, we collected data through in-depth interviews with and observations of 16 Chinese language teachers in Hong Kong's international schools. The analysis revealed that the participants simultaneously embraced multiple professional and sociocultural identities related to intercultural communicative competence teaching. Specifically, the professional identities included a *Chinese language teacher* identity and a *school staff member* identity, while the sociocultural identity comprised a *Chinese culture bearer* identity, a *multicultural* identity, a *cultural transmitter* identity, a *culture learner* identity, and a *cultural bridge* identity. These identities were found to compete with or reinforce each other in mediating the participants' efforts in relation to teaching intercultural communicative competence; different identities were often associated with different understandings of and approaches to teaching intercultural communicative competence. The findings suggest that language teacher educators need to recognise teacher identities as an important pedagogical resource when preparing language teachers for teaching in cross-cultural contexts.

1. Introduction

Developing learners' intercultural communicative competence to traverse cross-cultural settings has emerged as a key task for language teachers (Byram, 2014; Gong, Hu, & Lai, 2018 2018 Porto, 2019). Intercultural communicative competence refers to the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, and it is theorised to have three dimensions: attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Byram, 2014; Deardorff, 2006). As a starting point for the development of intercultural competence, the attitude dimension covers curiosity and openness, affection, motivation, and empathy towards one's own and other cultures. The knowledge dimension relates to a person's understanding and comprehension of her/his own as well as other social groups' cultures and interaction processes, such as worldviews, values, norms, etc. The skill dimension refers to a person's ability to acquire and interpret other cultures

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and relate the cultures to her/his own culture. It also involves the skills of listening, observing, evaluating, analysing, and interacting with others (Byram, 2014; Porto, 2019).

Teaching intercultural communicative competence presents a major challenge for many language teachers for various reasons (Baker & Fang, 2021; Young & Sachdev, 2011). To appreciate these challenges, research has explored the contextual factors that underlie language teachers' cognition and practices related to teaching intercultural communicative competence. These include teaching materials (e.g. Sercu, 2010), assessment standards (e.g. Young & Sachdev, 2011), and so on. Studies have also examined language teachers' personal factors, such as prior language learning experience (e.g. Czura, 2016) and intercultural experiences (e.g. Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, 2018). These studies have highlighted that language teachers' difficulties might have been caused by their association of intercultural communicative competence with 'a fixed and stable body of cultural facts associated with the target language area' (Gu, 2016, p. 267) without giving due consideration to the development of intercultural attitudes or skills. It must be acknowledged that changing teaching practices is a complex process since it requires teachers to develop new 'knowledge and instructional strategies' (Vetter et al., 2016, p. 306) as well as 'the whole way they understand themselves, their world, and the relationship between the two' (Kegan, 1994, p. 275). Consequently, it is critical for language teacher educators to understand the role of teacher identity in mediating language teachers' cognition and practice when preparing them for the challenge of teaching intercultural communicative competence (Gong, Gao, & Lyu, 2020; Gong, Lyu, & Gao, 2018).

Language teacher identity is a pivotal construct that reflects teachers' views 'of "how to be", "how to act" and "how to understand" the work and their place in the society' (Sachs, 2005, p. 15), as well as being 'a pedagogical resource' (Morgan, 2004, p. 174) for teaching practices. However, limited research attention has been given to the interaction between teacher identity and teachers' efforts to promote students' intercultural communicative competence. The exploratory study presented here aims to examine how language teachers' identities interact with their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence in the context of teaching Chinese as an additional language.

2. Teacher identities and language teaching

Research has attested to the connections between language teachers' identities and their classroom instruction (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2017; Menard-Warwick, 2008). On the one hand, identity is often associated with the beliefs that underpin teachers' practices (Wu et al., 2011). On the other hand, teachers' instructional experiences play a crucial role in their identity formation/transformation (Yuan & Mak, 2018). Britzman (1991) argues that 'learning to teach—like teaching itself—is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and what one can become' (p. 8). Pappa et al.'s (2017) study of the professional identities of in-service English content and language integrated learning (CLIL) teachers in a Finnish primary school revealed that the building of teachers' pedagogical and relational identity interacts profoundly with their teaching practices. Research has also unravelled and conceptualised different aspects of teacher identity, including professional identity, sociocultural identity, and personal identity, that may mediate teachers' teaching (see Table 1).

Table 1. Aspects of teacher identity that might be relevant to teachers' teaching.

Teacher identity	Description
Teacher professional identity	Teachers' professional positioning or roles in schools and classrooms, such as the subject-expert identity (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2000), the authoritative identity (e.g. Søreide, 2006), the creative identity (e.g. Søreide, 2006), and so on
Teacher sociocultural identity	Teachers' ethico-political roles in schools and classrooms, such as the (inter)cultural identity (e.g. Duff & Uchida, 1997; Ortaçtepe, 2015) and the (inter)national identity (e.g. Menard-Warwick, 2008)
Teacher personal identity	Teachers' individual characteristics in schools and classrooms, such as the caring identity (e.g. Vogt, 2002), the linguistic identity (e.g. Deters, 2011), and so on

Previous research on teacher identity and teaching (Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, 2018; Ortaçtepe, 2015) motivates us to undertake this inquiry on language teachers' identities and their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence. The study addresses the following two questions:

RQ1: What are the aspects of language teachers' identities related to teaching intercultural communicative competence?

RQ2: How do language teachers' identities interact with their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research context

In the study, the target population comprised Chinese language teachers in international schools in Hong Kong, which was a British colony for more than 150 years until the 1997 transfer of sovereignty from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China (PRC). In terms of language use, Cantonese is the dominant language that is used daily by almost 90% of the population in Hong Kong, while English is a second official language, widely used in government, education, and business, with great symbolic and instrumental value (Davison & Lai, 2007). In the last decade, however, Putonghua, the national lingua franca of the PRC, has been increasingly 'chosen by socio-economically advantaged Hong Kong parents to develop their children as elite bilinguals able to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries' (Davison & Lai, 2007, p. 125). Chinese language teachers now teach Putonghua instead of Cantonese, the local lingua franca, in international schools.

The Hong Kong Government defines international schools as schools that 'follow a full non-local curriculum designed for the needs of a particular cultural or linguistic group and/or for students who do not sit for local examinations' (EDB, 2017). International schools cater mainly for overseas families living in Hong Kong and families coming to Hong Kong for work or investment. The schools are mostly self-financing and usually adopt non-local curricula, such as international curricula from the US, Australia, Singapore, or Canada, as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Therefore, international schools usually employ a good number of expatriate teachers. In the majority of international schools, Putonghua(also referred to as Mandarin outside the Chinese mainland) is timetabled either as an additional language or as a compulsory second language until secondary school age (Davison & Lai, 2007 Lai, Li, & Gong, 2016 2016). This study focused on Chinese language teachers in international schools because

these schools normally pay close attention to facilitating students' intercultural communicative competence and require teachers to make more efforts to promote this through their curriculum design and teaching approaches.

3.2. Participants

Sixteen Chinese language teachers from fourteen international schools participated voluntarily in this study. The only criterion for recruiting participants was that the sample should come from a wide variety of international schools with different student demographic profiles and organisational structures, and that they should be in-service teachers with diverse backgrounds and experience (e.g. places of origin, dominant languages, teaching experience). This sampling method allowed the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research issue and to prioritise the participants' different views. Participants with several years of Chinese teaching experience were targeted in the expectation that they would have extensive experience to share. Table 2 summarises the participating teachers' profiles. Participants were assured of the confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary nature of the research, and consent forms were signed before their participation.

Table 2. Study participants.

No.	Name	Gender	Dominant language(s)	Place of origin	School level	Curriculum's origin	Teaching experience
1	Chan	Female	Mandarin & English	Singapore	Primary & Secondary	Singapore	5 years
2	Rachel	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	Australia	15 years
3	David	Male	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	Montessori	2 years
4	Li	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	UK	5 years
5	Meifen	Female	Putonghua & Cantonese	Mainland China	Primary & Secondary	IB	3 years
6	Ho	Female	Cantonese	Hong Kong	Primary	UK	25 years
7	Yue	Female	Cantonese	Mainland China	Primary & Secondary	IB	5 years
8	Jingjing	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Secondary	IB	4 years
9	Anna	Female	Cantonese	Hong Kong	Primary & Secondary	US	20 years
10	Fang	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Secondary	IB	7 years
11	Lisa	Female	Mandarin	Taiwan	Secondary	Canada	15 years
12	Song	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary & Secondary	IB	3 years
13	Sunny	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary & Secondary	Israel	5 years
14	Jessie	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	IB	3 years
15	Xu	Female	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	IB	16 years
16	Jun	Male	Putonghua	Mainland China	Primary	IB	3 years

Notes: all names are pseudonyms. Both Mandarin and Putonghua refer to Standard Chinese, but Putonghua is used for participants from Mainland China.

3.3. Data collection

This inquiry was part of an ethnographic study in which the first author conducted open-ended interviews with sixteen Putonghua teachers involved in teaching intercultural communicative competence. This was followed by an extended engagement with five focal teachers for a semester. The first author worked as an intern Chinese teacher in three international schools, and observed and discussed issues related to teaching intercultural communicative competence with these teachers. Fieldwork was concluded by re-interviewing all participants. The whole data collection process lasted an academic year, and data from multiple sources were collected, including participatory observation data, interview data, email letters, field notes, and relevant school documents. Due to space limitations, this paper explains the research questions by presenting our interpretation of the data derived from open-ended interviews, as supplemented with field notes. In line with our conceptual orientation, open-ended interviews afford one of the most powerful and widely-used means of exploring teacher language teaching (Borg, 2012) and teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2004).

The interviews were preceded by intensive fieldwork in the teaching context and conversations with Putonghua teachers on intercultural communicative competence teaching in general. The interviews in the present study were framed around several general topics that allowed room for the participants to talk freely about their own experiences and views, and which enabled the interviewer to delve deeper into each participant's account (Mishler, 1986). The following topics were addressed during the interviews: teaching experience; current school culture and the status of Putonghua teachers in the school; ways of teaching intercultural communicative competence; their professional, sociocultural, and personal roles or positionings that they perceived to be relevant to teaching; perceived changes in their identities over time; and perceived influence of their identities on teaching intercultural communicative competence. The interview questions were first reviewed and assessed by one expert and one researcher interested in teacher identity and teaching intercultural communicative competence. Then, the questions and the technique were pilot tested with one Putonghua teacher not included in the study, and interpretations for each item were checked, suggestions on wording were elicited, and the interview questions were revised accordingly. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant in their native or working language, Putonghua, so that they could express themselves more freely. Each interview lasted around an hour.

3.4. Data analysis

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim in Chinese and double-checked for accuracy. Thematic analysis was conducted to analyse interview data with both deductive and inductive phases, and the data were coded using NVivo 12. The data were first categorised according to predetermined themes theorised in the current literature to examine different aspects of relevant issues. For example, the data on teacher identity were categorised into three categories as informed by the literature—professional, sociocultural, and personal identity.

The interview data were then analysed inductively to generate concrete categorizations under each predetermined theme. The researchers read through the interview

transcripts four times to familiarise themselves with the data; text that struck the researchers as meaningful, interesting, or important was then highlighted and coded. Next, similar codes were assembled into overarching categories, informed by both the theoretical framework and the data. For example, under the predetermined theme *approaches to teaching intercultural communicative competence*, codes like 'teach knowledge of Chinese society to students', 'teach and transmit Chinese cultural knowledge', and 'pass on Chinese cultural knowledge' were aggregated into the category *knowledge-transmission approach*. The initial coding of the overarching categories was also compared across the 16 interviewees to create close or repeated responses and contrasting instances (Charmaz, 1990). During the interview data analysis, one experienced researcher was invited to carry out peer debriefing sessions in order to minimise bias (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

We were aware that the researchers' own beliefs and insider views can interfere with the 'objectivity, reflexivity and authenticity of a research project' (Kanuha, 2000, p. 444), and therefore we conducted participant checking after the data collection and the write-up to enhance the rigour of the research and the credibility of the research findings (Thomas, 2017). In order to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcriptions and the trustworthiness of the subsequent analysis, all interview transcriptions were sent back to the participants to see if there was anything they would like to correct, clarify, or add to inform the analysis and to help us to develop new ideas and interpretations (Birt et al., 2016). Two participants made minor annotations, and the other fourteen participants returned the documents without additional comment.

4. Findings

Overall, the analysis of the data identified that the participants simultaneously embraced multiple identities related to teaching intercultural communicative competence. While their professional and sociocultural identities were closely associated with their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence, the data recorded very few references to personal identities regarding intercultural communicative competence teaching cognition and practices. The professional and sociocultural identities were found to co-exist and interact with each other in mediating the participants' efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence.

4.1. Teacher identities related to teaching intercultural communicative competence

The participants reported two categories of identities concerning their teaching of intercultural communicative competence: professional and sociocultural. In particular, the professional identity referred to the *Chinese language teacher* identity and the *school staff member* identity, while the sociocultural identity consisted of the *Chinese culture bearer* identity, the *multicultural* identity, the *cultural transmitter* identity, the *cultural learner* identity, and the *cultural bridge* identity.

Regarding the *Chinese language teacher* identity, all the participants (16/16) unanimously defined themselves as Chinese language teachers for whom teaching intercultural communicative competence was a professional responsibility. For instance, the novice

teacher Li expressed the perceived close connection between her professional identity and intercultural teaching: 'Because I am a Chinese language teacher … teaching intercultural content is my job and one of my duties'. Anna, born in Hong Kong and with 20 years of work experience in several different international schools, gave more details about her self-identification as a Chinese language teacher concerning teaching Chinese culture:

> [1] In my understanding, as Chinese language teachers, we should observe Chinese people's lives in different communities. To some extent, we need a kind of consciousness in teaching [Chinese culture].

Anna's opinion envisaged teaching Chinese culture as an integral part of her Chinese language teacher identity. In short, the participants' accounts suggested that this professional role motivated them to teach Chinese culture in the classroom.

Some participating teachers (6/16) reported their self-identification as a *school staff member*, who typically associated intercultural teaching with the development of their schools and students. For example, Xu had taught Putonghua in an international school for 16 years. She believed that Chinese culture should be a basic requirement in the Chinese programme to promote the reputation of the programme and the school. In a similar vein, Chan, Jessie, and June also perceived that this identification made them realise the importance of embracing intercultural teaching as an essential means to boost the images of their schools.

The participants' accounts showed that half of them (8/16) tended to define themselves as Chinese *culture bearers*, and claimed that this sociocultural identity was closely related to teaching Chinese culture. Anna consciously embodied Chinese culture while teaching in the classroom, because 'As a Chinese [person], I have much knowledge about Chinese language and culture'. Likewise, although Rachel had an Australian husband and made frequent transitions between Eastern and Western cultures, she thought it was necessary for Chinese language teachers to build a positive image of Chinese culture. In her mind, this identity constituted meaningful cultural capital in relation to her teaching profession, and thus '[Chinese teachers] need a positive attitude toward our [Chinese] language and culture'. Li even considered that the 'Chinese culture bearer identity is the basis of the identity as a Chinese language teacher'. Hence, this kind of self-identification typically made the participants feel obliged to teach Chinese culture and build a positive image for Chinese culture.

Different from the *Chinese culture bearer* identity, *multicultural* identity was often associated with discourses featuring a strong awareness of different cultures and a critical and embracing view of different cultures. Half of the participants (8/16) identified themselves as global citizens. They usually demonstrated strong interest in and open-mindedness to different cultures, given their comparatively broad connection with both Chinese and other communities and cultures. For example, Rachel talked about how she was seen as a peripheral member of both Hong Kong society and her hometown society, and how this marginalised social position in different social communities reinforced her strong identity as a global citizen, which broadened her views of culture beyond the Chinese culture alone:

> [2] Hong Kong is a very multicultural place. … I have become a global citizen here, maybe. I tend to perceive the concept of culture more comprehensively. In other words, I need to understand other cultures besides my own culture.

Likewise, Anna, Song, and Sunny also defined themselves as global citizens because of experiencing intercultural transitions and adaptations in Hong Kong society and their own teaching communities.

The analysis also suggested that most of the participants (11/16) positioned themselves as *cultural transmitters*. Specifically, they expected to spread Chinese culture in the school and usually regarded their students as the primary objects of cultural transmission. For instance, Meifen perceived herself as 'a transmitter' and taught students Chinese culture because 'she was born in China'. Likewise, Sunny also expressed the belief that cultural differences in her teaching community played an important role in building the cultural transmitter identity:

> [3] I am working in a diverse context, which is an international school, and which is an international school in Hong Kong. Many different things make me not only work as a language teacher, but also transmit Chinese culture.

She also thought this self-identification went beyond the Chinese language classroom, and often considered herself as a cultural transmitter 'when facing persons from different cultural backgrounds'.

The participants' accounts showed that half of them (8/16) identified themselves as *cultural learners* who often transitioned between Chinese and Western cultures and learned from different cultures and sociocultural communities. Although Jingjing was a novice Chinese teacher, she had a strong motivation to improve her 'intercultural understanding and tolerance through learning about different cultures and appreciating diverse cultural backgrounds of students and colleagues'. Similarly, other participants who emphasised their *cultural learner* identity (e.g. Li, Rachel, Sunny, David) generally perceived a multicultural society as a primary factor creating practical opportunities to learn, reflect, and be integrated into different cultures. In particular, when talking about their living and working experiences, words like 'learn' (Li, Jingjing) and 'understand' (Sunny, Rachel) frequently occurred in the accounts given by the participants who projected themselves as cultural learners. This identification led them to taking an active part in various cultural communities, which consequently enhanced their intercultural awareness, their critical reflections on their own culture, and their communication skills with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Compared with the other four sociocultural identities, it seemed that fewer participants reported their *cultural bridge* identity in their accounts (3/16). These participants regarded themselves as a mediator bridging cultural differences and connecting their students with various cultural communities. As a cultural bridge, Sunny expected to help her students think independently and critically when approaching different cultures:

> [4] I just tell you [students] that this is my own [Chinese] culture, and I hope students can objectively face and understand it. If you can understand it, have your own ideas and form your critical thinking, I will respect all your ideas.

In her mind, the cultural bridge role was a two-way, encompassing self-identification, and it was crucial for Chinese language teachers to foster students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills to deal with the difficulties of intercultural encounters. In the same vein, Meifen assumed that 'connecting students with Chinese culture and other cultures' was her primary objective in the Chinese classroom.

Overall, the data analysis indicated that in a multicultural context (Hong Kong society and international schools), the participants were the most unanimous about their perceived identities as *Chinese language teacher* (16/16) and *cultural transmitter* (11/16). They diverged in other dimensions: eight participants highlighted the *Chinese culture bearer*, *multicultural*, and *cultural learner* identities; six stressed being a school staff member as a part of the professional identity; and only three participants thought of themselves as a cultural bridge. These professional and sociocultural identities closely interacted with their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence.

4.2. Teacher identities and teaching intercultural communicative competence

4.2.1. Different teacher identities lead to different efforts

The analysis identified that different identities seemed to be connected with different understandings of and approaches to teaching intercultural communicative competence. In particular, it was found that participants who emphasised their *Chinese language teacher* professional identity and *Chinese culture bearer* sociocultural identity often adopted teaching approaches characterised by a narrow focus on Chinese cultural knowledge transmission and one-way delivery of Chinese culture. When talking about how the *Chinese language teacher* identity interacted with their approaches to teaching intercultural communicative competence, participants focused exclusively on Chinese cultural knowledge and often equated intercultural communicative competence teaching with instilling in learners Chinese cultural facts such as festivals. Words like 'teach', 'tell', 'pass on', and 'transmit' were frequently used by the participants when talking about their perceptions of and practices related to teaching intercultural communicative competence. A strong association of the *Chinese language teacher* identity with the transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge was elaborated on by Li:

> [5] … I think [Chinese culture] is a very important part that needs to be taught in the classroom, and I should let students know about Chinese culture.

To Li, this transmission approach helped to fulfil one important role of a Chinese language teacher: to increase students' knowledge about China. The participants' assumption of this role only motivated them to transmit cultural knowledge rather than improving students' intercultural attitudes and skills.

In addition, the teachers' *Chinese culture bearer* identity was also found to go together with discourses on expertise in and obligations to transmit Chinese culture. For instance, Fang noted: 'I am not only a Chinese language teacher but also a Chinese person. So I think I have the responsibility and an obligation to help [students] know China and Chinese culture very well'. For Anna, Li, and Jun, being a Chinese culture bearer meant that they possessed an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture, which gave them 'the ability to teach relevant knowledge of language and culture' and laid the 'base of [their] identity as a Chinese language teacher'. This focus on in-born expertise, the obligation to teach Chinese cultural knowledge, and the tendency to see the transmission of profound Chinese culture knowledge as the foundation of being a Chinese teacher made Ho even question the legitimacy of non-native Chinese teachers:

> [6] To be honest, I don't agree that international schools need to hire foreigners to teach Chinese. The schools just recognize the advantage of foreigners using some new teaching

approaches, but ignore the fact that the foreigners do not have enough understanding and knowledge of Chinese history and culture to teach Chinese.

Thus, for participants who highlighted their *Chinese culture bearer* identity, the ability to deliver in-depth information about Chinese culture and history was generally regarded as an important competency that legitimised their position as Chinese language teachers and differentiated them from those who were less or not qualified for such a post. This mentality made them stress the one-way transmission of Chinese cultural information in teaching intercultural communicative competence.

Different from the *Chinese language teacher* identity and the *Chinese culture bearer* identity, which tended to shape the one-way transmission of Chinese cultural facts, the data analysis suggested that the *multicultural* identity was usually associated with efforts featuring a strong awareness of different cultures and a critical and embracing view of different cultural communities. Rachel, identifying herself as a global citizen, highlighted the importance of fostering a sense of global citizenship among her students, and of raising their awareness and tolerance of different cultures:

> [7] Being a global citizen is very important for both my students and me. When you teach, you may subconsciously teach global awareness to students and expect them to become global citizens. You really expect them to treat all cultures without any bias or discrimination.

In the same vein, for Song, her global citizen identity made her perceive and treat cultural differences in a more objective and impartial manner. Her self-positioning as a global citizen thereby influenced her approach to teaching intercultural communicative competence, which was characterised by a strong focus on objectivity and impartiality when perceiving different cultures: 'I present a culture in a comparatively fair and objective way in my teaching. I also expect my students to form this kind of view'. Thus, intercultural experience in daily life and working contexts and the consequent marginalised social positioning of different communities made some participants assume a multicultural identity and identify themselves as global citizens. This self-positioning helped to buffer them from misunderstandings and any potential negative impact of their intercultural experience on their sense of belonging. Moreover, this identification made the participants emphasise the facilitation of impartial understanding and the appreciation of different cultures among the students, and broadened their intercultural communicative competence teaching beyond the delivery of Chinese cultural knowledge alone.

The participants who had self-positioned their sociocultural identity as a cultural bridge also reported emphasising the enhancement of students' intercultural communication skills, and helping students to approach cultural issues with critical thinking, openmindedness, tolerance, and respect. Meifen viewed herself 'as a bridge between Chinese and Western cultures' and correspondingly felt that she 'should play a role in cultural exchange' and engage students in mutual respect and sharing. Similarly, Sunny underscored the importance of fostering independent and critical thinking among her students. Thus, for the teachers who had assumed the cultural bridge identity, teaching intercultural communicative competence was not a matter of one-way teacher-centered transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge; rather, it was a two-way equal dialogue between teachers and students, which involved the expression and discussion of different viewpoints. To them, teaching intercultural communicative competence was a generative process, involving critical understanding and unique worldviews.

The analysis above reveals that different identifications seem to orient and mediate teaching intercultural communicative competence towards pursuing different objectives, emphasising different contents and adopting instructional processes of a different nature. The more broadly-defined embracing identities (e.g. *multicultural* identity; *cultural bridge*), which went beyond Chinese culture alone and encompassed different cultural views, seemed to be associated with a two-way holistic approach towards teaching intercultural communicative competence that emphasised attitudinal and skill development via the discussion of cultural information. In contrast, the more narrowly-defined ethnocentrically-positioned identities (e.g. *Chinese language teacher*; *Chinese culture bearer*), which were typically ethnocentrically-positioned, seemed to be related to a one-way fact-oriented approach to teaching intercultural communicative competence that focused solely on imparting Chinese cultural knowledge.

4.2.2. Multiple teacher identities in mediating intercultural communicative competence teaching

The participants' accounts indicated that multiple identities interacted with each other in mediating their intercultural communicative competence teaching. For instance, Sunny, Jingjing, David, and Meifen all positioned themselves as Chinese language teachers, but they also assumed different sociocultural identities: David and Meifen took on a narrower sociocultural identity, *cultural transmitter*, compared to Sunny and Jingjing, who positioned themselves more broadly and open-mindedly as *cultural bridge* and *cultural learner*. The different combinations of professional identity and sociocultural identity mediated their different efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence. Meifen had both a narrowly-defined professional identity, *Chinese language teacher*, and a narrowly-defined sociocultural identity, *cultural transmitter*. These two narrowly-defined identities had reinforced each other and shaped her overall approach towards teaching intercultural communicative competence as the one-way transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge:

> [8] [Students] need to know some basic things about Chinese culture, like the meaning of the colors red and yellow in China. I also teach common knowledge of Chinese culture, like the Great Wall, the Panda, the Lantern, the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Bamboo.

In contrast, both Sunny and Jingjing had a narrowly-defined professional identity, *Chinese language teacher*, and a broadly-defined identity, *cultural learner*. It seemed that the two identities competed with each other, and their embracing sociocultural identity suppressed the role of their narrowing professional identity in mediating their cognition and practices. The *culture learner* identity made them regard cultural issues in a more open-minded manner and enabled them to appreciate others' perspectives, which consequently mediated their overall approach to teaching intercultural communicative competence towards an equal two-way dialogue between teachers and students involving the expression and discussion of different viewpoints:

> [9] As a cultural learner, I like to be a listener or audience when teaching [Chinese culture]. For my teaching method or teaching activities, I deliberately arrange some oral presentations or group sharing activities to let them express more to each other … Being a cultural learner is helpful for achieving my objective of teaching cultural tolerance. (Jingjing)

Thus, having an egalitarian embracing identity helped to counter the potential limiting impact of an authoritative narrowly-defined identity on teaching intercultural communicative competence. This was also clear in the case of Rachel, who claimed that she was both a Chinese cultural bearer and a global citizen (*multicultural* identity) as follows:

[10] When teaching Chinese culture, I do not think it is enough or appropriate to teach Chinese culture comprehensively. … So I cannot teach [Chinese] culture comprehensively, and I need to analyze [Chinese culture] in ways that help my students perceive [Chinese culture] positively.

As can be seen in the excerpt above, Rachel felt that because she was Chinese, she had an obligation to uphold a positive image of Chinese culture. At the same time, as a global citizen she also perceived the importance of fostering open-mindedness among her students (see Excerpt 2). To reconcile the competing influences of the narrowly-defined identity, *Chinese culture bearer*, and the broadly-defined *multicultural* identity, Rachel adopted a two-way communicative approach towards teaching intercultural communicative competence, whereby she engaged students in expressing different viewpoints to promote open-mindedness and critical thinking that might help counter negative thoughts about Chinese culture and develop positive perceptions about Chinese culture.

5. Discussion

Overall, the findings presented above illustrate the participants' different professional and sociocultural identities in relation to teaching intercultural communicative competence, and how these identities interact with their intercultural teaching cognition and practices. Beyond generally indicating multiple aspects of language teacher identity, this research further found that the different identities assumed by the participating teachers led to different approaches to teaching intercultural communicative competence. At the same time, multiple identities seemed to compete with or reinforce each other in mediating the participants' intercultural communicative competence teaching.

In terms of the participants' identities associated with teaching intercultural communicative competence, this research has revealed that multiple professional and sociocultural identities simultaneously co-exist in mediating the participants' cognition and practices regarding teaching intercultural communicative competence. Specifically, the professional identity concerned *Chinese language teacher* identity and *school staff member* identity; the sociocultural identity comprised *Chinese culture bearer* identity, *multicultural* identity, *cultural transmitter* identity, *culture learner* identity, and *cultural bridge* identity. This result echoes the findings of previous studies (e.g. Beijaard et al., 2000; Ortaçtepe, 2015; Wang & Du, 2016), which consistently showed that teacher identity is a combination of various sub-identities or aspects.

According to Sachs (2005), teacher identity is a dynamic construct that is both 'negotiated through experience' and 'made of that experience' (p. 15). The construction of these diverse identities was a socialisation and professionalisation process by which an individual participant acquired specific experiences, knowledge, and skills that were required in different professional and sociocultural roles. It seemed that both the multicultural society and the diverse teaching community provided an essential context to empower this process. Hence, there is a pressing need for educational policymakers to

create multicultural settings, or to provide intercultural communication opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers. In this sense, cross-border teacher education programmes and teacher development courses can continue to play a crucial role in building encompassing identities (Ishihara & Menard-Warwick, 2018 Lai, Li, & Gong, 2019 2019). Moreover, teacher educators and trainers should help pre-service and in-service language teachers to become more aware of their identity re/building in teaching intercultural communicative competence, and of the interaction between identity and teaching intercultural communicative competence as well. In particular, teacher educators need to be able to recognise the tensions and synergies among different identity components and help pre-service teachers to reflect the impact of the tensions and synergies they may experience during the process of learning to teach, since some teacher identities (e.g. *cultural bridge*, *cultural learner*, and *multicultural* identity) do not automatically strengthen teaching competence without supporting mechanisms.

Regarding the interaction between the participants' identities and their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence, this research elaborated that the relatively narrower and more ethnocentrically-positioned identities seemed to mediate teachers' intercultural communicative competence teaching towards a heavy emphasis on the one-way literal transmission of Chinese cultural knowledge, with limited criticality and reflectivity. In contrast, the more broadly-defined encompassing identities were found to be associated with a greater focus on fostering students' open mindset, respect, and tolerance towards different cultures. To some extent, this is in line with Menard-Warwick's (2008) study, which revealed that English instructors' identities, especially their intercultural identity, had a very strong impact on their cultural teaching approaches. More importantly, this research indicated that multiple identities seemed to compete or reinforce with each other in mediating intercultural communicative competence teaching. Having an encompassing identity may help to buffer or mitigate the potential constraining impact of a simultaneously-held narrowly-defined identity on teaching intercultural communicative competence. In this regard, having broad and open-mind identities is more likely to shape teachers' intercultural communicative competence teaching towards heightening the focus of instruction not only on facts/knowledge but also (and even more importantly) on attitudes, awareness, and skills, which are essential to facilitate learners' holistic intercultural development.

Only half of the participating teachers perceived themselves as having a cultural learner identity and a multicultural identity, and even fewer participants identified themselves as a cultural bridge. Instead, the majority of the participants underscored the influencing roles of their *Chinese language teacher* identity and *Chinese culture bearer* identity in their perceptions and practices related to teaching intercultural communicative competence. This tendency to highlight one's linguistic and cultural expertise in the target language in terms of defining teaching roles and priorities has been indicated in previous research on language teacher identity, in both the Chinese context (e.g. Gao, 2012) and in other contexts (e.g. Moloney, 2013). The participants in this research were teachers at international schools, where multicultural experience was an important consideration in recruitment and where the teachers were immersed in multi-cultural contexts; the weak self-positioning of *cultural learner*, *cultural bridge*, and *multicultural* identity might be even more serious in normal second language teaching contexts. Thus, how to orient language teachers towards broader and more dialogical positionings

in their sociocultural identification is a pressing issue that teacher professional development programmes need to tackle.

Moreover, since this study revealed that competition and tensions exist among various aspects of teacher identity, more studies are needed to examine the relationship between teacher identity and teaching intercultural communicative competence, so that the different roles of these aspects can be presented more accurately. Identity evolves dynamically and teacher identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and re-interpretation of teaching and sociocultural experiences (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Thus, it is crucial to explore how to manage, change, and construct teacher identity, especially broadly-defined, all-encompassing identities, with educational interventions or supporting mechanisms. It would be worthwhile to pay more attention to teachers' professional development trajectories amid the changes in language education, and particularly in cross-cultural contexts (Gong, Lai, & Gao, 2020 2020). In this respect, a longitudinal research design would be appropriate in future research, with teachers' experiential accounts offering detailed insights into their shifting identity development processes.

6. Conclusion

The present study examined how the identities of a group of teachers of Chinese as an additional language were associated with their efforts to teach intercultural communicative competence. It should be noted that this investigation was conducted with a group of Chinese language teachers in international school contexts that are dominated by Western cultures, and the teachers may therefore have downplayed their cultural role to gain legitimacy in the host context in order to show acceptance of or obedience to the dominant culture. Hence, the trajectories and challenges discussed here might be different in different cross-cultural or cross-border teaching situations, and for teachers adopting different curricula. This makes it imperative for researchers to explore the issue of teacher identity in relation to teaching intercultural communicative competence in different contexts (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Also, in any qualitative inquiry researchers might impose their own personal beliefs about and interest in intercultural discourses (Dervin, 2011; Gong et al., 2021 2021; Gong, Gao, Li, & Lai, 2020 2020). Our position as Chinese researchers means that to some extent our data interpretation might reflect the predispositions of a Chinese research tradition and our understanding of culture and intercultural communicative competence.

Despite these limitations, however, the findings confirm that teacher identity is 'a pedagogical resource' (Morgan, 2004, p. 174) and is central to language teacher development (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). The findings contribute to our understanding of the potential factors concerning teachers' intercultural teaching in the language classroom, and support the adoption of an identity-oriented approach to teacher education.

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