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Building Bridges in a Third Space: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools

Abstract This study explores the lived experiences of Chinese teachers in American Chinese Schools. Max van Manen's methodology for hermeneutic phenomenological research provides a framework for the study, and the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida guide the textual interpretations. Pedagogical voices of Aoki, Pinar, and Greene, and cultural journeys of Hongyu Wang and Xin Li reveal possibilities for understanding the experiences of Chinese teachers, as the question is addressed: "What is the meaning of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools?" Ten Chinese teachers engaged in a series of open-ended conversations. The conversations illuminate the experience of Confucian teaching meeting American pedagogies around two main themes. First, in following the metaphor of Chinese knotwork, the teachers speak of their struggles and challenges between Chinese Confucian and American pedagogies, reflect on splitting and splicing the knots through changing and adjusting their method of Confucian teaching. Second, they tell of the experiences of building bridges in a third space through dialogically connecting the different cultures and pedagogies in order to seek the appropriate way of teaching and learning Chinese well in American Chinese Schools.

Keywords phenomenological study, teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools, Chinese and American pedagogical encounters, a third space

Introduction

American Chinese Schools, the Sunday Chinese Schools in the US, are unique

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arrangements as non-profit informal schools. They usually rent American public schools for their school buildings every weekend. Most of the students are called second generation Chinese immigrants. All the administrators and most teachers are volunteer parents. There are no standardized tests, curriculum outlines, or strict rules in the schools. But there are different expectations from parents, teachers, and students, and unavoidable conflicts between different cultures and generations. Every weekend, teaching and learning Chinese brings Chinese people together in an American school, a non-Chinese place. People share, negotiate, and implement their ideas about teaching and learning Chinese in this place, which looks actually more like a community that is perhaps out of place. It is “a third space,” which provides a great opportunity to explore the differences, conflicts and negotiations in-between Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies.

To explore these cultural and pedagogical encounters in American Chinese Schools, the authors conducted a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of Chinese teachers’ teaching in American Chinese Schools. We wanted to answer a phenomenological question: What is the meaning of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools?

A hermeneutical phenomenology inquiry is a research methodology and also a writing approach. Phenomenology is the study of showing the phenomenon itself. Its aim is “gaining a deeper understanding of nature or the meaning of our everyday experiences” (van Manen, 2006, p. 9). “Hermeneutics is the study of the theory and practice of interpretation” (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Heidegger (1971) understands hermeneutics as an interpretive phenomenology. “Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the ‘texts’ of life” (van Manen, 2006, p. 4). In addition, “semiotics is used here to develop a practical writing or linguistic approach to the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics” (p. 4). Hermeneutic phenomenology, then, is fundamentally a writing activity.

Phenomenology is also a philosophy grounded in experience. It focuses upon life-world experiences in their purest forms, prior to any interpretation. Its subject matter is the lived experience, while the focus is a detailed unfolding and examination, a simplifying of what it is that we experience and how we experience in the routines of our daily life. As a method, phenomenology is a way of going back to the experience itself. When we look for answers to our research question, we must look behind the teaching experience for the meanings to be revealed, such as cultures, pedagogies, and philosophies.

Guided by van Manen’s theoretical framework and basic methods of phenomenological inquiry, the data was collected through inviting ten Chinese

teachers in several American Chinese Schools as participants. They were chosen, because they share similar teaching or other educational experiences, as well as have studied in Normal Universities in China. Two individual conversations were conducted with each participant and one group conversation throughout one academic school year. After each conversation, the participants received a copy of the instructions for writing samples and were asked to complete a narrative written account describing one of their most significant experiences of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools. Between the first and second round of individual conversations, each participant's teaching was observed at least once. Notes were taken about their teaching methods, classroom management strategies, conversations between teacher and students, and so on, to create a clear picture of their teaching. These notes were combined with other textual materials to engage them further in conversation about their teaching and to search for deeper thematic meanings. All these conversations, narrative writings and observation notes provided rich textual sources to determine the major themes and pedagogical considerations in our interpretive writing.

Through phenomenological writing and rewriting based on all the textual materials, the authors of this article generated many themes relating to Chinese teachers' teaching experiences in American Chinese Schools. In this paper, two major themes are presented. First, in following the metaphor of Chinese knotwork, the teachers speak of their struggles and challenges between Chinese Confucian and American pedagogies, reflect on splitting and splicing the knots through changing and adjusting their way of Confucian teaching. Second, they tell of the experiences of building bridges in a third space through dialogically connecting the different cultures and pedagogies in order to seek appropriate ways to teach and learn Chinese well in American Chinese Schools.

Making Knots: Four Ways of Pedagogical Encounters

In order to uncover the teachers' struggles and adjustments, the authors used the metaphor of "ropes" to contrast Chinese and American pedagogies, and "knots" to indicate their encounters.

Ropes and knots are symbolic in Chinese culture. "The original meaning of the word 'knot' is to take pieces of rope and tie them together; to tie the two pieces of rope is to make a knot" (Niu, 1989, p. 6). In ancient times, Chinese people used knots to record events. For example, "十" is used for the number 10, which is close to the present Chinese character for ten "十." Since the beginning, Chinese knots have carried significant symbolic meaning, connecting the arts with real life.

To explore the lived experiences of Chinese teachers' teaching stories in American Chinese School, the symbolism of "ropes" is used to contrast Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies. One rope indicates Chinese pedagogical practices, while another rope indicates American ones, such as teaching methods, classroom management, etc. These two independent "ropes" are spliced in different "knots" as two independent pedagogies encounter and negotiate conflict in different situations. In the following section, these pedagogical encounters and negotiations are described in four ways: curriculum development, relationships between teachers and students, teaching methods, and dialogical pedagogies between East and West.

"Doer" vs. "Designer"

Curriculum development is usually the first challenge Chinese teacher encounter when they begin to teach Chinese in American Chinese Schools. Xue, one of the Chinese teacher participators said:

When I was offered the job to teach kindergarten students Chinese, I was told that there was no textbook for the K level. I had to design the kindergarten curriculum by myself. Determining what to teach was a hard job for me because I had very little experience with this before. In China, the Ministry of Education will create the outlines and the government-owned publishing company will design the textbooks. The teachers are not required to create or develop curriculum themselves. Their job is to do the teaching following the assigned outlines and texts. We are only the "doers" of already developed curriculum plans.

According to Paine (1990), the ideal of a good teacher in China is to fulfill the guidelines of the teaching plans, which are determined by educational authorities. Teachers are supposed to be "doers" of curriculum that is developed in China. However, in American schools, the teachers are encouraged to design curriculum. McAdams (1998) compares teachers' jobs with architects' work, and says:

We are architects of spaces in higher education—intellectual spaces where our students reside for a time. In these spaces, we hope to meet their intellectual needs... Kindergarten teachers know the secret of using spaces. They use educational space in all its dimensions. (p. 61)

Like architects, teachers design the curriculum to make both teachers and students more satisfied. They are curriculum designers. Teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools gives most Chinese teachers an opportunity to

become curriculum designers for the first time. In this situation, two ropes indicating curriculum doers and designers encounter and are tied to make knots.

Based on Aristotle, the written [text] is the sound of the voice (as cited in Heidegger, 1971, pp. 400–401). How to choose a text expresses the voice of the teacher. It is related to the teachers' understanding of culture, history and pedagogy, and their own personal teaching experiences.

Hanyu pinyin is a system of phonetic symbols in Chinese, which uses the same alphabet as English, although the letters have very different pronunciations. As a fundamental element of Chinese, it is always taught to the people who would like to learn Chinese as early as possible in China. However, four or five year-old children may be learning English letters in the US. When we asked teachers Tanli, Chengxi, and Xuyun, the three kindergarten teachers, whether they put *Hanyu pinyin* into their curriculum, they gave us different answers. Teachers Tanli and Chengxi thought learning two different systems of phonetic symbols at the same time might confuse the students. So they gave up teaching *Hanyu pinyin* in their class. Teacher Xuyun taught a kindergarten bilingual class. She thought learning *Hanyu pinyin* would help the children learn English letters better and insisted on teaching it in her class. As the curriculum designers, the kindergarten Chinese teachers determined what to teach based on their own teaching experiences and understandings of pedagogy.

Should they teach *Hanyu pinyin* or not? What can they do when *Hanyu pinyin* conflicts with English letters? These three Chinese teachers negotiate in-between the curriculum doer and curriculum designer, and give different answers. In fact, they are “bridging the gap between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-in-use” (Pinar, 2005, p. 5).

Teacher-as-Father vs. Teacher-as-Professional

The teacher's close relationship to children is emphasized in Confucian education. Confucius, the “teacher of the ten thousand generations,” is honored as *Zhongfu* in China, where *zhong* means second one and *fu* means father. So Confucius was named the “second father” by his disciples and followers.

What does “father” mean? The father is a respectable and powerful person. He has authority over his child. Especially, in ancient China, the father is regarded as the head of the family and has the right to control his child's life. His relationship to the child is hierarchical. China is a highly hierarchical society. Chinese culture emphasizes teacher authority. The “Three-Character Classic” is a primary Confucian textbook from ancient China. In its third chapter, the author says:

To feed the body, not the mind—fathers, on you the blame! 养不教，父之过

Instruction without discipline, the idle teacher's shame. 教不严, 师之情 (as cited in Lee, 2000, p. 460)

In fact, the roles of a father and a teacher overlap. Both of them are important in educating children. The authority of the father empowers the teacher. As Chinese teachers in the US, do they experience this close but power-exerting relationship with their students of a "father"?

Teacher Ding is a retired teacher from China and teaches 3rd grade students at an American Chinese School. She told us she requires her students to "respect" her because she found that many students are not respectful of teachers in the US. Teacher Ding's idea of "respect" may mean a relation of authority or special regard according to her background as a traditional Chinese teacher. Some Chinese parents also wish that teachers could be close but strict in relating to their children. Teacher Xue told the authors that one mother said to her: "Please be strict with my kid. You can punish him if he makes any trouble in the class. I won't say anything about that!"

However, this kind of "fatherly" relationship may be challenged at American Chinese Schools. Teacher Lihong told us a story:

One of my students in my 2nd grade class moved up to a 3rd grade class. His 3rd grade teacher is regarded as a good teacher in our Chinese school. Once, the boy forgot to finish his homework, and then he was thrown out of the classroom by the teacher. Since then, the boy hated the Chinese school and didn't want to go back to school anymore...

Students who were born and grew up in the US may not accept such a strict and hierarchical relationship with their teachers, as discovered in the authors' fieldwork. Teacher Xue also shared a story of how her authority as teachers was challenged by parents. She said:

I can't forget my first year teaching Chinese in America. One Sunday night eight years ago, I received a call from the principal. He asked me if I had been impolite to a parent of one of my students that afternoon. I felt so strange and didn't know what he was talking about. He told me that one parent complained because I didn't respect her and she didn't like my teaching style. I taught kindergarten in Chinese School. One afternoon, a mother came to ask me to reduce my teaching material because her son couldn't keep up. She told me that she was not interested in having her son learn Chinese formally, but rather playing in a Chinese language environment. She said that this was the American teaching style for young kids. But I told her that other parents asked me to teach more because they wanted their children to learn Chinese seriously. Then she became very unhappy. But I didn't expect that she would call the principal to complain about me. I feel so angry and upset, because I never experience this in China.

Students' and parents' challenges to teachers' authority mean that they may require different teacher images beyond that of a "father" in American Chinese Schools. Actually, in the US, "teaching is usually seen as a form of professional work, that is, a type of complex work requiring a great deal of specialized knowledge" (Rowan, 1994, p. 4). An individual has to experience professional practice to become a teacher.

What is a professional? As a noun, professional means a person who has a particular profession as a permanent career. Profession is a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation, or an act of openly declaring or publicly claiming a belief, faith, or opinion (Profession, n.d.). But the idea of emotion or personal relationship is absent. Aoki (2005c) asks himself: "What does it mean to become a teacher?" and he answers: "I learned, from becoming one, that to become a teacher one undergoes a ritual that allows one entry into a culturally shaped and culturally legitimated world in which are prescriptions of years of training, certification, automatic membership in a teachers' association, apprenticeship, scrutiny and evaluation by legitimated seniors, and so on" (p. 337).

Becoming a teacher in the US involves undergoing a new ritual that is culturally shaped and legitimated in the new country. During the process, people may make mistakes, and experience feelings of failure and frustration. But as professionals, they have to face those trials and deal with them. Teaching Chinese in the US, Chinese teachers experience the struggle of learning new teacher rituals. At this moment, the two ropes of teachers being fathers and being professionals meet and are tied to make a knot. Teachers have to readjust their relationships with the children. They are not the "Chinese father figure" any more, but rather they have to develop their professional spirit based on equality and detachment.

Teacher-as-Virtuoso vs. Teacher-as-Midwife

During the conversation, Teacher Xue mentioned that she was confused by the classroom setting when she walked into a classroom in an American Chinese School for the first time:

The teacher's desk was at the corner, and the children's desks were not in rows. They were arranged loosely around the classroom. Was this the typical American classroom arrangement? What a big difference from my familiar classroom setting in China!

Paine (1990) has described the typical classroom arrangement in China's

schools. She says:

Classrooms typically are arranged with a podium or table at the front of the room. (There are no teachers' desks. The teacher is not seen as working on something, but as coming to present something.) Teachers use the blackboard, placed on the front wall, but rarely move to the other side of the podium, where students sit in rows. (p. 51)

She thinks that this kind of setting reveals the conception of teacher-as-virtuoso in Chinese pedagogy. According to Paine (1990), "the model for teachers in China is that of the virtuoso" (p. 54). It means that the teacher has to excel in the subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills, present and transmit knowledge well with little of his or her own interpretation and understanding, and commit to be willing to work in a group, and be concerned for others. Overall, the teacher has to be a good performer and can make the performance understandable for the students (audience).

Being a teacher-as-virtuoso means that the lecture is the primary teaching approach. Confucian and Buddhist philosophies both emphasize the importance of lecturing in education (Lee, 2000). The teacher uses the lecture as a main approach to transmitting information and knowledge, while the students sit quietly and listen to the lecturer (Turner & Acker, 2002). It is a teacher-centered approach.

Teacher Ding, said: "I feel uncomfortable when I find that the students sit on the skew." Since she had taught Chinese in China for many years, she holds onto many of the Chinese traditional teaching practices. She said, that good teaching needs good classroom discipline. So, she asks the students to "*An* 安 [sit] and *Jing* 静 [listen]." *An* means safe and tranquil; and *Jing* means quiet and peaceful in Chinese. "*An* [sitting] and *Jing* [being quiet and focused on listening]" means that the students have to sit upright, look at and listen to the teachers quietly in the class. "The students can do it!" Teacher Ding said affirmatively.

"*An* and *Jing*" is a typical teacher-centered pedagogy. The teachers give lectures, while the students listen to them quietly without argument. This teaching style still dominates the classroom curriculum in China today and impacts every student who gets educated in China's educational system. However, does this teaching style fit Chinese teaching in the US?

Socrates, the trailblazer of Western philosophy, rejects the "teacher" title and calls himself a "midwife" (Power, 1991, p. 28). A midwife is a person who assists women in childbirth, or help to produce or bring forth something (Midwife, n.d.). It states that a midwife is not the center, but an assistant or helper. She cannot do something for you, but helps you to do it yourself. This is a

child-centered teaching method.

Dewey (1902/2001) says: “The child is the starting-point, the center, and the end” (p. 9). He states that children have to learn by doing. When the student learns through doing by herself, the teacher becomes a facilitator. Geraldine Coleman (2001) also states that teacher as facilitator means that the teacher assists the students to learn and “facilitates learning by encouraging students to express their opinions and is genuinely interested in what they have to say” (p. 102). The teachers’ primary responsibility is to guide, as well as to stimulate. They have to be enthusiastic and “teach as celebration” (Phenix, 1975). Greene (1995) also thinks that imagination can “have strong impulses to open pathways towards better teaching and better ways of life” (p. 13). The teachers’ imagination can stimulate people to teach and learn better. Therefore, in American schools, the teachers prefer praising over criticizing students; prefer students’ doing over listening; prefer imagination over memorization; prefer critical thinking over quiet receiving; prefer dialogue over lecture; and prefer teaching as midwife to being a virtuoso.

In the authors’ conversations, many Chinese teachers shared stories of how they balance these differences and conflicts between Chinese and American pedagogies and cultures, reflect on, and change their original teaching methods. Their actions are ways to improve their teaching quality in American Chinese Schools.

Teacher Moli said that her role as a teacher has been changed in the US:

In China, it is important to make the students sit well and listen to me carefully. People emphasize the quality of teaching. The role of teacher is transmitting the knowledge. But in the US, it is more important to guide the students to develop their interests than teach the knowledge.

So, many Chinese teachers in the US attempt to adjust their roles and teaching methods in the class, such as emphasizing that the teachers “don’t talk too much in the class.” Teacher Lihong said:

When the students understand what I teach, feel excited about it, or follow my activity, and their works show that they have really learned, I feel so wonderful... But when I realize that I have talked too much, I feel terrible and have to stop talking immediately.... I have to do something else... Students’ participation is the fastest way to learn something. The teachers in Chinese schools often talk too much. I don’t think I talk much in the class, but I still find that some of the students may draw or do something else when I talk a little bit more.

According to Lihong, when the teacher talks too much, he or she has to pay

too much attention to his or her own performance and, as a result, ignore the students' needs and participation.

Teacher Chengxi also adjusts her voice and tone teaching in the class. She said:

When my daughter Nan was four years old, she went to school. I never forgot the teacher's voice and tone when she talked with my little daughter. It was so gentle and caring... Before, I often spoke very loudly and even cried out to keep classroom discipline in my class... I started to feel shame about my former teaching way in China, and wanted to try some new ways, and change myself... Since then, I learned to use a gentle and kindly voice and tone to teach. I gradually found out that it was better to teach in this kind of voice than to speak loudly. So now I teach in a gentle voice.

In Chengxi's story, the loud and powerful voice indicates a teacher's role as virtuoso, while a gentle and kindly voice indicates a teacher's role as midwife. By changing her voice and tone in the class, Chengxi adjusts her teaching approach to somewhere in-between teacher-as-virtuoso and teacher-as-midwife.

Being a teacher-as-virtuoso means that the lecture is the primary teaching approach. The teacher talks a lot instead of inviting the students' participation in the class. All the Chinese teachers in American Chinese Schools come from China. They all have experienced the pedagogy of teaching-as-virtuoso in China. However, when they began teaching in the US, they could not avoid the influence of American pedagogy, and were seen as a "midwife." Therefore, when the Chinese teachers teach in the US, they have to confront the pedagogical conflict between dialogue and lecture. Some teachers may recognize this conflict and make the necessary changes in order to accomplish good teaching. In this situation, two pieces of ropes indicating teacher-as-virtuoso and teacher-as-midwife are tied into a knot. Teacher Xue shared her feeling of sitting on this knot:

When I sat on the chair, I felt my center of gravity lowered a little bit. I became closer to the children. In fact, I had never sat down when I taught in China. As a virtuoso, I had to stand up on the stage and perform like an actor. My standing high above the students also indicated my authority and power in the class. However, as a midwife, I had to withdraw from the high and centered position, and share with the students. Sitting at the front or center seems like splicing two different ropes at the center of the knot.

Chinese Teacher-as-Learner vs. American Teacher-as-Learner

During the conversations and writing/rewritings, the authors found out that there

are some common beliefs and understandings of teaching that can be observed between Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies, although there are many more differences. We are not only learning from the differences, but also the commonalities. For example, based on both of the Chinese and American pedagogies, teaching is also a learning experience.

For Confucians, the ultimate goal of Confucian education is to achieve *shengren* (圣人 sagehood; Bol, 1989). Bol says, “If the goal of literati learning is sagehood, then in practice literati learning can never cease; it is a lifelong enterprise” (p. 151). Confucians stress *xue wu zhi jing* 学无止境, where *xue* 学 means learning, *wu* 无 means nothing or non-, *zhi* 止 means stop or end; *jing* 境 means an area or border. So *xue wu zhi jing* means there is no border to people’s learning. Learning is a ceaseless process. De Bary and Chaffee (1989) translated it as “living and learning.”

Confucius emphasizes that learning is “a source of inner joy and a condition for completing humanity” (Lee, 2000, p. 179). For Confucius, learning is a “moral enterprise” and “fundamental to moral life” (Bol, 1989, p. 157). To complete “humanity” and achieve “sagehood,” Confucians advocate a special way of learning, “self-cultivation.” “Self-cultivation” implies that learning has shifted from acquiring information to transformation (Tu, 1989). Chu Hsi thinks that “self-cultivation” is “learning for the sake of oneself” (de Bary as cited in de Bary, 1989, p. 189). “Self-cultivation” does not only mean learning knowledge by ourselves, but also enjoying and broadening our spiritual and intellectual worldviews. In ancient China, most teachers are Confucian followers. They see “the improvement of the self and the search for sagehood as the most worthy ends of education” (McKnight, 1989, p. 493). To self-cultivate and seek sagehood, the teacher becomes a learner.

Confucius also says: “Two companions walking alongside me can certainly be my teachers. I will learn whatever is good from them and reject whatever is bad” (Analects, 7, as cited in Cleverley, 1991, p. 6). Teaching and learning can occur anywhere and benefit anybody. So he emphasizes *jiao xue xiang zhang* 教学相长 (*Li ji: Xue ji*), where *jiao* 教 is teaching, *xue* 学 is learning, *xiang* 相 means each other, mutually, and *zhang* 长 means progress. So, the phrase *jiao xue xiang zhang* means that teaching and learning make progress together in the class. The teachers learn from their students while the students are learning from the teachers. Teacher-as-learner becomes an important image of the teacher in Chinese culture. There is a similar relationship expressed in Western culture through the idea of encounter.

Maxine Greene (1973) thinks that the teacher becomes a learner when he or she participates in the students’ life-world. She says:

He can discover, at appropriate moments, what it is to meet his students’ gaze and become

aware of their existence as his own gaze comes in contact with theirs. An encounter of this sort—an “I-Thou” encounter—occurs always in a present moment, in a domain apart from the object-world. In such dialogic relation, the teacher can experience being a learner; he can become, in a distinctive fashion, a learner himself. (p. 94)

Encountering means meeting as an adversary or enemy, to engage in conflict with, to come upon face-to-face, or to come upon something, especially unexpectedly (Encounter, n.d.). So, to encounter means meeting something or somebody as an adversary or enemy. What he meets may conflict with what he knows or expects. If we regard what the teachers have or expect as “I,” and the something different or adverse as “Thou,” then the “I-Thou” encounter may lead to teachers experiencing conflicts and differences, but in the process treating students as respected persons. The teachers have to learn the different or adverse “Thou” so that they can connect with the students’ “world-as-an-individual” and “teach the young person to know” (Greene, 1973, pp. 91–94).

Maxine Greene (1973) also offers some clues to explore how the teacher sees his or her students in the class. She asks:

What does he see when he looks at a child, at a young person of any age? A spiritual creature? A social organism? A half-civilized barbarian? A potentially rational being? Does he see a case sitting before him, an instance of cultural deprivation, an IQ, an underachiever or an overachiever, a kid, a pupil, a fellow creature? What does he mean when he says someone is only human, deeply human, not even human? What does he mean when he discusses self-concept, identity, individuality? What does he mean by man? (pp. 52–53)

These questions remind us that teachers become learners while facing the students as a person in the class. The students are subjects rather than objects. In her book *Releasing the Imagination*, Greene (1995) emphasizes that teachers are facing the person:

Teachers are also being asked to treat their students as potential active learners who can best learn if they are faced with real tasks and if they discover models of craftsmanship and honest work. Only when teachers can engage with learners as distinctive, questioning persons—persons in the process of defining themselves—can teachers develop what are called “authentic assessment” measures, the kinds of measures that lead to the construction of new curricula. (p. 13)

The students are potential active learners. The teachers have to respect the students, engage with their lives, and give them freedom to learn. Teachers are alive among the students. They are facing the person, the students’ culture, age,

identity, self-consciousness, and so on. To achieve personal fulfillment, teachers have to live in the students' world and experience democratic dialogue with them. Actually, teachers' worlds will encounter students'. Both of them will change through the encounter when teachers teach. Some Chinese teachers have come to an awareness of this pedagogy as well. Teacher Wenhua said:

When I taught in China, I didn't see the teacher as an individual, nor the student as an individual either. The relationship between the students and teachers is a kind of the relationship of the transmitter and the acceptor. Actually, there is no personal relationship. I can teach this class and that class by the same way without any difference. My teaching is universal for this or that class... But here, I have learned that the teacher is important as an individual. He or she has to influence the students in person. For the children, the teacher has to be a lived and sentient person.... Actually, when I try to recall how my former teachers teach, I won't remember how he or she teaches me to write or read, but may remember something he or she did which influenced the development of my personality.

Teaching in American Chinese Schools, Wenhua recognizes the importance of seeing herself and students as lived persons in the class. She becomes a learner when she participates in students' lived worlds and is being changed in the process.

Nel Noddings (2001) relates the conception of "caring" with teacher-as-learner pedagogy. She says: "Caring is phenomenologically accurate and highly useful for our work in education" (p. 99). It is not only used to refer to an attitude, but to "describe a relation or to point to something far deeper and more important—a way of being in the world" (p. 99). So caring becomes a way of being teachers. She also says, "A caring teacher is someone who has demonstrated that she can establish, more or less regularly, relations of care in a wide variety of situations" (p. 100).

When a caring teacher teaches, he or she will require "personal understanding," "invite communication," and "demand that competent carers remain close to the recipients of care" (Noddings, 2001, p. 101). Caring emphasizes the teachers' understandings and communication with the students while teachers become learners.

Then, how does the teacher-as-learner pedagogy help students learn? Heidegger (1993c) says, "Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than—learning" (p. 380). What does letting learn mean? Based on Heidegger (1993b), persons come to learn only when they experience what they take as something they themselves really already have. The thing that we want to

learn is already there, so that the task of teacher is not offering knowledge or guiding students to receive knowledge. Teaching is letting others learn, that is, bringing persons together in learning. Teaching is letting learn. It is more difficult than learning.

As Hultgren (1995) says, “to let learn means to prepare a space for listening that intertwines identities (self/other and self/society) in a retrieval of being, a leading in itself that withdraws from teacher to being-in-teaching-together” (p. 377). Therefore, if people want to learn, they have to experience it themselves; they have to listen to others; they have to withdraw from the leading-teaching positions. If people want to teach, they have to be able to learn. As a result, the teacher becomes a learner, and learners become teachers.

Both Chinese and American pedagogies emphasize the potential of teachers becoming learners when teaching. In this situation, there is a dialogical experience in-between “East” and “West.” The two ropes indicating Chinese and American teacher-as-learners are tied to make a harmonic knot.

Building Bridges in a Third Space

During the conversations with Chinese teachers, many of them shared their lived experiences of feeling caught between a familiar and unfamiliar world, living between home and a foreign land, and floating between past and current experience while teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools. These in-between feelings make them “dwell in a conjunctive space, not one splintered by binaries, but a lived space” (Pinar, 2005, p. 77), “a third space” (Wang, 2004).

A third space is a magic and secret universe, rather than being next to the second in place or time. Aoki (Rethinking Curriculum and Pedagogy, 1999) states: “It is a space of doubling, where we slip into the language of ‘both this and that, but neither this nor that’... the space moves and is alive” (p. 181). Then how can we feel a third space? Wang (2004) answers, “it is invisible, beyond the gaze of eyes... A third space is ineffable... It is a space of multiple others interacting through different times and places” (pp. 146–147). We cannot say where it is and when it is. It is ineffable. But we can feel it through experiencing of interacting in “between.”

Aoki (2005b) likens “East” and “West” to “Eastern culture” and “Western culture,” and discusses their relationship within the context of cultural identity. He says, “so understood, the term ‘East and West’ is rendered as a binary of two separate preexisting entities, which can be bridged or brought together to conjoin in an ‘and’.” (p. 315)

When Chinese and American cultural and pedagogical worlds meet, a third space occurs, and there is a bridge to make them meet. Bridge means a structure crossing over the earth or water. It is the bridge that locates the two banks, which exist across from each other. As Heidegger (1993c) says:

The bridge gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals.... The bridge is a thing; it gathers the fourfold, but in such a way that it allows a site for the fourfold.... The bridge is a locale. As such thing, it allows a space into which earth and sky divinities and mortals are admitted. (pp. 355–357)

So, bridge is a metaphor of gathering things and locating sites. Then, building a bridge means gathering things, going across, and locating sites for gathering.

Teaching Chinese in the US, a foreign land, is an act of building a bridge in a third space. It gathers Chinese and English languages and Chinese-born and American-born people. Moreover, teaching Chinese in a foreign land locates the two banks of the bridge through encountering cultural and pedagogical differences. The differences push Chinese teachers to go across to know each bank and even connect the two banks through understanding, adjusting, and changing. Therefore, Chinese teachers are building bridges in a third space through understanding, questioning, reflecting, negotiating, and adjusting their teaching while teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools. Teacher Xuyun shared how she negotiates the cultural differences by teaching Chinese characters in her class. She said:

When you write the Chinese character, you have to write it in *tian zi ge* 田字格. You cannot write the characters disobeying the rules. For example, you have to follow the stroke order, always writing “—” before “|” for example. You will be wrong if you reverse the order. This is the “culture.” Chinese people are very strict with the rules... You cannot say the culture is good or bad. It is only different... we have to realize it, regard it, understand it and then accept it... I try to melt the cultural difference. At first, I tell the children that one of the purposes that they come to study Chinese in American Chinese Schools is studying Chinese culture. But it doesn’t mean that we have to follow totally the Chinese way.... For example, I explain to them that in China, when the teacher talks, the students should not talk. But here, we can adjust a little bit. The students can talk if they raise their hands.

Additionally in relation to building, Heidegger (1993c) says: “Building puts up locales that make space and a site for the fourfold...” (p. 360). We see the special meaning of building that Heidegger has in mind:

To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals—this fourfold preserving is the simple essence of dwelling. In this way,

then, do genuine buildings give form to dwelling in its essence, and house this essential unfolding. (p. 360)

“Building thus characterized is a distinctive letting-dwell.... The essence of building is letting-dwell. Building accomplishes its essential process in the raising of locales by the joining of their spaces....” (Heidegger, 1993a, pp. 360–361).

So building for Heidegger means letting-dwell. A bridge becomes a dwelling place. Building a bridge becomes a process of letting-dwell as Aoki (2005a) says: “Any true bridge... is a clearing—a site—into which earth, sky, mortal, and divinities are admitted. Indeed, it is a dwelling place...” (p. 438).

Building a bridge is letting-dwell. When Chinese teachers teach Chinese in the US, they encounter difference and conflict between Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies. Indeed, they live in “an ambivalent space of both this and that, of both East and West” (Aoki, 2005b, p. 319). We call the ambivalent space of “Chinese and American” the third space. To teach Chinese well, Chinese teachers experience dwelling in a third space.

To dwell, people have to be be-in-the-place and listen to it with their heart. To dwell in the third space, wherein they teach native language in a non-native place, they have to listen to the difference or sameness in-between the native and non-native languages and cultures. They dwell in the midst of “interculturalism.” According to Aoki (2005d),

Now I slide away from the crossing, and sink into the lived space of between—in the midst of many cultures, into the inter of interculturalism. In-dwelling here is a dwelling in the midst of differences, often trying and difficult. It is a place alive with tension. In dwelling here, the quest is not so much to rid ourselves of tension... but more so to seek appropriately attuned tension, such that the sound of the tensioned string resounds well. (p. 382)

Dwelling in the midst of two different cultures and pedagogies brings a lot of difficulties and tensions. To dwell, they have to relieve their tension at an appropriate level, seek peace in such resolve, and make the attuned string resound well. For us, the researchers, and Chinese teachers, dwelling means finding the appropriate way in which to teach and learn Chinese well in American Chinese Schools.

Conclusion

With the growth of globalization, the social context of America and China has

changed, resulting in more immigrants, multi-languages, multi-cultures, and a global economy. These changes require inter-cultural understanding and communication, and the development of bi- or multi-cultural identity, which make this topic of teaching Chinese in the US ever more significant.

In addition, many educational reforms were conducted in both China and America today in order to improve their pedagogical practices following social changes and cultural globalization. The reforms in China usually stem from Western education and emphasize student-centered pedagogy. Controversially, the U.S. government initiated a reform called “No Child Left Behind,” which emphasizes standardized curriculum and evaluation. These dynamic changes have blurred the boundary of Chinese Confucian and American pedagogies. They also made teachers face up to pedagogical differences and think of the interconnections optimistically as well.

In this study, teachers of Chinese in American Chinese Schools shared with us their thoughtful understandings of the differences and interconnections between Confucian teaching and American pedagogy. Teaching their home language in a foreign land makes these teachers live in-between two different cultures and pedagogies, which brings them struggles and challenges. However, this unique situation also brings them more chances to grasp the essentials of Chinese and American education, and build bridges in-between Chinese Confucian and American pedagogies.

To explore these experiences and answer the research question: What is the meaning of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools? The symbolism of “ropes” was used to contrast Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies, and “knots” to indicate their encounters. The Chinese and American “ropes” are spliced to make different knots. During the splicing, Chinese teachers carry their past conceptions and experiences, the Chinese rope into the new world. However, it is often the new pedagogical rules and educational policy, the American rope that leads to the different splicing in making different knotted structures. For example, when Chinese kindergarten teachers got the chance to determine what to teach, they carried on their understanding of curriculum, the Chinese rope. Even though they often copied the curriculum outline from China’s kindergarten textbooks, they initiated their first step to be the “designer” rather than “doer” following American pedagogical way, the American rope. When Chinese teachers reflected on themselves and let go of some authority as “father,” the Chinese rope, they welcomed the new American teacher image as “professional,” the American rope into their teaching.

Moreover, when two ropes collide, they are entangled in order to make a

stable Chinese knot. As Chen (1996) says, Chinese knots are symmetrical in form with an “empty space in between” (p. 91). Therefore, in-between space provides an opportunity for that space to be filled. It exists when two different ropes meet. Extending this metaphor of the empty in-between space to the experience of the Chinese Sunday school teachers allows for the possibility of seeing the transformation of the participants through their teaching as they find meaning in the in-between. In-between is a unique place. On the one hand, it makes the Chinese teachers feel uncertain and unsafe; on the other hand, it creates a mixed space where Chinese teachers can see both the American and Chinese cultures and pedagogies, and experience the re-understanding they bring from a special perspective, which is a fresh and precise way to re-examine the world. Most Chinese teachers acknowledged the uncertainty of their identity and the possibility of re-identifying themselves to improve the quality of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools, as Wenhua said:

There are a bunch of balls. Some are white, and some are red. I am pink... I can't find my belongingness. There is no place for me. I am pink.... You have to create a place for yourself...In a safe place, you will be free to teach. It may not be the best teaching, but at least, it may be the most appropriate.

Teaching Chinese in the US is a complex phenomenon, so this idea of interlacement is a helpful metaphorical connection. It opens a door for us to describe and interpret the conflicts and negotiations between two different cultures and pedagogies. This knot metaphor also offers us the possibility of building bridges in the two different cultures and pedagogies through splicing them in different knotted structures, shaping the empty space in between two cultures, two pedagogies, home and foreign land, the past and present, a third space (Rethinking Curriculum and Pedagogy, 1999), in order to find an appropriate way of teaching Chinese well in American Chinese Schools.

In addition, this study suggests a need for Chinese teachers in American Chinese Schools to participate in on-going professional development to bridge the differences between Confucian teaching and American pedagogy in which they find themselves. It is also suggested that a teacher preparation track be developed in Chinese Normal schools for teachers who plan to teach Chinese in the US. Finally, the study suggests a need for Chinese teachers, administrators and, parents to be open to change as East and West cultures are brought together in Chinese Schools where teachers seek the better way of teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools.

However, this phenomenological study on teaching Chinese in American Chinese Schools is not ended yet. The authors will continue striving for the essence of the phenomenon. Laozi said, “*shang shan ruo shui* 上善若水.” “*Shang shan* 上善” means the ultimate good. “*Ruo shui* 若水” means living following the example of water, nurturing all lives but being willing and humble to stay in low places. Therefore, water is the way to be a great person: be peaceful, be sincere, be natural, be diligent, be humble, and most importantly, be open to change. To seek the right way of teaching Chinese in the US, we, as researchers, and Chinese teachers, have to be sincere, diligent, and open to change like water, running in-between Chinese and American cultures and pedagogies.

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