BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GULFS
CHC TEACHERS IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

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Introduction

The rapid increase in Chinese language programmes worldwide has created an increased demand for qualified Chinese language teachers. As Wang (2009, p. 283) notes, "the lack of quantity and quality of Chinese language teachers constitutes the key bottleneck in building capacity" for the sustainable development of Chinese language programmes. To meet this growing need, increasing numbers of native Chinese-speaking teachers from Confucian-heritage cultures (CHCs), such as Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, are being recruited to teach at public schools in the West. In 2008 in the USA, for example, there were more than 150 guest teachers from China teaching more than 11,000 students at K-12 schools in 31 states (Asia Society, 2008, p. 3). In Australia, "some 90 per cent of teachers of Chinese (…) are L1 speakers, most by far coming from the Chinese mainland, but there are also some from Taiwan and South East Asia" (Asia Education Foundation, 2010, p. 12). In New Zealand, of the 40 teachers currently teaching Chinese language in schools, about half are from CHCs (Dr. Han Xi, National Advisor: Chinese, International Languages Aotearoa New Zealand, personal conversation, June 2010).

These teachers face various challenges, both linguistic and cultural. Wang (2009) found that in order to be successful, CHC teachers teaching at American K-12 schools need to be highly proficient in English; they need the knowledge and skills required to tailor their target language into comprehensive input for their students. They also need the knowledge of social conventions and mores, such as mandatory regulations, dress codes, issues of touch, and privacy; and more importantly, the knowledge of how American students learn. She pointed out that these teachers need "the analytical tools that will enable them to analyse their own and their students' cultural scripts for what it means to be a teacher and a student, as well as patterns of classroom interaction and expectations about student achievements" (Wang, 2009, p. 285).

The need for "analytical tools" to analyse "cultural scripts" – a set of assumptions about cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices held by a particular cultural group (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004) – was confirmed by the author's study of two CHC teachers teaching Chinese in New Zealand secondary schools (Sun, 2010). An exploration of these two teachers' assumptions and teaching practices highlighted the significance of cultural scripts in shaping teachers' thinking and teaching practices, and pointed to

gulfs between CHCs and Western cultures. This article aims to raise awareness of such gulfs so that teachers and administrators may work together to bridge them. The first part of the article contains snapshots from the case studies which reveal characteristics of CHC teachers' thinking and practices. It then proceeds to highlight the fundamental differences between CHCs and Western cultures in respect of learning and teaching, and discuss CHC teachers' cultural scripts and the challenges they face teaching in Western schools. Finally an approach to bridging gulfs in learning culture is suggested.

Snapshots from the case study

The cases cited below are part of a study of three Chinese language teachers' personal practical knowledge – "knowledge which is experiential, embodied, and reconstructed out of the narratives of a teacher's life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987, p. 490). The study, which was undertaken from 2007-2009, is based on the assumption that teachers develop and use knowledge about teaching that is neither fully theoretical nor merely practical. Rather, a teacher's knowledge combines both kinds of knowledge, blended by the personal background and characteristics of the teacher and expressed in particular situations (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361). The purpose of the study is to gain understanding of teachers' personal practical knowledge and the factors that shape this in order to provide a window into the processes behind teacher development. Taking a qualitative case study approach, the study selected three language teachers teaching Chinese in three different secondary schools in New Zealand, two of whom are CHC teachers from China, and one New Zealand-born Chinese but a non-native Chinese speaker. The experiences of two CHC teachers, Dongmei and Wenying (both pseudonyms), are presented and discussed using data collected and analysed from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

Dongmei

Born in Northern China, Dongmei was trained as an English teacher in China and taught English to university students there for 12 years before immigrating to New Zealand in 2001. Having gained her postgraduate diploma in Secondary School Teaching in New Zealand, she started teaching Chinese from Y9-Y13 (ages 13-17) as a relief teacher at a girls' college. After completing her two-year term as a relief teacher, at the beginning of the 2007 academic year (late February) Dongmei was employed as a part-time Chinese language teacher at School D.

School D is a private girls' school with about 800 students from Y1 to Y13 (ages 5-17). Located in the heart of an urban district, with more than 100 years' history, this school enjoys a long-standing reputation for academic excellence. Dongmei regarded School D as an "elite" school and initially based her teaching on assumptions about an "elite" school and its students – that all the students at the school would have a desire to learn and that they would be willing to study hard. Based on these assumptions she presented the students with intensive content. For example, at the beginning of the term she included too much cultural content, having introduced the students to the four most famous Chinese classical novels, to well-known Tang Dynasty poetry and popular

festivals in China, and some language points which are normally associated with learning at higher levels. She soon found that her assumptions had been incorrect. The following excerpt from an interview reveals the conflicts she encountered as a result:

Excerpt 1

> 我感觉到新西兰就是像这样的学校还不是像中国学生那样就是一门心思的去学习，一大半来上课就是玩的，只是说跟别的学校比，可能就是纪律性好一点，老师说你不要说话了，她马上能尊敬你这个老师就不讲话了，但是从学习动力上来讲根本就没有中国孩子的那种学习动力。她还是想着怎么玩儿。

> I felt that the students in New Zealand, even the students at this kind of school, are not like the students in China who are committed to study. More than half want to have fun in class. Compared with the students at other schools, the students at this school are well-behaved. If a teacher asks them not to talk, they show respect and stop talking immediately. But their drive to learn is not as strong as in students in China. They have their minds set upon how to have fun. (My own translation.)

This excerpt shows that Dongmei had concerns about her students' attitude to study, their behaviour and their respect for teachers. Central to these concerns is her comparison between New Zealand students and Chinese students. In her opinion, New Zealand students are not as motivated as Chinese students. They care more about having fun and less about study. It is interesting to note that Dongmei viewed "having fun" as being at odds with learning.

The extensive data from Dongmei's narratives and from observations and interviews (Sun, 2010) showed that Dongmei also had difficulty finding a balance between challenging students and motivating them; encouraging student participation and keeping them quiet; teaching too much and teaching too little; and having fun and learning. However, as she became more familiar with the school and the students, she began to realize that many of these differences were due to the cultural differences between learning in a Chinese context and learning in the local context. As a result of this realization, she started to change her attitudes, as the following except reveals. Comparing her way of teaching with teaching in the French programme at her school, Dongmei said:

Excerpt 2

> 我现在观念也转变了，原来说［学生］老玩儿根本就不学东西，人家就是这么个文化，人家就是寓教于乐，你一节课人家在学就行了，你用不着那么像中国的题海战术，写写写。实际上现在我的那个 worksheet 还是写的东西很多，一大篇，挺吓人的。人家［法语项目］又是画又是图的，完了就写几个字。

My ideas have also changed. Previously I thought the students were spending a lot of time playing without learning. But that's their culture. Here students are learning through lively activities. There is no need to drown the students with huge amounts of homework and assignments, writing, writing, writing. In fact there is still a lot of writing in my worksheets now. It looks scary. The worksheets in the French programmes are full of pictures with few words. (My own translation.)

This excerpt shows that whereas previously she had viewed "having fun" as unrelated to teaching and learning, Dongmei had developed a new perception that having fun is part of Western educational culture. However, while she was making changes, she also noted that her teaching was still "content-oriented"; that is, she still cared about teaching "something solid", as her worksheet showed.

Wenying

Unlike Dongmei, Wenying started her teaching career in New Zealand, receiving her formal training at a College of Education in New Zealand. She had previously received her bachelor's degree in French in China and worked as a French interpreter in a French company in China before immigrating to New Zealand in 1995. After completing her postgraduate diploma programme, Wenying was employed as a full-time Chinese language teacher at School W in August 2001. School W is a state college for girls with a roll of about 1,200 students (Y9-Y13), most of whom are European New Zealanders from middle-class families. The school was established 120 years ago and prides itself on the high academic achievement of its students. Wenying said it was her dream school, one of the reasons being that:

Excerpt 3

就是单从学生这个她的 effort 和 attitude 还有她这种素质就觉得这个学校的学生是很认真，就是说学生嘛，teenage，都有调皮的时候，但是你能说她，她听你的，比较尊重你。（…）总的来说我就觉得这些女孩很乖。

The students at this school have the right attitude; they are committed to learning and would like to put effort into it. Of course, as teenagers, sometimes they are naughty, but they behave themselves if you remind them. They respect you. (…) Generally speaking I think these girls are well-behaved. (My own translation.)

When Wenying started teaching at this school the Chinese programme had already been fully developed. Wenying thought her predecessor, also a CHC teacher, was responsible for the students' positive attitude and behaviour and their trust in the native Chinese-speaking teacher:

Excerpt 4

> 我就是觉得前面一个老师她开了一个好头，这个学生她抓得很好，她从这个 behaviour，从学生的这个努力，从各方面她自己的教学就是让学生信任这个老师。而且她是一个中国人，[学生] 就觉得中国人很严谨，很 hardworking，（…）所以她们就接纳中国人，有这个 native speaker 教中文，我们做学生的就很 lucky。他们很认真，（…）她就觉得很信任你。

> I think that my predecessor made a good start with the Chinese programme here. She has developed in the students the right attitude and good behaviour. She is Chinese. Through her teaching she has built the students' trust in Chinese teachers. This teacher made the students feel that Chinese people are well-organized, hardworking (…), therefore the students accept Chinese teachers and feel lucky to have a native Chinese speaker to teach them Chinese. They think Chinese teachers are committed, (…) they trust the Chinese teacher. (My own translation.)

From this excerpt we can see that one of Wenying's concerns is to win student trust in, and acceptance of, the native Chinese-speaking teacher. Her concept of the native Chinese-speaking teacher is very value-laden. Among these values is that of being well-organized, a value which was also apparent in her own teaching. In her classroom everything was fully in her control – students were well-behaved, teaching went step-by-step, and there were rarely interruptions. Everything went smoothly. Indeed, her motto, "everything goes smoothly" describes the predominant characteristic of Wenying's teaching style.

Wenying believed that order in the classroom is essential to ensure "everything goes smoothly". She believed that "as a teacher you must first and foremost keep the class under control, otherwise no matter how perfect a lesson plan you've got, you'll end up as an armchair strategist – you will never be able to deliver it". To achieve this control, Wenying made a point of getting her students on track from the very beginning, and developing good learning habits. Wenying believed that before teaching students a subject, the teacher should first educate the students themselves as persons. For this reason, building positive attitudes and habits, and reinforcing classroom rules were always an important part of her teaching in Term One.

What do these snapshots tell us about these teachers' personal cultures of learning and teaching? Where do these cultures stem from? The following examination of cultural differences of learning and teaching attempts to provide a conceptual framework to answer these questions.

Cultural differences in learning and teaching

Grimmett and Crehan (1992, p. 60) argue that culture "represents the values that bind people together". Jin and Cortazzi (1998, p. 748) define a culture of learning as "socially transmitted expectations, beliefs, and values about what good learning is". They elaborate:

> The concept draws attention to the usually taken-for-granted cultural ideas about the roles and relations of teachers and learners, about appropriate teaching and learning styles and methods, about the use of textbooks and materials, and about what constitutes good work in classrooms. Cultures of learning are at the interface between culture, socialization, and education. They are influenced by tradition but can change in response to circumstances or other traditions. (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, p. 748)

Clearly shared cultures change from influence within, but there has been little research examining the impact of differing cultures of learning and teaching on the CHC language teachers teaching Chinese in Western countries. However, research on Chinese learners and teachers of English as a second language (Clark & Gieve, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Gieve & Clark, 2005; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998, 2006; Shi, 2006; Tsui, 2007) and cross-cultural research in general education (Chan & Rao, 2009; Watkins, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 1996, 2001) have documented a number of differences between cultures of learning and teaching in CHCs and in Western cultures. These include factors believed to contribute to success, order of learning-related activities, learning mechanisms, personal dispositions, and roles of students and teachers. These differences not only provide lenses through which to examine the experiences of Dongmei and Wenying, but also serve as a framework to analyze teachers' cultural scripts in teaching Chinese as a second language education. The reference to both CHCs and Western cultures does not imply that they are homogeneous, nor that they are associated with fixed and predictable behaviour. Rather, the differences discussed below refer to a fundamental set of distinctive values and beliefs that are perceived to be shared by many members of that culture.

Effort vs. ability

In CHCs it is believed that everyone is educable. It is the individual's effort, or will power, not intelligence, or ability, that makes the difference (Lee, 1996). Therefore, in CHCs, students must take full responsibility for their own success or failure. As the Chinese saying goes: "With constant grinding, a needle may be made from a pestle". By contrast, there is a tendency in the West to attribute success to ability. Cross-cultural studies of students' opinion on success support this claim (Biggs, 1996; C. Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a; Hau & Salili, 1996). Biggs (1996) reported that Hong Kong secondary school students attribute success first and foremost to effort, then to interest in study, study skill, mood, and only fifth, to ability. He commented, "the first four are more or less controllable; the fifth, which Western students see as most important for success, is not" (Biggs, 1996, p. 59). In fact, in CHCs success achieved through hard work is valued more highly than that gained by high ability (Biggs & Watkins, 1996, p. 275).

This is the fundamental assumption that sets the CHC educational tradition apart from the Western tradition. Because of the attribution of success to effort, learning is usually associated with diligence and hard work in CHCs. In Cortazzi and Jin's (1996a) investigation of Chinese students' perception of a "good" student, "hard working" was the number one characteristic. The same finding is also reported in Shi's (2006) study 10 years later.

Knowledge and skills vs. exploration

Beliefs about the appropriate order in which various learning-related activities should take place have a strong influence on teaching pedagogies and learning strategies. Biggs (1996, p. 55) states that Chinese people believe that knowledge and skill development must come first. Only then is there something to be creative with. In CHCs, the end is a product, not a process. Biggs notes that American education, on the other hand, is more concerned with the process than with the product; exploring and creating are seen as more important than honing the specific skills.

Chinese educational tradition puts more weight on teaching and learning content or knowledge. The value placed on knowledge and its conservation is apparent in the common Chinese expressions for "teaching" – *jiaoshu* (the teaching of books); and "schooling" – *dushu* (the reading of books) (Mok, et al., 2001, p. 261).

Rote learning (repetition and memorisation) vs. understanding

Closely related to the emphasis on knowledge and skills is the importance of repetition and memorisation in CHCs. If knowledge and skills are the foundations upon which an education is built, they need to be gained by any means. Repetition and memorisation are regarded in CHCs as two basic learning strategies to achieve this goal. Because of the wide use of these strategies, the Chinese learner is often viewed as a rote learner. However, Biggs and Watkins (1996, p. 270) contend that this is a Western misperception, and simply to equate memorising and repeating to rote learning is simplistic. Many CHC students learn repetitively in the belief that memorisation can lead to understanding. They see "repetition as a route to understanding" (Hess & Azuma, 1991, p. 7). In his synthesis of studies of CHC students, Watkins (2000) reported that repetition serves two different purposes for CHC students: to create a "deep impression" and thereby aid memorisation, and to deepen or develop understanding by uncovering new meaning. Western students, however, tend to use repetition to check that they have really remembered something. This, Watkins explains, is because Western students see understanding as a process of sudden insight; Chinese students typically think of understanding as a long process that requires considerable mental effort (Watkins, 2000, p. 166).

Indeed Chinese people have great faith in the role repetition and memorisation play in learning, as this well-known Chinese saying indicates: "Only after a book is read a hundred times does its meaning become obvious". It is therefore very common to see Chinese students reading texts repeatedly when learning a foreign language.

Docility vs. independence

According to Hess and Azuma (1991) and Biggs (1996), children in CHCs develop a docile disposition prior to beginning schooling which matches the behaviour required at school. By contrast, Western children are generally raised to be assertive, independent, curious, and to explore on their own terms. These qualities, however, are not rewarded in all schools. In Western society, therefore, there is a mismatch "with children being socialized one way out of school, another way in school" (Biggs, 1996, p. 58). As a result, whereas children in CHCs do not, generally speaking, need to be motivated to learn, in the Western education system, students need to be constantly motivated to do so (Biggs, 1996, p. 58). Thus, Hess and Azuma (1991, p. 7) found that in American schools, "the teacher often provides specific stimuli or a stimulus environment that *appeals* to the children, engages them with encouragement and feedback, and moves on briskly.... Children are *enticed* into working by presenting tasks in easy steps, by assuring prompt success, and by moving briskly from a completed problem to a new one. The teacher does not count on internalized diligence; the stimulus environment is designed to *induce* interest and create a motivation to work on the task" (emphasis added). Students are less likely to be blamed for inattention in American schools, because the teacher not only "attends to the details and strategies of presenting subject matter but also takes responsibility for engaging the interest of the class. The success and quality of schools are judged by their ability to *arouse* interest in the student" (Hess & Azuma, 1991, p. 7, emphasis added). This is in sharp contrast to their counterparts in CHCs.

The role of students and teachers

From the preceding discussion it can be seen that in CHCs students are expected to study hard and take responsibility for their level of achievement. They are required to be docile in the classroom and to follow the teacher's instructions. Being hardworking, diligent and well-behaved are regarded in CHCs as the primary characteristics of a good student (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996a, p. 189). The most important characteristics of a good teacher in CHCs are to have a deep knowledge of the subjects and to be able to present this knowledge to the students. Cortazzi and Jin's study (1996a, p. 189) found that the CHC teacher who lacks subject knowledge is not a "good teacher" in his or her students' eyes. In their study of British and Chinese secondary school students' expectations of a good teacher, Jin and Cortazzi (1998) found that, while the British students valued the teacher's ability to arouse the students' interest, explain clearly, use effective instructional methods, and organise a range of activities, Chinese students valued teachers with deep knowledge, the ability to answer questions, and who were good moral models.

In CHCs, teachers are expected not only to act as a moral model for students to imitate but also to have authority. Perhaps because of these expectations, classes in CHCs are usually quite formal, and teachers can "be highly authoritarian if necessary in order to keep absolute control over the situation" (Ho, 2001, p. 112). As a result, Ho observed, "teacher-centred pedagogy and student compliance are still prevalent in many modern Chinese societies despite the fact that some of them [such as Hong Kong], have a long history of Western influence" (Ho, 2001, p. 99).

Summary

The cultural differences presented above can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Different emphases in culture of learning and teaching: CHCs vs. Western (adapted from Cortazzi & Jin, 1996b, p. 74)

Categories	CHCs	Western cultures
Factors attributing to success	Diligence	Ability
Priority of learning	Knowledge/skills first	Exploration first
Learning mechanism	Repetition/memorisation	Enlightenment
Student behaviour disposition	Docility	Independence
Role of student	To study hard	To explore
Role of teacher	Expert, presenter	Motivator, organizer
Teaching approach	Teacher-centred Pace, presentation	Student-centred Activities, tasks
Teacher-student relationship	Hierarchical: agreement, harmony, respect Formal	Horizontal: discussion, argument Informal

These different categories are interdependent and integrated. Thus in CHCs, because personal effort is believed to play a decisive role in success, students have full responsibility for their achievement. Because the acquisition of knowledge and skills are viewed as important, teaching is generally knowledge-transmission-oriented, pace and presentation are regarded as good teaching performance, and learning is repetition and memorization dominant. Because students have been shaped to be docile in society, they are expected to be compliant in the classroom, and teachers in CHCs are, in turn, expected to be authoritative. This in turn leads the teacher-student relationship in CHCs to be more hierarchical and formal, with an emphasis on agreement, harmony and respect.

In Western cultures, because success is attributed to ability, students are not held solely responsible for their achievement. Because the emphasis is put on exploration in learning and on students' independent dispositions, teachers are seen to be responsible for their students' academic achievement to a much greater degree than in CHCs. The teacher's responsibility includes motivating students and maintaining their interest. Teaching in Western schools is therefore more student-centred with attention given not only to the details and strategies of presenting subject matter, but also to engaging the interest of the class. Teacher-student relationships in Western schools thus tend to be more horizontal and informal, with more discussion and argument permitted in the classroom.

It should be said that the cultural differences between education systems in CHCs and the Western cultures are broader and more complex than the generalised differences highlighted above. Within a single culture values can differ significantly. While caution is needed to avoid simplistic stereotyping, these identified differences can nonetheless serve as an analytical starting point to examine CHC teachers' cultural scripts and the challenges they face when teaching in the Western schools. The analysis of the two specific cases in this way is the focus of the next section.

CHC teachers' cultural scripts and challenges in teaching in the West

Drawing on the conceptual framework discussed above, I now examine Dongmei's and Wenying's cultural scripts and the challenges they faced when teaching in the West.

Emphasis on "effort"

It is obvious that both Dongmei and Wenying held the fundamental belief in CHCs that "effort" makes difference in learning, and they valued diligence. Dongmei believed "good" students are those who have a desire to learn and are willing to study hard, as stated in Excerpt 1. If some students did not do well in learning Chinese, she assumed that they did not try hard enough. For example, when she commented on a student's poor performance in learning characters, she said that girl did not practise enough. The dichotomy she perceived between "having fun" and learning, as presented in Excerpt 2, is also rooted in this belief.

Wenying also placed "effort" on the top consideration, which is revealed in her comments on the students at School W (see Excerpt 3 and 4). In her opinion, "good" students are those who have developed a positive learning attitude, which means "they are committed to learning and would like to put effort into it". This attitude is not limited to students, but applies to teachers as well, according to Wenying. She believed that the teacher should set a model for her students, because it is the teacher's attitude and sense of responsibility that helps win student trust. Wenying particularly considered "hardworking" as a wining characteristic of CHC teachers (see Excerpt 4).

Because of the belief in the importance of effort, CHC teachers might tend to blame students for low achievement. The challenge for CHC teachers is therefore to pay more attention to knowing their students so that their pedagogy is more tailored to meet students' needs. During the case study, both Dongmei and Wenying admitted that knowing their students is one of the big challenges they faced.

Focus on teaching "content" and presentation

Influenced by the weight put on the importance of knowledge in the CHC educational tradition, CHC teachers tend to focus on teaching students "things" (content) and their own presentation. For example, when she was introducing Chinese culture to the students, Dongmei put a lot of effort into presenting content and much less effort into encouraging them to explore the culture. She was conscious of whether her students had learnt something "solid" from her class. Her worksheets, too, were "content-oriented", compared with the worksheets of the French programme, which in her opinion were more "fun-oriented", as stated in Excerpt 2.

Wenying, on the other hand, cared much about her presentation in teaching, and about making sure "everything goes smoothly". Her teaching practice was very teacher-controlled with clear steps starting from words (pronunciation and characters), moving to sentence structures, then dialogue, and concluding with writing a passage. This procedure is in line with the Chinese tradition of literacy education, which begins with teaching characters, then proceeds to words, sentences, paragraphs, and ends with a passage. This is considered to be the fixed order of teaching and learning the Chinese language in Chinese schools. This approach is still widely used in China today, even in English classes, as observed by Cortazzi and Jin (1996a, pp. 182-183).

Focus on content presentation might make teachers to put more attention to their self-performance. CHC teachers thus face the challenges of shifting attention to engaging students into learning process, to simulating their interest and nurturing their desire to explore the target language and culture.

Appreciation of the student's docile disposition

Perhaps because they were themselves educated to be docile and compliant in CHC educational tradition, both Dongmei and Wenying regarded the student's docility as a desirable characteristic of a "good" student. While Dongmei appraised the students at School D as better-disciplined compared with students at other schools (see Excerpt 1), Wenying credited her predecessor on her achievement in developing the students' good docile behaviour at School W (see Excerpt 3 and 4). In fact both Dongmei and Wenying put a lot of effort into controlling student behaviour in class. They seemed to have achieved their goal, as the students in their Chinese language classes tended to be docile and were generally well-behaved. The same observation of Chinese language classes in American schools appears in Chen's (2006) report. She writes:

中文课堂上我们见到的学生大多比较乖顺，能够根据教师的布置和要求展开学习活动，课堂上的学习状态和服从性都较好。(F. Chen, 2006, p. 125)

Most students in Chinese language classes we observed are very *docile* – they follow the teachers' instructions and participate in learning activities. Both their attitude to their studies and their level of *obedience* in the classroom are good. (My own translation, emphasis added.)

While the above observations present an optimistic picture of Chinese language classrooms, it does not follow that classroom management seems easy to CHC teachers. On the contrary, during the study, both Dongmei and Wenying nominated classroom management as the biggest challenge they experienced when they started teaching in New Zealand schools. CHC teachers must be prepared to face this challenge when they come to teach in the West.

Care about the student's respect for the teacher

Having grown up in the tradition which regards highly "the dignity of the teaching profession", CHC teachers are sensitive to the students' respect for the teacher. Talking about their students, both Dongmei and Wenying named the students' respect for them as a merit (see Excerpt 1 and 3). Their concern about this respect influenced the ways they worked with students. Teaching in a Western context, Wenying always paid attention to winning student trust in CHC teachers generally, and she was particularly conscious about the students' word-of-mouth comment about her teaching and the Chinese programme.

Dongmei, although an experienced English language teacher, found it difficult to establish relationships with the students in New Zealand schools. She did not know how close she should be to her students. A story she told illustrates her dilemma. In her first year of teaching at School D, at the end of Term One, a Y8 (aged 12) girl came to her and said "I want to give you a hug". Dongmei did not know how to respond to this, and just smiled at the girl in response. She did not let the girl hug her, and, of course, nor did she hug the girl. She said in the interview "we Chinese people are not used to doing this". Her comment, "Poor little girl" seemed to suggest regret.

As Dongmei's experience shows, CHC teachers often find it challenging to establish the expected teacher-student relationship in Western schools, due to the different status of teachers in the different cultures.

A strategy to bridge the cultural gulf

Studies of teacher and student beliefs about language teaching and learning in second language education (Arnett & Turnbull, 2007; Barcelos, 2003; Brown, 2009; Polat, 2009) have found that both teachers and students bring their own expectations and beliefs about effective language teaching and learning into the classroom, and that mismatches between teacher beliefs and student beliefs often affect classroom activities and can result in negative learning experiences. There is, therefore, a need to address discrepancies between teacher and student beliefs, particularly those rooted deeply in cultural differences (Polat, 2009, p. 230). There are a number of crucial generalised differences between CHC and Western cultures, and these differences underlie the challenges for CHC teachers teaching in the West, particularly in areas such as pedagogy, classroom management and teacher-student relationship establishment, as both Dongmei's and Wenying's cases have shown.

What strategy should be adopted to bridge the cultural gulf and address these challenges? Intercultural awareness raising and intercultural competence development are proposed as strategies. Although it is not new in itself, the concept "intercultural competence" has been gaining momentum in second language education internationally (Newton, 2009, p. 1). There are a number of definitions of intercultural competence, but the most influential one is provided by Byram (1997). Byram (2003, p. 62) has identified five *savoirs*, or components of intercultural competence. They are summarized as follows:

- *Attitudes*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own (*savoir être*).

- *Knowledge*: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction (*savoirs*).

- *Skills of interpreting and relating*: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own (*savoir comprendre*).

- *Skills of discovery and interaction*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*).

- *Critical cultural awareness/political education*: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (*savoir s'engager*).

These five components also offer guidelines for intercultural competence development in teachers from educational cultures different from that of their students. In my opinion, the starting point for this development is awareness raising. Only when teachers become aware of differences in learning culture between them and their students, can they start to take actions to address these differences in their teaching practices, as Dongmei's case shows. This awareness raising is crucial because, despite the usefulness of generalisations as a starting point, in reality differences between any cultures are not clear-cut. "Small culture", that is the culture situated in a local context, must be taken into consideration (Clark & Gieve, 2006). In countries with a great number of immigrants, such as New Zealand, multi-cultural classes have become more than common, with many students coming from other cultures rather than CHCs and the Western cultures. As pointed out earlier, even within CHCs or within Western cultures, the values and beliefs will vary among individuals. Therefore, when teaching in this multi-cultural context, teachers are required to be sensitive to different cultures and to be explorers themselves. This awareness raising is not limited to teachers. It is also important to teacher educators and school administrators in order to gain a better understanding of teachers and their practices so that they would be in a better position to provide pre-service and in-service support.

How can these stakeholders' awareness of any cultural gulf be raised and how can they be helped to develop their intercultural competence so that they can work together and bridge the gulf? There is an extensive literature on cultural differences which is useful but any reading needs to be in the context of engaging teachers, researchers, teacher educators, and school administrators in discussion and reflection. The stories of the participants in this study offer case studies for consideration and reflection. For instance, through the interviews, Dongmei reflected on her teaching practices and identified challenges she encountered in her first year of teaching at a new school. She then became engaged in the process of problem solving, by making an explicit statement of the differences between two teaching contexts and seeking how to resolve the problems as she saw them (more details can be found in Sun, 2010).

Such case studies are useful input for workshops that are intended to engage teachers in reflection in a collaborative way. The vicarious experiences can encourage participants to tell their own stories, reflect on their own experiences and identify any changes or action research that might be indicated. Based on these reflections teachers may like to plan and conduct action research on their own practices in collaboration with teacher educators/researchers. Such engagement by teachers would help broaden and deepen their understanding of themselves and their students, and guide them in working out their own way to develop their intercultural competence and their students' as well, and ultimately to bridge any gulf in learning cultures. This effort towards intercultural competence development is in line with the goal set for the new learning area of *Learning Languages* in the *New Zealand Curriculum*, in which it is stated that "learning a new language provides a means of communicating with people from another culture and exploring one's own personal world" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 24). Teaching starts with teachers learning.

Conclusion

Taking the experiences of two CHC teachers as examples, I have discussed the influences CHC teachers' cultural scripts had on their teaching practice and the challenges they faced when teaching in the West, New Zealand included, and suggested an approach for bridging cultural gulfs. The cases presented in this article can potentially raise awareness of cultural influences on the teaching and learning of Chinese in Western schools. The cultural differences highlighted could serve as a conceptual framework to help CHC teachers, school administrators and teacher educators work together to understand the nature of gulfs in learning culture. This understanding is the basis for reducing the mismatch between the beliefs of CHC teachers and their students about the teaching and learning of Chinese.

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