Chapter 8
Flexible Acculturation and Identity Transformation in L1-L2 Chinese Language Teachers in Hong Kong International Schools

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Abstract This chapter explores the themes of acculturation and identity transformation among seven Chinese language teachers in Hong Kong. These teachers, who initially taught Chinese as a first language in local Chinese schools, later transitioned to teaching Chinese as a second or near-native language in English-dominant international schools. This study utilises a qualitative research approach, focusing on the long-term teaching experiences of the participants to gain insights into their transformational experiences and acculturation processes from their narratives. We draw on flexible acculturation theory and teacher identity theory to examine the connections and disconnections between acculturation processes and identity change across schools. The findings underscore the participants' profound meaning-making processes as they trainsitioned from teaching in local schools to international schools. The participants' previous professional identities as L1 teachers allowed them to draw on multiple resources with a deeper understanding about language teaching and and self-assurance in their changing roles as language educators. They critically reflected on these changing experiences in their subsequent teaching practices within international school contexts. This study holds implications for teacher education and professional development programmes, suggesting the need for tailored initiatives designed to support Chinese language teachers during their transition to teaching in international schools.

Keywords L1 teaching · L2 teaching · Chinese language teachers · International schools · Identity transformation

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8.1 Introduction

China had the second-largest number of students attending English-medium international schools in the world, amounting to 479,700 in 2015 (EducationInvestor, 2015). It is estimated that the number of students attending English, private, and international schools will reach 1.2 million in East Asia by 2029 (Davis & Waite, 2020). In the East Asian international school sector, Chinese language education plays a vital role due to the massive demand from students raised by native-Chinese-speaking families as well as non-native-Chinese-speaking students who learn Chinese as a second or foreign language. In the major Chinese-speaking areas such as mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, Chinese has been offered as a compulsory subject daily in most international schools. Understanding the role of Chinese language teachers in these international schools, especially Chinese-as-a-foreign-language (CFL) teachers, is significant for several reasons—not least for the influence of international school contexts on the previous Chinese teaching approaches and beliefs they had—and to which they may integrate, mediate, or transform—and their impact on students from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The CFL teachers in our study had initially taught L1 Chinese to native Chinese students in a local school context in Hong Kong or mainland China before they teach Chinese to non-native-Chinese-speaking students in international schools. Although this group of teachers is rarely reported in the literature, it is not uncommon in the Chinese-as-an-international-language teaching force (Li & Lai, 2022). Indeed, Chinese language teachers in international schools are not a homogeneous population; they were not all trained as second language teachers at the very beginning. Instead, they demostrate a range of differences in terms of their prior academic training, professional experiences, school environments, and subjects of instruction. These differences significantly influence their teaching beliefs and pedagogical practices in their current school settings. Our research focuses on how these teachers adapted themselves to international school contexts that differed significantly from their former schools in terms of pedagogies, disciplinary specialisations, student backgrounds, and school cultures. It also examines the degree to which their previous teaching experiences facilitated or constrained their ability to adapt to their L2 teaching roles in international school settings. These issues are critical to Chinese language teachers planning to pursue a teaching career in an international school context and stakeholders interested in understanding this emerging pool of teaching force, which has significant implications for CFL teacher professionalisation.

In this study, we aim to provide a typology of identity transformation in L2 Chinese teachers with prior teaching experiences as L1 teachers, highlighting the ways through which these teachers have adjusted to the distinct challenges of teaching Chinese in international school contexts. Our study demonstrates that these teachers did not simply abandon their earlier L1 teaching methods upon transitioning to teach in international schools. Instead, they have developed a new identity characterised by a complex dynamic system that enables them to adapt their teaching approaches effectively, catering to the needs of the diverse student populations they encounter.

8.2 Literature Review

8.2.1 Acculturation

Acculturation, a concept for understanding the adaptation process of immigrants in host societies, was traditionally defined as the process of cultural change initiated by the encounter between the host culture and the heritage culture (Redfield et al., 1936, 1954). In the acculturation process, acculturative changes may appear in different forms, such as modifications of one's heritage culture, a selective adaptation of value systems of the host culture, or a mixture of both cultures. Whereas the traditional conceptualisations of acculturation have been criticised for their unidimensional approach to predicting a singular result, such as assimilation or the melting pot (Lee, 2008; Pham & Harris, 2001).

Berry and his associates (Berry, 1986, 1997, 1998; Berry et al., 1987) proposed a bidimensional model of acculturation, which involves the preservation of one's heritage culture and adoption of the host culture. According to this model, identification with one's heritage culture does not necessarily stand against that with the host culture. In this model, combinations of high and low positions yield four strategies of acculturation: *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation*, and *marginalisation* (see Fig. 8.1). Integration refers to acculturation strategies that individuals use to maintain their heritage culture and absorb the host culture at the same time; assimilation refers to strategies that individuals place a high value on the host culture but negate or reject their heritage culture; separation, in contrast to assimilation, comprises strategies that individuals advocate their heritage culture but reject the host culture; and marginalisation refers to the strategies that individuals reject both their heritage culture and the host culture.

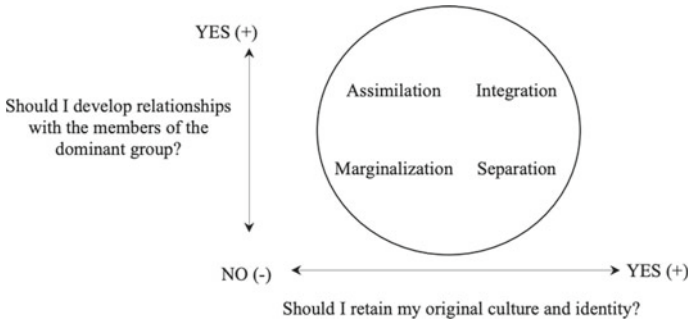

Fig. 8.1 Adapted from Berry (1997)

8.2.2 *Flexible Acculturation*

Situated at the intersection of functional and conflict theoretical paradigms, Nederveen-Pieterse (2007, 2010) proposed the concept of *flexible acculturation*, which can be used to understand cultural transmission processes in intercultural settings. As explained by Lee (2008), flexible acculturation, differing from the ideas of assimilation, melting pot, or multiculturalism, includes different interactions among different social groups, and; it refers to both agency and social forces so that "it is more comprehensive than the idea of acculturation in acculturation psychology" (p. 51). As Lee pointed out, when studying flexible acculturation processes, it is essential to identify critical social actors and their social positions shaped by historical and contemporary social contexts. Lee identified four essential virtues for the flexible acculturation concept that differ from the traditional acculturation concept: (1) it has diverse social players, rather than just political and economic elites; (2) it is not only about differences but also about interactions; (3) it includes multiple processes; and (4) it is not merely about the agency but also about social regulations.

Flexible acculturation theory is especially useful for studying the complexity of identity construction in multicultural or transcultural contexts when traditional concepts of space and time are challenged due to the increasing migration, professional change, and cross-cultural interaction. In international schools, teachers, particularly those specialising in teaching CFL, represent a distinct group nessesitating flexible acculturation as they are situated in transcultural workplaces where the boundaries between nation-states are dissolving, and the traditional concept of citizenship is being challenged. This study perceives CFL teachers as active social actors engaged in a multifaceted acculturative process. Their adaptative process of teaching CFL in international schools can be understood as an acculturative process. The international schools, in turn, create specific social fields within which the teachers navigate the complexities of their acculturation processes.

8.2.3 *Teacher Identity*

Teacher identity has been a popular research focus in recent decades, and it is often underpinned by the poststructuralist approach that recognises its multiple, complex, situated, and shifting nature (Firth & Wagner, 1997, 2007; Morgan, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003). For teachers, the process of constructing their identities involves a complex negotiation process between their personal and social identities, which are shaped by how they perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others (Li, 2022). Ethnicity, race, gender, and cultural background are essential variables that contribute to identity construction, which is also influenced by historical, socio-political, educational, and socio-economic contexts. According to Sachs (2005), the process of teacher identity construction could guide teachers on "how to be," "how to act," and "how to understand" their professions and roles in society (p. 15).

A few salient studies of Chinese teacher identity in international school contexts investigated the complex process of their pedagogical beliefs and practices intertwined in the nest of traditional Chinese education practices and the Western-liberal international school practices (e.g., Lai et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2015; Li & Lai, 2022). For instance, Li's (2015) study on the identity construction of Chinese language teachers in international schools in Hong Kong revealed that the process of teacher identity construction represented a type of CFL pedagogical innovation, which involves a balanced approach that critically examines traditional teaching methods while acculturating themselves in new or Western-based teaching approaches.

Language teacher identity is a significant issue in the teacher identity literature, particularly in light of the widespread expansion of foreign language learning worldwide. The linguistic, ethnic, and sociocultural dynamics involved in foreign language teachers significantly influence how identity is constructed, negotiated, and transformed. In Hayriye Kayi-Aydar's (2019) review of empirical studies on language teacher identity, five kinds of language teacher identities have been reported as the most frequently studied: narrated identities (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011), identities-in-practice (e.g., Trent, 2010), gendered identities (e.g., Appleby, 2013), future selves (Urzúa, & Vásquez, 2008), and sociocultural identities (e.g., Ajayi, 2011). However, empirical data to understand various types of teacher identities remain insufficient. To enrich the demographic data of CFL teachers in international schools, we aimed to study a group of teachers who previously taught L1 Chinese in local school contexts and then switched to teaching L2 Chinese in Western-based, English-medium, private international schools in Hong Kong. The exploration of their identities revealed a transprofessional aspect (Li & Lai, 2022), enabling them to seamlessly switch between teaching different subject areas within language teaching. Our research objective was to understand how these teachers were acculturated into international school settings that differed in many social and cultural dimensions from their previous local school environments. The research question we attempted to examine is: How do the CFL teachers acculturate themselves during the transition from teaching L1 Chinese in local schools to teaching L2 Chinese in international schools?

8.2.4 Theoretical Framework

In our study, we use both Berry's (1986, 1997, 1998) bidimensional acculturation framework and Nederveen-Pieterse's (2007, 2010) flexible acculturation theory as an integrated framework to demonstrate the transformational aspect of CFL teachers' identity across their narrated experiences of teaching L1 and L2 Chinese in local and international schools respectively. This transformational aspect mainly illustrates how CFL teachers utilise their 'trans-professional experiences' (Li & Lai, 2022) to achieve their professional and social goals. As a result, the concept of flexible acculturation in teacher research has been extended into the field of international education. Berry's (1986, 1997, 1998) bidimensional acculturation framework was adopted to understand patterns of the teachers' acculturation process in the host culture of

international schools, while Nederveen-Pieterse's (2007, 2010) flexible acculturation theory was used as a supplementary theory to identify changing aspects of different stages of the acculturation process. We are aware that these two theories stem from different theoretical disciplines: the former is based on a socio-psychological framework that focuses on individual positions in the host culture, while the latter is a construct from the intersection of functional and conflict theoretical paradigms that emphasises both individual agency and the social structure. By integrating these theories, we seek to offer a more holistic insight into the complex, changing nature of teacher identity in school-based acculturative processes in our research context.

8.3 Methodology

8.3.1 Data Collection

Our study aimed to explore teachers' constructions of their identity as educators. We collected teachers' views through semi-structured one-to-one interviews with seven teachers. The interviews were conducted with individual teachers within their school compounds, and one was conducted at a cafeteria with a retired teacher. Interview questions were developed based on the following themes: (i) career biography, including previous L1 teaching beliefs, practices, and reasons for career changes; (ii) the acculturation process of switching from L1 teaching to L2 teaching; (iii) the acculturation process of transitioning from teaching in local schools to international schools; (iv) differences, similarities, or interconnections between the two teaching experiences; and (v) meaning-making of the acculturative process. The authors, who are experienced in research on CFL teacher education, interviewed the teachers on a face-to-face basis during the autumn semester of 2019. The questions we asked the teachers were primarily open-ended, allowing for rich, authentic narratives from the participants using their own terminology. Each interview lasted about one hour and was recorded on a digital recorder. A research assistant then transcribed the recordings. To maintain anonymity, all names and identifying information have been replaced with pseudonyms.

8.3.2 Participants

The seven participants in our study (see Table 8.1) were experienced teachers who taught in local schools and English-medium, International Baccalaureate (IB) international schools for a substantial number of years in Hong Kong. All the participants were certified teachers in Hong Kong and held a bachelor's or master's degree. They were all native Chinese speakers and were highly fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English.

We recruited the participants using a snowball sampling approach due to the specificity of the career change experiences they shared. It is important to note that justifying sample size can be a significant challenge in qualitative research and may lack rigour (Marshall et al., 2013). We adopt a 'localist perspective' (Qu & Dumay, 2011) toward our interview approach, which emphasises the importance of the interview process. This approach allowed the participants to reflect on the meaning of our research topic and provided a space for them to construct their situated identities via narrating their trans-professional stories (see Li & Lai, 2022).

Table 8.1 Educational and teaching backgrounds of the participants

Teacher code	Gender	Total Years of teaching	Years of teaching in Hong Kong local schools	Years of teaching in Hong Kong international schools	Level of education	School Section	Roles at current school
A	Male	13	11	2	Master's	Primary	Head of Chinese
B	Female	27	7	20	Master's	Secondary	Head of Chinese
C	Female	15	7	8	Master's	Secondary	Teacher of Chinese
D[1]	Female	38	13	11	Bachelor's	Secondary	Former Head of Chinese (retired for one year)
E	Female	10	6	4	Master's	Secondary	Teacher of Chinese
F[2]	Male	18	4	10	Master's	Primary	Head of Chinese
G	Female	10	6	4	Bachelor's	Primary	Teacher of Chinese

[1]Teacher D worked as an L1 Chinese teacher in a nation-state, secondary school in mainland China for 14 years before teaching in Hong Kong.
[2]Teacher F worked as a homeroom teacher in a local primary school in New Zealand for four years before teaching in Hong Kong.

8.3.3 Data Analysis

We used thematic analysis to identify patterns of meanings and experiences from the interview data, which were first coded manually to subdivide the data into categories and then labelled and coded for allocating units of meanings (Dey, 1993). The codes, represented by chunks of words, phrases, sentences, or dialogues from the interview transcripts (Basit, 2003), were then constructed, compared, and recategorised to make a hierarchical order to describe the larger picture that accords with the research aim of our study. This way of analysing qualitative data allowed us to examine different participants' perspectives, find differences and similarities, and generate unanticipated points of view (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Three major themes representing the participants' transitional and acculturative processes were generated from the data: the experiences of conflicts and struggles in the early stages of L2 teaching, making meanings of the differences between L1 and L2 education and senses of job achievement, and the experiences of professional identity construction in international schools.

8.4 Findings

8.4.1 Managing conflicts and Struggles in Early Stages of L2 Teaching

The participants in this study vary in their acculturative processes in their early stages of teaching L2 Chinese. Some teachers (A, C, E) experienced severe 'cultural shocks,' whereas others (B, D, F, G) experienced a relatively smooth transition. For instance, Teacher A's initial experience of L2 teaching was not chosen by himself but was 'arranged' by his school since the school lacks a teacher force specialised in L2 education. In Excerpt 1, Teacher A talked about his early experiences teaching L2 Chinese in a local multicultural school:

Excerpt 1 (Teacher A on his frustration in his early teaching of L2 Chinese)

Teacher A: I enjoyed my teaching of L1 (to local Cantonese-speaking students) at that time since I was just graduated and the students were around 16 to 17 years old, and we all speak Cantonese as our mother tongue … Although their literacy level was not that good, I felt teaching them was like growing up with them together. However, when I switched to my L2 classroom, I almost cried every day after work …

Interviewer: Cried after work?

Participant A: Since I did not have any professional training in L2 teaching, and I didn't understand … so they (the L2 students) often said that they could not understand my teaching. However, when you speak too much English, you would feel that your English is not good enough, and you don't feel like teaching Chinese … so I struggled a lot and felt very confused.

Lacking preparation and sufficient training at the beginning of his L2 teaching led to frustration and a sense of underachievement for Teacher A. The opposite

feelings and senses of achievement toward teaching L1 and L2 Chinese revealed his 'acculturative stress' (Berry et al., 1987) with new symbols he came across in a teaching context that was new to him. Teaching L1 did not contain much about dealing with the unknown cultures and subjects of teaching, so he did not feel any sense of isolation or marginalisation in an L1 classroom.

Interestingly, Teacher A's attitude toward L2 teaching changed dramatically at a later time, especially after he completed a part-time master's study in Second Language Education. As he analysed his way of adjustment in Excerpt 2:

Excerpt 2 (Teacher A on the reasons for his early frustration in L2 teaching)

Teacher A: Honestly, you have to admit that L2 students are a bit more active than L1 students in classrooms. They are really active … For instance, we require our kids (L1 students) to be quiet and listen to their teacher. Whereas it would be impossible to ask the L2 students to do this as this was their culture. They liked to ask their teacher about this and that. I understood this gradually. I think my sense of failure in L2 teaching (in the beginning) was because of … my self-centrism. That is, I thought all students should be like this … but they think teachers should not be like this … The second reason was my pedagogical approach … why did I speak English all day? Didn't I want to be a teacher of Chinese? … Also, I understood (after the master's study) that L2 acquisition was different from L1 acquisition. They are two different kinds of things. I then started adjusting my teaching approaches.

Teacher A's frustration with L2 teaching revealed the challenge of adjusting to a new teaching context and the need for teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices. Teacher A's identity as a teacher was initially anchored in his experience with L1 students, and then he struggled to adapt to the different expectations and behaviours of L2 students. Theoretical training in L2 education during his postgraduate study and continuous self-reflection helped generate new knowledge about L2 teaching for Teacher A. His realisation that L2 acquisition is different from L1 acquisition allowed him to be able to gradually adapt to the new context. This brought about the adjustment of his teaching strategies and attitudes and provided an acculturative channel to allow him to gradually adjusted to the L2 teaching context. Thus, this adjustment further reduced his acculturative stress and the conflict with the L2 teaching context.

Excerpt 3 (Teacher C on her learning of classroom management in her early teaching in an international school)

Teacher C: I remember one time I asked my Year 7 students to be quiet as they were very noisy. And then I asked the whole class to stand up. Actually, I did not intend to punish them but asked them to stand up to reflect on their behavior. Afterward I received a complaint from a parent. One student's mother said to me that her child felt very aggrieved about my strategy and thought I was so aggressive that I scolded the whole class, so her child cried after he went back home. I felt this child was not very naughty (and did not understand what went wrong). Then gradually, I realised that international school teachers rarely criticise students negatively and usually used more positive strategies to discipline students … I learned little by little by observing how the Western teachers discipline the students. They did a very good job in this.

In Excerpt 3, Teacher C experienced similar difficulties in classroom management in her early days of L2 teaching. She initially used a teaching strategy that was effective in her previous teaching context (asking the whole class to stand up to reflect on

their behaviour), but then found this strategy was not effective in the international school context and led to a complaint from a parent. Through observation and learning from Western teachers, she gradually adapted her teaching strategies to better suit the cultural norms and expectations of students in the new school context. She made acculturative changes to her classroom management strategies, allowing her to gradually adapt to the international school context. These changes seem inevitable since the loss of ownership and autonomy during the transition from L1 to L2 teaching and the contextual change would cause negative psychological consequences if they constantly fail to adjust to the new context (Berry, 1998).

However, other teachers did not experience strong acculturative stress. This is probably due to their rich teaching experience across a range of culturally diverse schools before they joined international schools. For instance, as Teacher F described in Excerpt 4:

Excerpt 4 (Teacher F describing his transition from teaching in a local school to an international school)

Teacher F: For me, there is no adjustment process because everything was very natural. It seems like all my previous teaching experience was prepared for my teaching in my current school. Why do I say this? It is because I have mastered all the theories about L2 teaching. I have a Master's degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), so I have this theoretical base. Additionally, my teaching experience in New Zealand allowed me to familiarize myself with Western kids, right? … Actually, subject knowledge in L2 teaching is all about them … so I know how to tailor my teaching according to the characteristics of these kids.

In the above excerpt, Teacher F seemed to have undergone the process of integration (Berry, 1997), which was a process in which individuals maintain their original cultural identity while also adopting aspects of the new culture. Teacher F obtained a Master's degree in TESOL, which suggests that his theoretical background in L2 teaching was strong. This background allowed him to integrate into the culture of the international school in Hong Kong, which was characterised by a diverse student population and a focus on L2 teaching. Teacher F's transition from teaching in a local school to an international school can be seen as an example of how a teacher's identity was shaped by teaching experiences and contexts. Teacher F's previous teaching experience in New Zealand allowed him to familiarise himself with Western kids, which likely influenced his teaching style and approach. His transition to an international school was relatively smooth and natural, likely due to his strong theoretical background and previous teaching experience. His ability to tailor his teaching to the characteristics of his students suggests that he is a flexible and responsive teacher, which is an important aspect of teacher identity in the context of L2 teaching. It is evident that individual adaptation processes vary, and the early adaptations of teachers are significantly influenced by their prior teaching and educational experiences.

8.4.2 Making Sense of the Two Subject Areas of Chinese Language Teaching

Almost all teachers agreed that L1 and L2 teaching is different, mainly in terms of the objectives of teaching and subject knowledge. Meanwhile, they almost all agreed that L1 and L2 teaching had given them equal senses of achievement, but in different ways. Teacher F, as the Head Teacher of his team, talked about the differences between L1 and L2 teaching in Excerpt 5:

Excerpt 5 (Teacher F on differences in L1 and L2 teaching)

Teacher F: Teaching Chinese as a second language has been an issue for the recent 20 years. It has received international attention only in the recent ten years. The more demands in learning Chinese, the more influence this language would have on the globe. However, the research relating to L2 education mainly focuses on pedagogy and does not have so much experience as the field of L1 educational research, right? So many new things have emerged from L2 education … so it is fascinating. I felt it is fascinating in terms of its challenging nature and influential capacity.

Interviewer: Then what about L1 teaching?

Teacher F: L1 teaching actually has its limitations? First, it has been included in the framework set up by the Educational Bureau, so you have to reach its goal. The government has its rubrics for assessing L1 learning, like the TSA (Territory-wide System Assessment) or the Secondary School Entrance Examination, which are used to assess the Chinese language achievement of all Hong Kong children. This has led to the fact that all people use the guidelines for TSA as their teaching guidelines. However, L2 teaching is more flexible, because it has a wider space. L2 students are also highly diverse in their geographical backgrounds. So L2 education is more challenging and more tolerant. It is a newly emerging field, right?

It can be seen that Teacher F developed a deep interest in L2 teaching and its challenges, and saw it as a fascinating new field. He saw himself as an adaptable and responsive teacher in the context of L2 teaching. His narratives also revealed that he perceived himself as a forward-thinking and innovative teacher in the emerging profession of L2 teaching. As noted by Teacher F in the previous excerpt, all the teachers in this study have experienced the unique 'space' that exists within the field of L2 teaching. In comparison to L1 teaching, L2 teaching is a more emerging area with fewer restrictions from the Education Bureau, in contrast to the well-developed curricula of L1 Chinese. This allowed the participants of this study to experiment with new pedagogies, adjust old strategies, and explore their teaching potential. This space, which is not present in L1 teaching, allowed the participants to reconstruct their professional identities and make changes to their teaching beliefs and strategies. Gradually, their professional identities were developed and their teaching practices were improved within the unique context of L2 teaching.

Excerpt 6 (Teacher C on the differences between L1 and L2 teaching).

Interviewer: So … do you think any parts of your L1 teaching experience are useful for your L2 teaching? Or do you think they are completely different?

Teacher C: I should say they are very, very different. Since L1 teaching attaches importance to the appreciation for language and literature. Students need to know how to appreciate

the beauty of literature. You need to guide the students to feel different themes of beauty from literature and develop sympathy for humans … Whether students could have these kinds of feelings? Whether they could sense (the beauty)? Whether their language competence could reach this level? These are very critical things. Another difference is that critical thinking is more important in L1 teaching since we assume all students understand the language basically, how to use this language to communicate more effectively to express their thoughts at a deeper level? This is difficult. Whereas for L2 teaching, it is more important to teach the functional part of the target language, like how to effectively use some words, phrases, or sentences, and how to write a simple essay using the most simple words … so I think they (L1 and L2 teaching) are very different.

Like other teachers in this study, Teacher C perceived that L1 and L2 teaching mainly differs in objectives of teaching and subject knowledge. For her, L1 teaching emphasises more on enhancing students' appreciation for language and literature, which required guiding students to feel different themes of beauty from Chinese literature and develop deep sympathy for human beings. However, Teacher C saw L2 teaching as being more focused on teaching the functional aspects of the target language, such as how to effectively use words, phrases, and sentences, and how to write a simple essay using basic vocabulary. This perspective suggests that her L2 teaching goal is tied with teaching practical language skills and helping students achieve communicative competence in Chinese. These differences between teaching L1 and L2 Chinese were articulated by many other teachers.

Despite this, the participants did not think that teaching L2 is more simple than L1. Like the strong acculturative stress Teacher A experienced in his early days of L2 teaching (Excerpt 1, p. 6), L2 teaching is more about understanding the cultural backgrounds and the learning needs of the students and more about making adaptive changes to one's teaching approaches, as compared with L1 teaching. All the participants agreed that teaching L1 and L2 were both rewarding experiences, but in different ways, as described by Teacher D and C in the following two excerpts:

Excerpt 7 (Teacher D on senses of achievement in L1 and L2 teaching)

Interviewer: With regard to your senses of fulfilment in teaching, which one (L1 or L2 teaching) gives you more sense of achievement?

Teacher D: I think they are more or less the same. For L1 teaching, if your students could write a very good essay or a research report, you would feel a sense of achievement, right? Whereas for L2 students, if they could be conversational – that would also give you a strong sense of achievement. So it depends on what your standpoint is. I think no matter you are an L2 teacher or an L1 teacher, you could all have a sense of achievement from your teaching. The key thing is how to balance these psychological needs.

Excerpt 8 (Teacher C on the sense of achievement in L1 and L2 teaching)

Teacher C: They (teaching L1 and L2) are very different … I felt very happy when I taught L1 as I love teaching literature … if a student likes the literature you teach, or when you and your students have a deep discussion about literature, or when your students are touched by literature, you would feel very happy. This is a sense of achievement. However, to date, one (L2) student who impressed me most was a student from my Chinese beginner class. He started learning Chinese from scratch ... I remember in the last class he spoke Chinese from the beginning to the end, and then he bought a cup of coffee for me. I felt a strong sense of achievement because he started learning from scratch. Although his Chinese is pretty broken and simple, he could still communicate with me. We could have a sort of

connection. I felt this is very, very touching … he always tried to use the new words he had just learned to excitedly communicate with me … this sense of happiness in me could hardly be described.

Excerpts 7 and 8 revealed the two teachers' interpretation of senses of achievement in L1 and L2 teaching. Teacher D saw the sense of achievement in L1 teaching as being tied to students' ability to write a very good essay or research report, while in L2 teaching, the ability to hold a conversation could give her a sense of achievement. Teacher C described her sense of achievement in L1 teaching came from inspiring students to appreciate Chinese literature and engaging in deep discussions, whereas in L2 teaching the progress made by a beginner student who was able to communicate in Chinese, despite the students' limited Chinese language competence. Both teachers agreed that L1 and L2 teaching, although the target language is Chinese, created a different sense of achievement. When teaching L1, their sense of achievement comes from the improvement of students' higher-order thinking, literary skills, and aesthetic ability. Whereas when teaching L2, their sense of achievement comes from enabling the non-Chinese students to communicate in Chinese. Although there was a slight variation in their interpretations of the differences in teaching L1 and L2 and senses of achievement, they articulated more commonalities than variations in L1 and L2 teaching.

8.4.3 Reshaping Professional Identities in International Schools

The larger international school context also played a significant role in reshaping the professional identities during the acculturative processes of the participants. As Teacher C described:

Excerpt 9 (Teacher C on the influence of the international school context)

Interviewer: From your perspective, having worked in this school for so many years, has this school influenced you in terms of the context, your teaching beliefs, and self-perceptions.

Teacher C: Yes

Interviewer: In what ways?

Teacher C: In a local school … when you are searching for an answer, you have a set of model answers that has been already provided for you … standard answers. Since we all know that we have a bunch of rubrics for assessment, we all have to follow the rubrics. However, in an international school, you have to be more open-minded and listen to different voices of the students. Your students could even take the leading role and tell you the due dates they want … So I think international schools are more student-oriented … very often, you don't find a single answer to a question. For instance, in listening and reading tests, there are many conceptual questions, or we could say, open questions, which allow students to express their views. So there is no single answer set up for the students, and even for speaking tests – they allow students to express their opinions as well.

In Excerpt 9, Teacher C advocated the appreciation for diversity and the open-minded assessment culture in international schools. She described a more rigid

approach to teaching in her previous local school context as there were model answers provided for assessments and rubrics that must be followed. Many participants talked about the rigid system assessment of their previous local schools, which limited the spaces for individual teachers to tailor to students' individual needs. Under the international school system that embraces international mindedness and multiculturalism as its educational philosophy, the participants' teaching beliefs and practices were gradually reshaped to adopt more flexible, student-centred, formative, and individualistic assessment strategies. Other teachers also described the differences in work-related cultures in local and international school contexts:

Excerpt 10 (Teacher D on the differences between international and local school contexts)

Teacher D: I think the overall environment (of international schools) is better because teachers could have more freedom in teaching.

Interviewer: More freedom than that in local schools?

Teacher D: Yes, yes, more freedom. In local schools, the system is more strict. That means you have to accomplish your teaching plans by a specific date … However, in international schools, there is more space, like teachers could arrange the timelines for teaching by themselves and choose supplementary materials based on their preferences … So in an IB school, more freedom … entails higher requirements for teachers. You have to be a competent teacher. Otherwise, you become a textbook-driven teacher.

In Excerpt 10, Teacher D indicated the differences in her social role when working in different school contexts. As also indicated in Excerpt 7, the local school contexts had similar assessment approaches following the guidelines from the Education Bureau; this offered little spaces for teachers to exercise their agency in teaching and assessment. The teachers generally preferred the 'freedom' from the international school system as individual teachers' agency could be exercised to a greater extent. This 'free space' also influenced the participants' identity construction—from more passive to more active role players in their communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Exerpt 11 (Teacher G on the differences between international and local school contexts)

Teacher G: For instance when we have staff meetings … in my previous local school, teachers just sit in the meetings, and people in the higher positions make the decision and conduct the discussion. The teachers just need to perform their decisions. However, in this international school, no matter in the Chinese or International department, your colleagues all welcome you to express your viewpoints. So the atmosphere here is better.

Differences between local and international schools were also reflected in the relationship between teachers and school policymakers. As described by Teacher G in Excerpt 10, she found she could participate in staff meetings more actively in international schools by expressing her own views and participating in decision-making. This could not be realised in local schools where the relationship between teachers and policymakers is more hierarchical. Apparently, the participants' professional identities were shaped by different demands and expectations of each context. The student-centred approach and openness to diversity in the international school context have influenced the teachers' identities as a more adaptable, responsive teacher.

8.5 Concluding Remarks and Implications

Our study has explored the acculturation process of seven teachers who switched from teaching L1 Chinese to local school students to L2 Chinese to international school students, focusing on their identity construction during their acculturative experiences. In general, the participants' discourses about their acculturative process in international schools have manifested as more flexible than controlled processes of their identification processes (Lee, 2008). Most teacher identity studies in cross-cultural teaching support the view that identity is situated, dynamic, and changeable. These studies have also supported our argument that L1–L2 Chinese teachers actively participated in flexible acculturative processes, which are also processes for reconstructing their professional identities.

Understanding the identities of these teachers in their acculturative process in international schools is essential. Our study finds that teachers showed multiple ways in which they could be drawn into the profession of L2 teaching. Their successful acculturative experiences could inform teachers who would like to pursue a teaching career in international schools. The identity change experiences of these teachers demonstrate the flexible, dynamic, and malleable nature of teacher professional identity. The agency these teachers exercised is positively linked with their professional motivations and commitment. Whereas agency is not the only factor, a variety of work-related, contextual factors such as educational philosophy, student backgrounds, teaching approaches, and assessment methods all play important roles in shaping the teachers' professional beliefs and practices during their acculturation. What is more, our study revealed that there are no fixed disciplinary boundaries between L1 and L2 teaching, even though the teaching objectives and target students are usually different. The teachers in our study found special meanings that were peculiar to their professionalism and work commitment. This could also be seen as a flexible strategy (Lee, 2008; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2007, 2010) that maximised their sense of fulfilment in their changing teaching careers.

This study challenges the assumption that CFL teachers who previously taught L1 Chinese are ill-equipped to teach in international school contexts. Instead, our participants possessed a valuable skillset that enabled them to navigate the complexities of teaching Chinese in diverse settings. By establishing a typology of L2 Chinese teachers who previously worked as L1 teachers, this study provides an important reference for understanding the ways in which these teachers adapt to their new roles and responsibilities, and identifies areas where additional support may be needed to facilitate their transition to teaching in international schools. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of developing teacher education and professional development programmes that take into account the unique needs and experiences of CFL teachers who previously taught L1 Chinese. By providing targeted training and support to these teachers, we can help to ensure that they are able to effectively meet the needs of their students and contribute to the continued growth and development of Chinese language education in international school settings.

The insights of this study are relevant for individuals interested in teaching L2 Chinese in international school contexts and for international school recruiters. Our study has underscored the importance of understanding the teachers' previous teaching experiences and their transition to a new school context. By gaining insights into how these mature entrants adapt to teaching Chinese in international schools, we can inform teacher recruitment and development practices with theoretically and situationally informed insights.

Questions for reflection:

1. Why did the Chinese language teachers in this chapter experienced an identity transformation when they switched from teaching L1 Chinese to L2 Chinese?
2. What does 'flexible acculturation' described in this chapter mean? To what extent do the acculturation levels of Chinese language teachers may indicate teaching effectiveness? Why?
3. What policy changes and school initiatives could be implemented to support the acculturation process of Chinese language teachers in international school contexts?

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