

# “Learning Chinese” or “becoming sinophone”: incorporating learner identity in a model of cultural pedagogy for Chinese

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# Cover choices (i): “Great wall of Chinese characters”



# Cover choices (ii): “Clever Chinglish”



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# 1. The Great Wall of Chinese Language Teaching



# Great Walls of Discourse (Saussy 2001)

## btw ‘Chinese’ and ‘Foreigners’

Problem:

Q. How well does Chinese studies measure up to needs of students?

A. Effective outcome of university Chinese teaching: *prevent* foreigners from learning to use the language properly.

Solution:

learning Chinese ⇒ becoming sinophone

# “Chinese” versus “sinophone”

- “Chinese”: language / nation / ethnicity
- “sinophone”: Chinese language ⇒ Chinese voice
- Shih 2007: ‘sinophone culture’
- cultural products of Chinese language communities *outside* China
- cf *français* ‘French’ vs *francophone* ‘French language’
- Barme 2005/ 2010: ‘sinophone realm’,
- Chinese languages and cultures part of global world
- Chinese learners participating in hybridity

# “Becoming sinophone”: developing a Chinese voice

As a potential sinophone, you yourself must develop your own Chinese ‘voice’, quite literally in terms of mastering the sounds and wordings of the language, but also in the sense of finding an identity for yourself, of establishing a reference point for yourself in the sinophone world. After a while you will begin to assert yourself as a sinophone, to intervene in the dialogue, to put forward your own point of view, and to take issue with others’ points of view. (McDonald 2011)

## 2. The geopolitical context of Chinese teaching



# *duiwai* ‘towards foreign’ vs *guoji* ‘across nations’

- *duiwai Hanyu jiaoxue* ‘towards foreign Chinese teaching’: unidirectional from sinophone ‘centre’ to those seeking entry to sinophone sphere
- Office of Chinese Language Teaching International (Hanban) *Guojia duiwai Hanyu jiaoxue...* ‘State towards foreign Chinese teaching...’
- Confucius Institutes as extension of soft power
- Chinese language teaching as part of diplomatic project of Chinese state
- *guoji Hanyu jiaoxue* ‘international Chinese teaching’

# International Chinese language teaching (Lu 2010)

- ‘international Chinese language teaching’: from ‘please come in’ to ‘go out’
- construct a bridge of friendship – a Chinese language bridge – for all countries of world
- contribute our strength to establishment of harmonious international order
- adding “cultural power” to China’s existing global economic power (Ding & Saunders 2006)
- “The Chinese can’t make Chinese language teaching international, only the foreigners can” (Orton pc)

# *China: The Pessoptimist Nation*

## Callahan 2010

“To understand China’s glowing optimism, we need to understand its enduring pessimism, and vice versa. To understand China’s dreams, we also need to understand its nightmares”

- China’s national aesthetic: superiority + inferiority complex
- structure of feeling: sense of pride + sense of humiliation
- interdependence of
  - institutional structures
  - personal experiences.

### 3. Managing foreigners vis-à-vis China



# some identity labels

*liuxuesheng*: (temporarily) staying student

*Zhongguotong*: China expert

*waiguo zhuanjia*: foreign expert

*Zhongguo renmin de lao pengyou*: old friend of  
Chinese people

assumptions:

- absolute distinction between ‘Chinese’ and ‘foreign’
- unidirectional interaction (Chinese  $\Rightarrow$  foreign, foreign  $\Rightarrow$  Chinese), ‘essential’ identity of both unchanged
- accumulation of knowledge about China and / or of a repertoire of Chinese language
- uncritical identification with aims of Chinese state

# temporary vs ongoing cognitive vs behavioural

- *liuxuesheng* ‘(temporarily) staying student’: having gained relevant knowledge, returns to place of origin
  - ⇒ “sinophone”: become part of sinophone society
- *Zhongguotong* “China expert”: cognitive grasp
  - foreigner familiar with Chinese conditions
  - foreigner who can speak fluent Chinese
- ⇒ “sinophone”: develop behavioural accommodation to sinophone culture(s)

# identify with political aims vs critical in-/out-/off-sider

- *Zhongguo renmin de lao pengyou*: old friend of Chinese people

Cf Mao Zedong: foremost question of revolution:  
'who is our friend and who is our foe.'

post 1949: friends of China contributing to  
'socialist construction' of 'New China'

- *zhengyou* 'critical friend' (Kevin Rudd 2008)  
⇒ sinophone: empathy + concern + critique

# Learning from English teachers

Frustrations of the foreign expert (*waiguo zhuanjia*)  
in 1981 (Orton 2009)

- English-speaking teachers in China positioned as people valuable in the Chinese quest
- *im*-positioned as respected sources of authentic English language and meta-linguistic knowledge
- texts deconstructed into turns of phrase and linguistic structure, thrust of their content as grist for thought ignored
- little interest in what the English speakers knew and valued about selves and their societies / cultures

# Foreign language *habitus*: separating *yong* ‘utility’ from *ti* ‘essence’

- foreign language *habitus* may clash with first language *habitus* (Gao 2009)
  - prolonged identity anxiety among Chinese involved in learning English
  - Western learning as *yong* (utility): economic value of the language as capital
  - cultural *ti* (essence) embedded in linguistic *habitus*
- ⇒ sinophone: “third place” at the interaction of two cultures
- learners take both insider’s and outsider’s view on C1 and C2(cf Kramsch 1993)

## 4. Living with hybrid identities: learning from the peranakan



我一直想 stay in touch with Chinese,  
我报给了我一个学习华文的空间。♪

郭英华 Leslie Kwok - 前国家游泳选手/商人

# Peranakan AKA ‘Straits Chinese’

- *peranakan* ‘born locally’: people of Chinese descent born and bred South-East Asia from 16C
- dropped Chinese in favour of Malay, Malay-based creole, English
- hybrid cultural repertoire cf *nyonya* cuisine (e.g. laksa)
- hybrid ethnicity: Harry Lee Kuan Yew, Ien Ang

# Peranakan (a) Lee Kuan Yew: hybridity as deprivation

- sociolinguistic background: English & Malay
- equation between Chinese ethnicity and fluency in Chinese
- “deculturalised” person loses self-confidence, feels sense of deprivation

“Only a Chinese Singaporean who cannot speak or read it, and who has been exposed to discomforture or ridicule when abroad, will know how inadequate and how deprived he can feel” (*Keeping my Mandarin Alive* 2005)

# Peranakan (b) Ien Ang: hybridity as imposition

- sociolinguistic background: Malay & Dutch
- ethnicity as exclusion from local context: “go back to where you came from”
- Chineseness as imposed identity

“to be told ...that I actually didn’t belong there but in a faraway, abstract, and somewhat frightening place called China, was terribly confusing, disturbing and utterly unacceptable. I silently rebelled, I didn’t *want* to be Chinese.... Chineseness...at that time...was an imposed identity, one that I desperately wanted to get rid of” (*On not speaking Chinese* 2001)

# Sinophone: hybridity as productive

- “creative” approach to ethnicity (Ang 2001)  
“privilege neither host country nor (real or imaginary) homeland, but precisely keep a creative tension between ‘where you’re from’ and ‘where you’re at’.”
- “going beyond” approach to cultural awareness (Gao 2002)
  - able to communicate in an open, flexible, and effective manner
  - able to construct one’s identity productively in intercultural communication
- Chinese language learner ⇒ potential sinophone
  - NOT threat to / replacement of BUT *extension* of sociolinguistic repertoire
  - sense of identity

# Dr Ned McHorse: hybridity as performance



# **McHorse the Knife**

(with apologies to Bert Brecht & Kurt Weill)

Now the strong ones like their power, dear  
And they flaunt it, full of fight  
A fine scalpel wields McHorse, dear  
But he keeps it out of sight

Now the strong ones *write* their power, dear  
And it's discourse shakes their stick  
But that tool is double-edged, dear  
Ned is up to every trick.

# Some new directions

## **Learning Chinese: Linguistic, Sociocultural, and Narrative Perspectives**

Patricia Duff, Tim Anderson, Roma Ilnyckyj, Ella Lester,  
Rachel Tianxuan Wang, Elliott Yates

**Multiple (autobiographical) case study/  
narratives and cross-case analysis of  
Chinese language/literacy learning by  
five English-L1  
intermediate-advanced adults**



# **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- Looking for different ways (methods, theoretical perspectives, genres) of understanding and representing the learning and use of Chinese as an Additional Language (CAL)
- Describing similarities and differences among the five learners' experiences and abilities and possible explanations for those differences
- Connecting research on CAL with existing research and traditions on other languages
- Undertaking a highly collaborative, participatory, longitudinal study and co-authored book

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**APPENDIX A: CAL LEARNERS“ NARRATIVES (N3)**

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