

Profession or passion?: Teaching Chinese in London Chinese complementary schools

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As academic interest in Chinese complementary schools has grown, insufficient attention has been paid to the role and experiences of teachers working in these schools. This paper has drawn from accounts of Chinese complementary schoolteachers in London, together with the author's personal experiences of working as a teacher in one such school. The paper analyses recent changes in the demographic of these schools and also the changing discourse field that surrounds them. The discussion then progresses to consideration of the impact of these changes upon Chinese complementary schools, especially with regard to teachers' experience. This paper examines the pattern of professional training that exists among this growing segment of teachers, identifying issues for the future. The paper asks why it is that so many teachers who bring very positive commitment and engagement to their professional role do so in the face of poor funding and pay. Finally, the paper focuses on new challenges for teachers in their classrooms with the aim of providing directions for future development and research.

Keywords: Chinese complementary school; British Chinese community

Introduction

In my doctoral research, my aim is to explore the cultural identities of British Chinese (BC) children, beginning with ethnographic fieldwork in one of the London Chinese complementary schools while working as a teaching assistant. A year later I became a volunteer teacher taking the GCSE¹ Chinese class. An unanticipated finding came in the form of learning about the perspectives and experiences of volunteer teachers working in the complementary schools. It soon became evident that there was little published research into this dimension of the field so the present paper is a contribution toward reducing the deficit.

The focal interest of this paper lies with the accounts and experiences of teachers in London Chinese complementary schools. Recent changes in the demographical and discourse field concerning China and Chinese are analysed. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of these changes upon the Chinese complementary schools, especially the teachers. There is then a discussion of the motivations of such teachers and the meanings they gave to aspects of their work in the Chinese school. Finally, the paper focuses on specific new challenges relating to teaching practice in classroom settings in these schools.

Chinese complementary schools in the UK

It has been noted that, 'Chinese complementary schooling is particularly long-established in the UK' (Francis *et al.*, 2009: 478). Yet the practice and function of these Chinese heritage community language schools have been little documented by researchers (Li, 2006). It was not until recently

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that researchers started to map the population and practice of Chinese complementary schooling in England (Francis *et al.* 2008; Francis, *et al.*, 2009; Li and Zhu, 2010; Mau *et al.*, 2009).²

Existing records show that from the early twentieth century, there were Chinese classes held to teach BC children Chinese language and culture. With the post-war wave of Chinese migration from Hong Kong and the New Territories in the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of Chinese complementary schools established then focused principally on teaching Cantonese and traditional characters rather than Mandarin and simplified characters³ (Francis *et al.*, 2009). Since the 1980s a series of newer schools has been formed to cater for the growing population of young British-born Chinese and new Chinese immigrant children. In 2012, the chairman of the UK Association for the Promotion of Chinese Education (UKAPCE), Mr Wu, announced that there were more than 130 Chinese schools in the UK, catering for 25,000 students.⁴ According to the member schools listings from another association to promote Chinese language and culture, the UK Federation of Chinese Schools (UKFCS), there are 21 schools in the Greater London region out of its 73 registered member schools in the UK.⁵

Chinese schools are largely voluntary and part-time charities. Although different schools have different policies, textbooks, and pedagogical approaches, all are committed to a similar aim of teaching the Chinese language and transmitting Chinese culture to school-aged Chinese young people in the UK. There have been a number of common features identified by researchers (Creese *et al.*, 2006; Francis *et al.*, 2008; Li and Zhu, 2010; Mau *et al.*, 2009).

Being under-funded and under-resourced is a common problem. Chinese schools mainly rely upon a relatively low tuition fee (ranging from £15 to £90 a year), although some schools have a small amount of funding from the UK government and donations from individuals or companies (Mau *et al.*, 2009). Most school classrooms are rented from mainstream schools or colleges, with limited access to teaching facilities such as computers, electronic whiteboard, and projectors (Francis *et al.*, 2008).

The population of students is overwhelmingly comprised of second-generation BC rather than third-generation pupils. Pupils are grouped according to ability not age, with pupils of varied ages in the same classroom (Mau *et al.*, 2009).

The main classes are to teach Chinese language. But all schools also provide pre- or after-school classes related to Chinese heritage, such as Chinese dance, calligraphy, kung fu, and Chinese painting. The curriculum is mainly delivered in Chinese although English is also employed (Francis *et al.*, 2008). The majority of schools mainly teach Cantonese, although learning Mandarin is increasingly popular (Li and Zhu, 2010).⁶

Most teachers are parents of school students, or volunteers. Most of them have not received formal teacher education or training either in the UK or abroad. Teaching practices vary across schools and often depend on individual teachers (Mau *et al.*, 2009). These teachers have been criticized for having 'old-fashioned' and ineffective teaching methods, with an 'essentialized' view of Chinese culture (Francis *et al.*, 2008).

These schools have helped BC young people to acquire practical language skills, which are seen to benefit them in terms of future employment prospects. These schools have also been portrayed as 'idealized' learning spaces with no 'racism', which offer an escape from disruptive and uninterested peers in mainstream schools (Creese *et al.*, 2006). It has been shown that the 'holistic' learning approach combined with a competitive and reward culture in these schools has a positive impact on students' achievements in mainstream education (Francis *et al.*, 2008). Apart from academic benefits, these schools also create a social space for Chinese in Britain to meet and interact, which facilitates continued interaction with their 'mother country'. Both Chinese language acquisition and the social function of these schools have a strong influence on the construction of BC ethnic identity (Creese *et al.*, 2006; Li and Zhu, 2010).

Apart from examining the basic features and functions of these Chinese complementary schools, the main focus of existing literature is discussion around learners' identities, language learning, and ethnic identity. There is a very limited amount of academic research discussing complementary school teachers' aspirations and beliefs (Wu *et al.*, 2011) and leadership in the UK Chinese complementary schools (Thorpe, 2011).

Methodology

The data used for the present paper come from a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with Chinese complementary schoolteachers (N=10, 3 males and 7 females), BC children (N=26) and parents (N=10). Ethnographic participant observations were undertaken between 2010 and 2012 in four Chinese complementary schools in London. These four schools are located in the north (School N), south (School S), east (School E), and west (School W) of London. School W (founded in 1978) and School N (founded in 1997) only provide lessons in Mandarin and simplified characters. School E was founded in 1983 under the demand of the increasing number of Vietnamese Chinese in south-east London. School S was founded by a group of immigrants from Hong Kong in 1991. Both schools E and S only provided Cantonese and traditional characters classes when they were founded. By 2013 they both had Cantonese and Mandarin classes running parallel at each level. During term time, schools S, E and W operate every Saturday for two or two and a half hours; School N runs every Sunday for three hours. All four schools are located in rented classrooms or buildings in local mainstream schools or community colleges. All four schools have over 250 pupils from age 4 to 18, more than 15 volunteer teachers, and one parents' committee. These schools all offer classes from nursery to A-level Chinese, plus one or two adult classes. Most students graduate from these schools by completing their GCSE or A-level Chinese examinations.

I have been working in School N for four years, first as a teaching assistant and then as a teacher in the GCSE Chinese class. I also had two or more formally arranged visits to each of the other three schools for participant observation. All the interviews with teachers and parents were conducted in Chinese, whereas interviews with BC children were mostly in English. The interviews were all audio-recorded and typically lasted between 45 and 60 minutes each, although some lasted for more than 90 minutes. Before discussing the findings from interviews and ethnographic observations, the paper first considers the possible prospects and challenges the schools face, brought on by the recent social and cultural changes within the British Chinese community in the UK.

A challenge for the present research has been how to balance my role as both researcher and practitioner. At times some of what was being researched intersected with personal professional involvement. This was dealt with by including other schools and teachers where I had not worked and whom I had not met. I also established a note-making reference, which allowed me to reflect on ideas and reactions more objectively. However, this paper maintains a position of the committed researcher and is written with the aim of making a contribution to future practice and development.

Changing demographics and discourse field of British Chinese population

Since 1980 there have been three prominent changes in the patterns of Chinese migration to the UK. The first is that the population of UK Chinese immigrants has increased rapidly both in terms of numbers, and the rate of increase. The second is that the number of Chinese whose family origins lie in China has now significantly overtaken those from Hong Kong. Historically

this represents a major shift from the Cantonese-speaking Hong Kong people who have long dominated the UK Chinese community. Thirdly, the composition of the immigrants has shifted from being dominated by poorly educated rural workers towards well-educated students and professionals. There are also noticeable changes since the 1990s in how China and being Chinese are perceived in the UK, both culturally and ideologically. These changes have had a huge impact on the British Chinese community and also entail several implications for the study of Chinese complementary schools.

Increasing population of Chinese immigrants in the UK

The Chinese community presence in Britain can be dated to the beginning of the trade between Britain and China during the nineteenth century, mostly by the East India Company who employed Chinese seamen in their ships. Figure 1 shows the population growth of Chinese in Britain from 1851 to 2011. Figures before the 1991 census are rather speculative because of the absence of an ethnic origin question. In the 1980s, despite the growing numbers of UK-born Chinese, most immigration was accounted for by the entry of dependents and new spouses. The 1991 census, which for the first time included a question on ethnic origin with a 'Chinese' category on a 100 per cent count, reports the population at 152,900. The Chinese ethnic group constituted the smallest of the seven 'pre-coded' ethnic groups, at 0.29 per cent of the national total. The 2001 census shows a persistent and substantial increase in the Chinese population in absolute numbers as well as proportionately to other ethnicities. The figure puts the Chinese at 247,403, 0.43 per cent of the British total and 5.3 per cent of all ethnic minorities. In the latest census in 2011, the population of Chinese had risen to 433,150, 0.7 per cent of the British total and 5.3 per cent of all ethnic minorities. Thus the overall percentage of the population formed by the Chinese ethnic group remains low, but it is characterized by a high percentage increase of 183 per cent from 1991 to 2011. There has also been a rise in unskilled illegal migrants and over-stayers who seek subsequent naturalization that has increased the absolute numbers but tends not to appear in official figures.

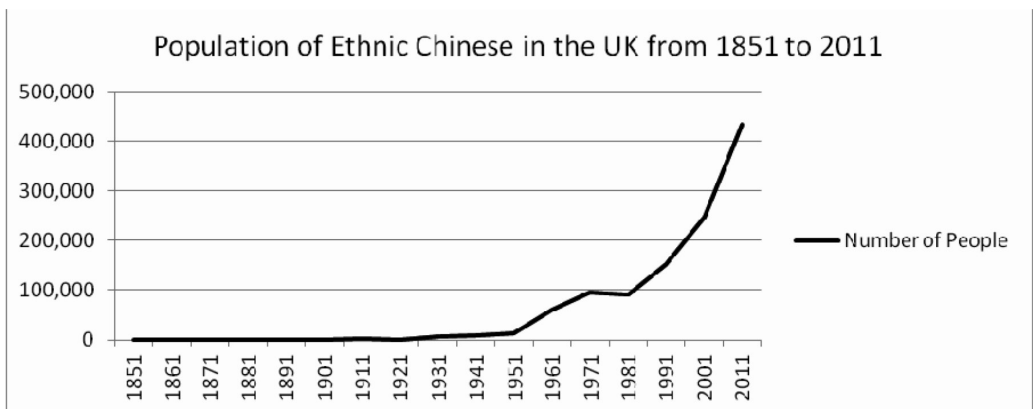


Figure 1: Population of Ethnic Chinese in the UK from 1851 to 2011. From various sources shown in Appendix 1. The graph shows the dramatic demographic shift following the realization of aspects of the opening up policy in China.

Changing patterns of Chinese immigration in the UK

According to the existing literature, three waves of Chinese movement can be identified during the subsequent 150 years (Luk, 2008). The first wave of Chinese migration to Britain was from 1850 to 1945, and consisted of contract labourers who were young, single, male Chinese nationals, mainly from the Guangdong area in south-east China. Some of these Cantonese seamen returned home, but others stayed and clustered together forming the early Chinese communities in the port cities of London, Liverpool, and Cardiff. To cater for these seamen, a number of Chinese settled to establish boarding hotels, restaurants, and social clubs. Another group of Chinese migrated to Britain in the early twentieth century. These people were temporarily resident students and diplomats who came from Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. The young students were attracted to London and the major university towns. Most returned home after they had qualified, but a small number settled in Britain permanently (Wang, 1991).

The next wave of Chinese immigration to the UK took place during the post-war period (1945–1980). The majority of these immigrants were from traditional farming clans from villages in the New Territories of Hong Kong (HK). Most of these Cantonese- and/or Hakka-speaking villagers were poorly educated, with little English but one simple objective: to work hard and save diligently in order to rejoin their families in their homeland for a life of peace and comfort (Watson, 1977). Another group of immigrants during this period were Vietnam War refugees from North Vietnam who were either twice migrants from China (those who had migrated and settled in Vietnam, then re-migrated to Britain) or who had a Chinese ancestral background. These people were also mainly farmers, fishermen, or craftsmen with little or no schooling (Benton and Gomez, 2008). With a lack of qualifications, and inexperience of mainstream work, many of the Chinese immigrants during this period were restricted to jobs in catering or laundries (Shang, 1984).

The succeeding wave since the 1980s brought the majority of today's Chinese population into Britain. Carrying on from the previous migration wave, it has been recorded that an official total of 26,620 HK Chinese came into Britain from 1980 to 2003 (Luk, 2008), although the actual figure might have been higher. The figure climbed especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, attributable to the perceived political uncertainties before the change of governance of HK to China in 1997. Unlike those 'old' immigrants who were poorly educated, these 'new' immigrants included some of the best-educated and highly skilled members of HK's population. But this influx of HK immigrants was short-lived because of the restored confidence in HK as a relatively stable political and economic environment (Luk, 2008). Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 2, the decline in Hong Kong Chinese immigration since the 1990s was in contrast with the recent growth of immigrants from China.

Once China began to open up after the economic reforms implemented from 1979, an increasing number of Chinese began to go overseas, in small numbers at first, but in significant numbers from the mid-1990s. The Chinese government has encouraged Chinese students to study overseas as part of the country's economic and modernization reforms. Although data presented above include immigrants from Taiwan, the influx of students who were Chinese nationals has contributed towards the overall growth of the UK Chinese population. Currently, with this latest wave, the Chinese student population in Britain has been estimated to be 49,100 in 2010 (Nania and Green, 2004). Many of these students have gone on to become permanent residents in the UK. Additionally, it was noticed that during the 1990s and early 2000s a large number of Fujian Chinese⁷ were arriving and settling in the UK. There has been speculation that many are illegal immigrants coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to their lack of skills and qualifications, a majority of the Fujianese tend to work for the Chinese who are already established in Britain (Benton and Gomez, 2008).

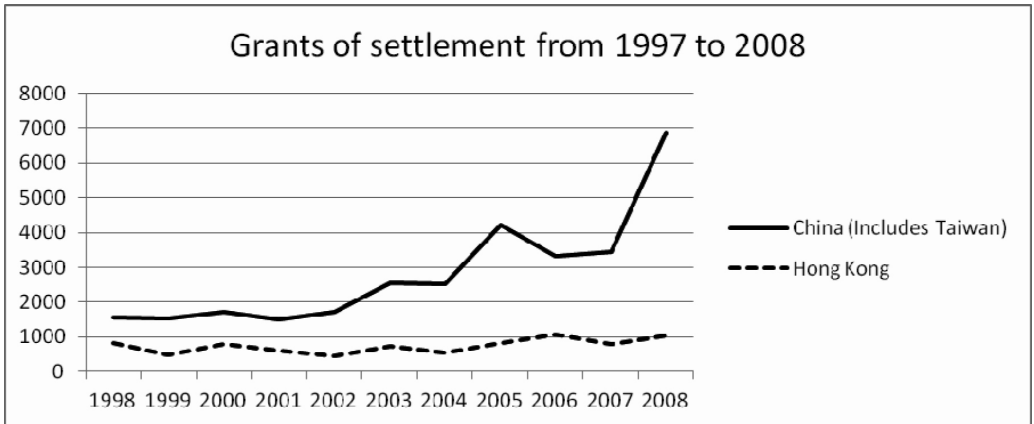


Figure 2: Grants of settlement from 1997 to 2008

Source: Data extracted from 'Grants of settlement by country of nationality', in Annual Abstract of Statistics, Office for National Statistics (various years, see Appendix 2)

Chinese people from other parts of South East Asia, such as Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore, also migrated to Britain towards the end of the twentieth century (Benton and Gomez, 2008). They tended to be highly qualified and were more likely to work in the legal, accountancy, and medical professions (Archer and Francis, 2007). Being more educated and having a higher standard of English, these white-collar 'new' Chinese immigrants from HK, China, and South East Asia will probably have more in common with the British middle class than migrants from HK and Vietnam in the earlier periods or those who were illegal immigrants from rural areas in China. With differences in educational and social background, it is the children of these 'new' immigrants since the 1980s that comprise a majority of pupils attending Chinese complementary schools.

Changing discourses concerning China and the Chinese in the UK

Prior to the nineteenth century, there had been two modes of highly contradictory representations of China and Chinese in Britain. The first representation presented China as a country that was full, rich, and powerful, with the Chinese presented as clever and ambitious people, with a potential for taking over based upon the ancient exploits of Genghis Khan – the Asian hordes mythology. The other representation portrayed China as being in turmoil, problematic, and alien; with the Chinese as being passive, unapproachable, and weakened by opium (Parker, 1993). Even with the intensified communication and interactions around the world under the impact of globalization, these two forms of representations persisted into contemporary discourses concerning China and Chinese in the UK. On the one hand, the rapid development of China in recent years has strengthened the image of China as a rising politico-economic power. On the other hand, China has not been forgotten as a country troubled by problems such as pollution, corruption, and inequality.

The real economic and social changes in China, together with the changing discourses surrounding China and Chinese have impacted upon the British–Chinese community. In Chinese complementary schools, Mandarin has started to take over as the politically and economically dominant language. In Britain, all Chinese complementary schools that previously only taught Cantonese now offer Mandarin classes, yet none of the Mandarin complementary schools teach Cantonese (Li and Wu, 2009). The research data collected in the Chinese complementary

schools are in accordance with this shift. Furthermore, this trend of learning Mandarin has not only influenced the British Chinese community but also spread to a wider context in Britain. Mandarin, as the official language of China, receives institutional support from the Chinese embassies and non-governmental organizations such as the Confucius Institutes, as well as the British educational and cultural establishment (Li and Zhu, 2010). The new UK primary National Curriculum, which takes effect in 2014, has listed Mandarin as one of the compulsory foreign language courses in primary schools. More and more mainstream schools in Britain have started to offer Mandarin classes. These demographic and discourse changes will bring opportunities as well as challenges to the Chinese complementary schools, and especially to teachers who work at the frontier of teaching Chinese.

Becoming teachers in Chinese complementary schools

From my data, there are two main routes into teaching in these Chinese schools. Most teachers in Chinese complementary schools, especially teachers in leading positions, are parents who became involved because their children came to learn Chinese there (Thorpe, 2011). For these parent-teachers, there are two explanations for how they came to take up their teaching role. Some parents have a strong personal interest in teaching Chinese, such as Teacher G in School N (T NG), who says she loves teaching children although she never had previous relevant work experience. For her, teaching in a Chinese school was an enjoyable job, not as stressful if she taught for a living. She saw teaching as a ‘爱好’ (hobby) and said she could not stop thinking about how to teach whenever she had time:

对怎么教好中文，我总是有一些想法的，然后就到班上去付诸于实践。

I always have some thoughts about how to teach Chinese well, then I put those thoughts into practice in my class. (T NG)

A few teachers like Teacher NG saw working in Chinese schools as one way of fulfilling their career dreams of teaching. Others had changed their career path after teaching at the school. Teacher I in School S (T SI) had always wanted to be a teacher but her full-time job was in human resources. After discovering her strong passion for teaching in the Chinese school, she took a teacher training course in childcare and education and a training course for teaching Chinese as a foreign language:

中文学校算是给了我一个机会把我所学的想的带到真正的教学中。

Chinese school gives me an opportunity to bring what I learnt and thought into real teaching practice. (T SI)

The second category of parent-teacher undertook their teaching role either out of practical convenience or as a gesture of help for friends. Teacher NM is one example:

说实在的原来不想做老师的。因为我很忙，没有时间嘛。但是校长就一直给我打电话，后来我说那好吧那就试试喽。所以也是为了送孩子也是为了在他上课的时候自己消遣一下时间嘛，如果把小孩子送过去三个小时你没有地方去也挺无聊的。

But to be honest I didn't want to be a teacher because I'm quite busy, don't have time. But the headmaster kept calling me. Then I said alright, just give it a try. So it is for my child but also for me to *kill some time* when he is learning, it's also very boring if I only send my kid to school and have nowhere to go in the three hours. (T NM)

Teacher WX used to be a secondary school teacher in China, he also said he would not have come to teach if it were not for his friend, the headmaster of the Chinese school he works in:

教这里的孩子和教中国的孩子太不一样了。学校不好找老师，我就一直帮忙做着。他们找着老师了我就走。

Teaching children here is very *different* from teaching children in China. It is hard for the school to find teachers. So I just help them along. I will leave as soon as they find a teacher to replace me. (T WX)

Despite their different motivations for teaching in these Chinese schools, once they have taken the teaching position, every one of them, as a parent and a teacher, expressed a sense of cultural obligation to teach Chinese for their children. As Teacher EM said:

我觉得他们学中文是必须的。我不想要自己的孩子失去中国的语言和文化根。我希望让自己的孩子在这里能好好学习，将心比心 (jiāng xīn bǐ xīn)，我也就要求自己在这里好好教书。’

I think for them (BC children) learning Chinese is a *must*. I don't want my children to lose the Chinese language and culture and the roots. I hope my own children can learn well in this school, we treat as we expect to be treated, I also demand myself to teach well here. (T EM)

Most parent-teachers would leave their teaching post when their own children stopped attending and learning at these schools. However, there were still a few parent-teachers who stayed in these schools after their children had left. They would attribute such dedication to their sense of attachment to the school or to a sense of obligation to transmit Chinese language and culture to the next generation. These teachers often developed strong affections for the teaching role, or for their teacher colleagues. As Teacher NX said:

这么多年我在这里和一些老师成了很好的朋友，我还来中文学校的一大原因就是来这里和他们见见面，聊聊天。

All these years I became very close friends with some teachers here, one of the important reasons I still come here is to see them and chat with them. (T NX)

Furthermore, they also think what they do is very important and useful for their children and the Chinese community. These teachers normally get comparatively low pay (£9 to £15 per hour). As Teacher SN said:

大家都很忙，特别作为两个孩子的母亲，平时还要上班。。。如果没有一点热情和爱心谁能坚持下来呢？

Everyone is very busy, especially as a mother of two, I also need to work during weekdays ... who would still want to come here if they don't have some passion and a loving heart? (T SN)

The demographic and discourse changes described earlier helped in the recruitment of a different type of teacher into the teaching staff. Apart from parent-teachers, there were an increasing number of volunteer teachers and teaching assistants who were postgraduate students from Hong Kong or China studying in the UK. At School N, there were 11 non-parent teachers out of the total 22 teachers, 9 of whom started working in the school while they were studying postgraduate courses in the UK. Almost all the teaching assistants were UK-based postgraduate Chinese students majoring in education or undertaking teacher training (such as PGCE Chinese) courses. Such teachers joined the school either to further their academic research and training, or to accumulate work experiences to enhance their CVs for future job applications. As TA NH said:

最近英国有一股学汉语热，所以在这里教中文应该是很有发展潜力职业。。。我希望在这里的工作经验会对我以后找工作有帮助。

Recently there is a fever of learning Chinese in the UK, teaching Chinese as a career here looks very promising ... with the teaching experiences here I hope it will be helpful for me. (TA NH)

Although these student teachers may have received a more professional teacher training, they lack the long-term commitment to the school which we found as a characteristic of many parent-teachers. The student teachers tend to leave the school once their visas expire or when they have completed their studies in the UK. In order to maintain a stable teaching staff, the head teachers are more inclined to employ these students as teaching assistants first, and only promote them into teaching positions once their visa issues have been resolved. Even though finding teachers continues to be a challenge, schools still implement a minimum one-year employment policy for teachers. As the head teacher in School N commented:

现在有很多学生都想到我们学校学习。去年我们加了一个幼儿班，今年一年级又多开了一个班，A level 也分成了两个班。明年已经有很多人在waiting list上要报名... 但是如果我找不到合适的老师就不敢多开班。那如果老师找得不好的话呢，你一个班变成两个班，ok，结果可能是走掉一个班，那就没有意思了。我们学校声誉是很好的，但是我的想法是什么呢，宁愿好了不要滥了。想要的来的小孩子，我宁愿你进不来，我把你推荐到别的学校去。

Now there are many students want to study in our school. We've added a nursery class last year. This year we have opened one more class for Year 1, and divided A-level into two classes. There is still a long waiting list for next year enrollment. ... But if I cannot find a suitable teacher I dare not to expand. If you didn't find a right teacher, you expand one class to two classes, OK, but the result is likely to be losing one class of students, then that's meaningless. Our school has very good reputation, but my opinion is, it's better to have good quality rather than quantity. For those children who want to register, I'd rather they can't get in and I will recommend some other schools for them. (T NH)

From this statement and others expressing similar viewpoints, it can be seen that teachers in these Chinese schools often are surprisingly motivated given the lack of resources, funding, and professional support. As explained above, their commitment arises either from a personal passion for teaching or from a sense of cultural obligation. However, teachers in Chinese schools have often been described as amateur teachers with little professional training (Francis *et al.*, 2008). The findings of the present research suggest that lack of professional qualification does not necessarily imply non-professional or unprofessional teaching practice. It is also necessary to recognize this common characteristic of Chinese schoolteachers has historical reasons. Firstly, teacher training courses for the teaching of Chinese per se only started to grow slowly over the past two decades. Before that, very few Chinese teachers in the UK, irrespective of whether they are in Chinese complementary schools, mainstream schools, or private tutoring, had recognized qualifications for teaching Chinese. Secondly, within the current training courses provided by UK universities, the focus is to teach Chinese as a foreign language which, as most of these teachers noticed, is very different to teaching Chinese as a 'mother-tongue' language to BC children. Similarly, those who are qualified school teachers in China are likely to find 'difficulties' in applying the teaching methods which they have learnt in these Chinese school settings in the UK. More targeted teacher training is now being provided by organizations such as UKAPCE and UKFCS. However, these short-term training sessions have acted more as teachers' workshops for an exchange of experiences rather than as systematic training supervised by recognized accrediting bodies. Although recently there has been an increasing number of teachers who have obtained a PGCE in Chinese,⁸ they mainly work in mainstream schools. With the lack of funding and resources, the Chinese complementary schools remained unattractive to such teachers. It needs to be stressed that although they have limited professional support, some of these teachers in Chinese complementary schools are far from passively accepting the status

quo. Instead, they are actively seeking professional support and reflecting on their own teaching practice to seek better ways of teaching in their Chinese schools.

New challenges in teaching in Chinese schools

Teachers in Chinese language community schools in the UK face similar problems to teachers almost anywhere else, such as lack of funding, teaching resources, and professional support. In addition there are challenges that have flowed from the changing nature of the communities they serve.

Mandarin or Cantonese

Several researchers have commented on the shift of the dominant language from Cantonese to Mandarin in the global Chinese diaspora (Li and Wu, 2009; Li and Zhu, 2010; Mau *et al.*, 2009). All head teachers from the four schools who were interviewed have confirmed the phenomenon of flourishing Mandarin classes and shrinking Cantonese classes. In schools N and W, which only provide Mandarin classes, the number of students has increased from less than 30 to more than 300 during the last ten years. Schools S and E opened Mandarin classes about six years ago, and currently 60 to 70 per cent of the students are taking Mandarin classes. As the head teacher in School E explained:

有些从香港和马来西亚来的家长还是希望自己的孩子学好mother tongue first, 然后再学Mandarin。好像基于这个原因吧, 初级班还是有学广东话的demand, 但是后来他们会转到普通话班。。。如果从长远来说啦, 几乎所有人最后都要去学Mandarin。。。为什么? 因为这对他们以后找工作有优势吧, 你看看现在中国发展那么快。

Some parents from Hong Kong or Malaysia still want their children to learn the mother tongue (Cantonese) first, and then to learn Mandarin. That's why there is still demand for Cantonese in early years, but later they switched to Mandarin classes. ... So in the long term, almost everyone wants to learn Mandarin in the end. ... Why? Because it will be an advantage for their career in future, just look at the huge development in China. (T EH)

For these Cantonese-speaking families, when Mandarin became increasingly useful for their children in the future job market, it is learned to acquire social capital for personal future development, whereas Cantonese remains as a language for family interactions and connective bonds to their place of origin. The decision on which Chinese dialects/language to learn reflects the recent changes within the Chinese community in Britain. Language learning here has been associated with the economic and social development of the immigrants' origin, influenced by the recent discourses about China in the media or in public discussion.

Meanwhile, this shift of language learning in the Chinese community also creates a demand for teachers who are fully fluent and literate in both Cantonese and Mandarin. Some Cantonese teachers expressed the pressure of losing students because they did not know Mandarin to the level where they might be able to teach it. However, some Mandarin teachers felt it was hard for them to adjust their pace of teaching because the children from Cantonese family backgrounds always needed more help for their listening and speaking.

Another change has been noticed in learning two Chinese writing systems: simplified characters and traditional characters.⁹ The simplified-traditional debate has clear political and ideological connotations. However, more recently simplified characters have become more popular among learners in Chinese schools and those who are learning Chinese as a second language (Francis *et al.*, 2009; Li and Zhu, 2010).

Changing student identities and group dynamics.

One of the biggest challenges I found teaching in the Chinese schools is the diversity of students. In a small class group of 20 students, there are at least four categories of students with different language backgrounds, learning objectives, and expectations. Within second-generation BC students there is an increasing lack of homogeneity. This can be seen in my own GCSE Mandarin class in School N, which contains students aged from 11 to 15. This is a class to help students prepare for GCSE Chinese. However, despite there being a shared goal for the class, there are underlying differences in terms of purpose of learning, ways of learning, and expectations from teachers and parents.

The majority of students are second-generation BC both of whose parents are from China (N=8). They use Mandarin almost every day with their parents at home. They are normally already fluent speakers of Chinese and English and are learning literacy rather than learning a new language. Their parents would expect them to achieve more, even up to the level of native Chinese. Many parents who fell within this category expressed dissatisfaction with the quality and pace of their children's learning:

我觉得他写作的语言太简单了，他需要多学些成语和复杂的句子。

I think his expression in writing is too simple, he needs to learn more idioms and complicated sentences. (P NL)

你说这样是GCSE考试啊？这是国内小学二年级的水平吧。

Do you call this GCSE level exam? That's primary school Year 2 in China. (P NX)

你能不能在课堂里只说中文也让他们多说中文，他现在在中文学校之外都不说中文。

Could you only speak to them in Chinese and make them speak more Chinese, he rarely speaks Chinese outside the Chinese school. (P NM)

For this group of children, learning Chinese is more or less similar to learning a mother-tongue language. Without teaching grammar, these children have already acquired the abilities to speak and compose correctly. Their aim is to use Chinese as native speakers. On the other hand, the UK GCSE Chinese or A-level Chinese examinations, which are designed for learners who are learning Chinese as a foreign language, all seemed to be too easy for them. But they still want to get good results in these examinations, because these are the most recognizable qualifications in the UK.

One variation of such students are those from Cantonese-speaking families (N=2). Compared with children whose parents are native Mandarin speakers, there are often not too many differences regarding reading and writing skills for this group of children, but they will struggle to achieve the same standard for listening and speaking. In the UK GCSE Chinese examination, there are two versions of the paper for both Mandarin/simplified characters and Cantonese/traditional characters. Some of the children will achieve 'A' star grade if they take the Cantonese examination paper. However, they still chose to take examinations in Mandarin. As one of the students put it:

My Cantonese is no problem, there is no need to prove it, but for Mandarin, I need a qualification. (S NQ)

Students in the second category are from families in which only one parent is Chinese (N=3). They have less exposure to the Chinese language at home compared to the previous category of students. They mainly use English to assist their Chinese learning. They would normally prefer teachers to explain key language points or grammar in English. The series of text books School

N use is called 'Zhongwen' (中文, which means 'Chinese'). They are published in China, and aimed at second generation overseas Chinese children learning their mother-tongue language. With no English translation, these textbooks are very similar to those for native Chinese children. While the previous category of students found it acceptable, students from ethnically mixed families tend to struggle to keep up with the curriculum. GCSE Chinese material, on the other hand, is more suitable for such students, who acquire their Chinese through formal learning rather than in their homes. For such students, to achieve an 'A' in GCSE examinations is an important proof of their language ability in Chinese. However, very few of them go on to complete A-level Chinese study.

Another category of students come from families in which none of the parents are Chinese or know the Chinese language (N=2). In this case, we have ethnic Chinese children adopted by English families. There are also children from British white, British Indian, and British black families who are attracted by the influence of the increasing popularity in learning Chinese. With little help from their parents, these students had almost zero knowledge of the Chinese language before they came to the school. They are learning Chinese as a foreign language mostly through English translations. Even up to GCSE level, they will struggle to understand some of the basic daily conversations. After four years of study in the Chinese school, there is one student from this group who could not even make a simple self-introduction in Chinese. She said:

Most of the time, the teacher is talking in Chinese but I don't understand a word what she said, so I just do my own thing. (S NB)

Such students also wanted to achieve good results in the GCSE Chinese examination, with many aiming for a grade of 'B' or above. In order to do so, they would have to focus only on preparing for GCSE and abandon learning the 'Zhongwen' textbook.

A final category of student comes from families who are new migrants from China to the UK (N=5). Most of them have finished primary school education in China. Their level of Chinese passes the standard of UK A-level Chinese. Their problem, however, is that their level of English is insufficient to understand lessons in English or to finish examination papers in English. They normally find that both the GCSE and 'Zhongwen' textbooks are too easy for them. However, they found the GCSE Chinese examination paper too difficult because they were required to answer questions in English. They also wanted to take GCSE and A-level Chinese. For many, their purpose for coming to the Chinese school was to learn how to take Chinese examinations in English rather than to improve their Chinese. In a seemingly contradictory sense it may be said that they attend the Chinese school in order to improve their English.

It may seem to be oversimplified to categorize students based on their family background. However, it is not an arbitrary categorization that ignores the power of individual learning motivations and abilities. While acknowledging the individualities of students, it is also important to recognize the different learning patterns based on the family backgrounds they come from. One head teacher (from School N) said,

毕竟每个星期在中文学校也就两三个小时，老师能做的也只有那么多。学生的学习成绩很大程度上取决于家庭的语言环境和父母的帮助。

With only two to three hours per week at Chinese school, there is only so much a teacher can do, the performance of students to a large extent depends on family language environment and parental support. (T NH)

Learning Chinese has always been used as a marker of cultural identity by students, teachers, and parents (Archer and Francis, 2007; Li and Zhu, 2010). The categories of students summarized above are not just the products of structured observations by a social researcher but rather reflect the views expressed by students who display a clear awareness of the boundaries of each

group. Social activity often happens in such culturally defined sub-groups with their ability in the Chinese language acting as a signifier for their degree of 'Chineseness'. The research revealed tensions between these groups. The following are a few statements from students:

There's nothing to be proud of if he is good at Chinese, because he is Chinese, I'm not even a full Chinese. (British and Chinese mixed-race Student)

I am fed up with them being so noisy and naughty in class. They are all bad students if they were in China. (Student newly settled in the UK)

If you are fresh, then it's not good! [Interviewer: What do you mean by fresh?] Fresh as in newly arrived from China, and they have an accent, that's not good, they will get the shit rip out of them if they were at our school. ... I normally don't want to get involved with them. (British born Chinese student)

The lack of homogeneity between and within groups of students poses challenges for teachers and we are now in a situation in which it is no longer suitable to use one set of teaching materials, follow one style of language teaching, or solely use either English, Cantonese, or Chinese as the language medium for lessons. In future teachers will need to be more flexible in their approach towards the curriculum and to reflect more critically on whether they have been able to address the varying needs of their students. There also needs to be an honest recognition that Chinese schools are far from being homogeneous 'idealized' learning spaces. There are segregations and tensions among different groups of students based on their places of birth, family backgrounds, or even the length of time they have lived in the UK. Chinese language teachers now have a responsibility to balance attention to such groups within the class in an effort to foster positive and healthy relations among students.

Conclusion

This paper has explored some of the new challenges faced by teachers working in Chinese complementary schools as they respond to changing demographic trends and shifts in patterns of discourse concerning the British Chinese community. The educational research field has hitherto largely ignored the perspectives and experiences of teachers working in these complementary schools. The paper considered complex factors behind some stereotypical descriptions of these teachers as being unprofessional or non-professional and passive, revealing that the very opposite was true.

While past challenges arising from lack of funding and professional support persist, new challenges relating to teaching students whose backgrounds differ have arisen. For such teachers there now exists a different set of learning objectives. The demands being made upon them and the schools in which they teach have also been transformed. A paper such as this might, only a few years ago, have seemed to be focusing upon the concerns of a very small (some might say almost invisible) ethnic community within the UK, however, as has been shown, the target community now numbers above half a million people and continues to rise. Such concerns therefore might also be relevant to the growing number of teachers of Mandarin in mainstream British schools.

The research also raised questions regarding the complexity of teaching within complementary schools. Teachers and schools now need to reflect on their teaching practices as class groups become less homogeneous. One issue for example is the growth in numbers of students for whom English is their first language and this raises the need in future for teachers of Mandarin to be prepared and capable of explaining their lessons in both languages. This research is based on data collected from a small sample and personal experiences. The hope is that the

present paper will stimulate others working in this sector to undertake further research into these schools, especially to meet the need for more up-to-date and flexible teaching materials.

Appendix 1: Population of ethnic Chinese in the UK from 1851 to 2011¹⁰

Year	Number	Sources
1851	78	1851 census
1861	147	1861 census
1871	202	1871 census
1881	665	1881 census
1891	582	1891 census
1901	387	1901 census
1911	3,182	1911 census
1921	4,382	1921 census
1931	5,973	1931 census
1951	12,095	1951 census
1960s	60,000	(Jones, 1979)
1971	96,035	1971 census
1981	92,000	OPCS, 1981 ¹¹
1991	152,900	1991 census ¹²
2001	247,403	2001 census
2011	433,150	2011 census

Appendix 2: Grants of settlement by country of nationality from 1997 to 2008

Year	Number of Persons	
	China ¹³	Hong Kong ¹⁴
1997	1,230	900
1998	1,550	810
1999	1,520	490
2000	1,710	800
2001	1,515	605
2002	1,705	460
2003	2,540	725
2004	2,515	540
2005	4,215	805
2006	3,320	1,060
2007	3,440	785
2008	6,890	1,040

Source: *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, Office for National Statistics (various years).

Notes

1. GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education, an examination taken by school students aged 16 in England and Wales.
2. See reports and articles produced by Francis, Archer, and Mau (2008) under research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) investigating the ways in which British-Chinese pupils (as the highest achieving ethnic group in the UK) construct pupils' identities and experiences in relation to the space of Chinese supplementary schooling.
3. Cantonese is a language mainly used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Guangdong Province in the south-east of China. Mandarin, also called 'Putonghua', is the official language in China and Taiwan. Traditional characters (which are more complex) are used in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, and many overseas Chinese communities. In the 1950s, the Chinese government introduced the simplified form of characters, which are currently being used across China, Singapore, and Malaysia and are gaining popularity among overseas Chinese communities and non-Chinese learners.
4. See news report 'British "Chinese fever" continues to heat up, Chinese schools have reached more than 130', www.chinanews.com/edu/2011/10-13/3384888.shtml (accessed 16 October 2013).
5. See UKFCS website: http://ukfcs.info/en/member_schools.php (accessed 30 January 2014).
6. In Chinese, there are three terms to describe modern standard Chinese: 普通话 (Pǔtōnghuà), literally 'common speech', (English translation is 'Putonghua' or Mandarin), used in the People's Republic of China (PRC); 国语 (Guóyǔ), literally 'national language' (English translation is Mandarin) used in Taiwan; and 华语 (Huáyǔ), literally 'Chinese language' (English translation is Mandarin) used in Singapore, Malaysia, and overseas Chinese communities. In English, the term 'Mandarin' originally referred to civil officers of the Chinese Empire. It was then extended to the language used by the imperial court in Beijing and sometimes by imperial officials elsewhere (官话 Guānhuà; literally 'speech of officials'), and as such was adopted as a synonym for Modern Standard Chinese in the twentieth century, which later became the common English translation for all three Chinese terms mentioned above. The overseas Chinese communities adopted the name 'Huayu' to refer to Mandarin to avoid choosing a side between the alternative names of Putonghua and Guoyu, which came to have political significance after their usages diverged along political lines between the PRC and the Republic of China. It also incorporates the notion that Mandarin is usually not a national language but a language shared by ethnic Chinese living in different countries (Li and Zhu, 2010; Ramsey, 1987).
7. Fujian is a south-east coast province next to Guangdong in mainland China. Fujianese have their own dialect but the formal education in school is in Mandarin.
8. PGCE stands for Postgraduate Certificate in Education. It is a teacher-training qualification that includes master's credits in the UK.
9. Traditional characters and simplified characters are two standard character sets of the contemporary Chinese written language. Traditional Chinese characters (Fántǐzì, 繁体字) are those Chinese characters and any character set that does not contain newly created characters or character substitutions performed after 1946. They are most commonly the characters in the standardized character set of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. Simplified Chinese characters (Jiǎntǐzì, 简体字) are standardized Chinese characters introduced by the government of the People's Republic of China since the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to increase literacy. They are officially used in the People's Republic of China and Singapore.
10. The data in this table before 1991 has been adapted from Luk (2008) and Jones (1979). Data from 1991 onwards comes from successive UK census reports. Figures before the 1991 census are rather speculative because of the absence of an ethnic origin question.
11. Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: 1981 Census.
12. 1991 data have been adjusted for census under enumeration using OPCS/GRO(S) 1994 adjustment factors.
13. Includes Taiwan.
14. Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China) includes British overseas territories citizens and stateless persons from Hong Kong and British nationals (overseas).

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