A Comparative Study of Teachers' Professional Identities in State and Private Primary Schools in China



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Abstract

Teacher professional identities (TPIs) need to be considered as crucial to link teachers' personal experiences with the social and professional changes needed for improved learning and developmental skills in schools. In the context of China's social transformation and educational reform, private schools have become increasingly popular among parents who seek educational opportunities for their children to improve their developments and life chances. The private sector has grown significantly with five times increase in numbers of students enrolled in private primary schools between 1996 to 2003 (Shanghai Education Science Research Institute, 2004: 3). Despite policy changes, the Chinese government began to improve its regulations on establishing private schools by providing policy support for non-profit private schools and prohibiting profit-led private schools and the controls of foreign entities for providing China's nine-year compulsory education (Ministry of Justice of People's Republic of China, 2018). Against this background, a growing number of college graduates and qualified teachers work in the non-state sectors[1]. Due to the limited knowledge of the nature and diversity of private schools, evidence of the roles and impact of private schools in developing countries remain insufficient (Ashley et al., 2014). Similarly, teachers' learning and professional experiences in private schools has been long-neglected topic in the field of teacher education and professionalism.

In this research project, I aim to compare how teachers construct their identities to strategically negotiate the meaning of their work in both private and state schools in County Nanqi (a pseudonym) in China. I began this research project with a broad view of identity as a process through which a person understands his or her values, relationship to the world and possibilities for the future. I gradually developed the research aims by comparing how state school teachers and private school teachers draw on multiple personal, professional and cultural resources in forming their narratives to provide the distinctive and common features of their educational values and experiences. In particular, I focus on the notion of agency – teachers' strategic capacities to question and negotiate dominant discourses to achieve their own educational value and well-being in teaching.

A constructivist perspective had guided the choice of a qualitative approach to inquiry in this study. From February to August 2016, I visited four schools (two state schools and two private) to conduct interviews with 16 teachers and 4 school managers in Nanqi. Employing the research strategy of narrative inquiry and comparative analysis in the tradition of grounded theory, I suggested a two-dimensional matrix that demonstrates the common features among the 16 participant teachers and identified different types and orientations of teachers' identities and commonalities across teacher cases in four different state and private schools in this research context: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement; and 4) control. This research study found fewer differences in teachers'

[1] In this thesis, I use the term "non-state" where it applies generally to providers across the formal and informal education, for-profits and non-profits providers. Otherwise, I will specify the particular type of providers the research study relates to (private international schools, charity schools, private tutoring institutes etc.).

narratives between the four school cases; there were more differences among the 16 teachers in interpreting and reacting to changing school contexts in China. Meanwhile, ambiguities, tensions as well as culturally specific references coexisted in TPIs and individual teachers' pursuit of integrity and purpose at work.

This study's unique contributions lie in its innovative design in investigating teachers in both state schools and private schools, and in embedding TPIs in different school contexts in China. The comparative typology from the matrix of TPIs could serve as a means to help teachers further identify, articulate and, if necessary, justify their sense of their professional identities. This study also provides some critical reflections on the issues of language and culture, as well as the researcher's identity in conducting an empirical study to better understand teachers' experiences and the formation of their professional identities in different school contexts in China.

Abbreviations

AIS	Ash International School
AS	Aspen School
AST	Advanced Skill Teacher
BA	Bachler of Arts
BoE	Bureau of Education
BoS	Bureau of Statistics
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CUREC	Central University Research Ethics Committee
MLP	15 year Medium and Long-Term Plan
MoE	Ministry of Education in China
MSc	Master of Science
NCR	National Curriculum Reform
PE	Physical Education
PST	Private School Teacher
PTI	Private Tutoring Institute
RCS	Redwood Charity School
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Question
SST	State School Teacher
SPED	Shandong Provincial Education Department
TPI	Teacher Professional Identity
WS	Willow School

Chapter 1. Introduction and research background

1.1 Origin of this study

This study seeks to explore the notion of professional identity against the background of recent educational reforms in China. The origin of this research stems from my personal experiences in teaching English to primary school students in a private tutoring school in Shandong province. In this role, I became aware of the significance of teachers in shaping the quality of students' learning. I had witnessed teachers' efforts to support student learning. However, private school teachers (PSTs) often perceive themselves as being "outside of the state system"[2] and lacking professional status and development due to a significant gap in their career infrastructure, qualifications, rights and welfare benefits, in contrast with those of state school teachers (SSTs) (Figure 1). While parents are increasingly paying to send their children to private schools for various reasons (e.g. different and more suitable learning environments and educational outcomes), little is known about teachers' experiences and how these may shape their sense of professional identities in private and state schools in China. I believe that policies aimed at improving the quality of education in both private and state schools should take TPIs and their sense of belongingness in both sectors into consideration.

In my earlier MSc research project, *Teaching in the shadow: an exploration into teachers' professional identities in private tutoring institutions in China*, my interviews with ten private tutoring school teachers revealed that teachers had developed the "temporary worker" identity and often lacked a sense of belongingness. A metaphor employed by one teacher in the MSc study offered a powerful expression of her uncertainties about the basis of her career in teaching:

> You might love this field from your heart. However, if the base was not set up, it will collapse out of the blue and break into pieces regardless of how fancy it is above the ground. (Xiaoxue, six months, kindergarten English)

Xiaoxue (a pseudonym) was a graduate from a local teacher education institute and a qualified teacher, who had worked in a private tutoring school for six months at the time of interview. Although the feeling of a lack of belonging in Xiaoxue's story cannot be generalised as a common feature of PSTs' identities from my small-scale MSc study, other research has demonstrated that PSTs often lack a sense of belonging, job security and a stable professional identity (Mei, 2007; Zhou and Tan, 2010). In this supposedly diversified "educational market", where a wide range of formal and informal learning activities take place against the background of a proliferation of educational entrepreneurs and learning

[2] 体制外

technologies and digital tools, the planned economy and centralised communist work union[3] system no longer keep teaching jobs in one system. How do teachers know where to work and belong as a profession? How do teachers construct their identities among their different commitments and roles? In this sense, PSTs' experiences as "temporary workers" in China raise essential questions about teachers' identity, agency and resistance within unique social and educational contexts.

My previous study focused on a small number of teachers in one type of private educational/training institute. This larger-scale DPhil research project builds on and extends my previous small-scale enquiry through more extensive fieldwork and adds a comparative perspective through semi-structured interviews with a larger sample of teachers working in different school contexts. The present study explores teachers' experiences in both private and state primary schools. It seeks not only to provide evidence of the influences of teachers' personal experiences and particular school contexts, but also to illustrate some of the broader social and educational transformations in contemporary Chinese society that may influence the development of TPIs.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The main research aims of this DPhil study are: 1) to explore the processes and factors influencing professional identity construction in different primary school contexts; 2) to compare the characteristics of TPIs across individual and school cases in both state and private schools; and 3) to investigate teachers' strategies to reconcile tensions and uncertainties in these processes. This section further explains these aims and research objectives to facilitate the achievement of these aims:

Research aim 1: To explore how teachers construct their professional identities in different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools).

I argue that individual teacher's identity formation needs to be examined in both state schools and private schools as a part of the development and challenges facing educators in the Chinese society. Therefore, this research study approaches teachers as individuals who are capable of actively engaging with dominant discourses as well as of trying to make sense of their personal experiences; as such, the critical analytical considerations lie in exploring teachers' stories within the specific school as well as the broader social and cultural contexts. The following research objectives (RO) seek to facilitate the achievement of this aim.

[3] 单位

RO1: Identifying the perceived factors impacting the changes and development of individual teachers' sense of identity at work.

RO2: Assessing teachers' perceptions and experiences of their engagements with others in their particular school contexts and how this might influence teachers' professional self-efficacy and sense of belongingness at work.

Research aim 2: To compare the characteristics of TPIs between two state schools and two private schools to identify the shared features and the differences.

Drawing on insights from theories of teacher identities (see Chapter 2 for a literature review), this exploratory study also aims to compare and contrast teachers inside and outside of private schools to include insights into teachers' different experiences and responses to changes arising from different school settings. An earlier comparative study demonstrated that it is not possible to fully understand either the private sector or the state sector of education in isolation from each other (Walford, 1989:5). However, there is still a lack of a research focus on the formation of teacher identities in private and state schools; this might be due to the highly systematic and structured research designs that focus exclusively on either SSTs or PSTs as the research interest groups. This limitation of previous studies might also be the outcome of restrictions faced by researchers in accessing multiple schools and different groups of teachers. To achieve the second aim in this research study, I address the following ROs:

RO3: Identifying the differences and similarities of school contexts that are relevant to TPIs.

RO4: Identifying the characteristics of individual TPI constructions and comparing these characteristics within and across four school cases.

Research aim 3: To investigate the strategies that teachers employ to reconcile tensions and uncertainties at work in state and private primary schools in Nanqi.[4]

This study views TPIs as a part of the broader processes of human development, which might involve confusions about one's roles, tensions in managing multiple demands and expectations, as well as changes in one's personality. To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between teachers' agencies, career choices and experiences in schools, the investigation into tensions and uncertainties in the changing educational landscape in China is of vital importance. The following ROs seek to facilitate the achievement of this research aim:

[4] More information on the educational context of Nanqi is given in Chapter 4.

RO5: Identifying the tensions that teachers experienced in constructing their professional identities, and their perceived conditions and strategies to address those tensions.

RO6: Further recording and theorising teachers' narratives of the processes of reacting to these perceived tensions and uncertainties, which may or may not further influence teachers' sense of their professional identities.

1.3 Research questions

As outlined earlier, this study investigates the formation and characteristics of TPIs in private and state schools in one county in Shandong province in China. Embedded in the general inquiry are the following specific research questions (RQs):

RQ 1: What characterises teachers' sense of their professional identities in the four different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools) in Nanqi in China?

Sub-question 1: How do teachers within each school construct their professional identities?

Sub-question 2: How do teachers experience and reconcile tensions in their identity construction?

Sub-question 3: What are the other characteristics of TPIs?

RQ 2: What personal and social factors do teachers consider important in shaping their professional identities?

RQ 3: What are the differences and similarities in the TPIs in the two state schools and two private schools in Nanqi?

To achieve the main purpose of the enquiry, I chose to explore the similar and different characteristics of TPIs by using an interpretive approach and by employing semi-structured interviews to collect empirical data about 16 individual teachers' narratives in four different school contexts. Thus, the first RQ identifies the characteristics of teachers' work experiences in state and private schools on multiple professional, social and personal levels. The second RQ investigates the perceived factors that influence their sense of self as teachers; it also attempts to explore how individual teachers respond to multiple structural restrictions and opportunities in their professional lives. This question also allows for an exploration of other factors that may shape teachers' experiences beyond the school context. The third question further examines the similarities and differences of TPIs across the two sectors and the four schools to illuminate the role of these contextual features.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

This section provides a brief overview of the thesis.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research rationale, origin, RQs and structure of the research study.

Chapter 2: Primary school teachers in China: diversifications and structural complexity

This chapter engages with the existing literature and reports on private education and PSTs in China to provide a descriptive introduction to the research background. I first identify the phenomenon of private education and point out the lack of clear definitions of private education worldwide. I then move on to introduce the changes and development of government policies in China with regards to the development of private schools and the concerns of PSTs. Existing studies about PSTs, however, have been limited to case studies of these teachers in a particular type of school. Yet the diversifications and structural complexity in private schools have remained unexplored. The final section of this chapter attempts to connect TPIs in private schools in China with challenges in teacher education and global questions about teacher identities.

Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter reviews existing literature to provide an analytic description of the context within which primary school teachers make sense of who they are and what they do. Research projects in other sectors are included as contributory documentation if relevant and are considered to contribute pertinent insights on TPIs. The literature review begins with the discussion of the significance of teachers' professional identities for students' learning, teachers' well beings as well as school development. A subsequent section outlines the characteristics of, and factors that may influence, the development of TPIs as found in existing empirical studies. It continues by discussing the changes and challenges that teachers face in the context of China's seventh national educational reform since 2001. The review then considers studies that focus on PSTs and concludes with a discussion of the conceptual framework for this research project. The review, as a point of departure for my own study, also offers me the basis for comparison and consensus in the choice of methodology and research design.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

In Chapter 4, I explain the methodology and research design in detail. I first present the RQs and research strategy, and then discuss the choice of methods, moving on to

elaborating the data collection and analysis process. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the research ethics and limitations of the chosen approach.

Chapter 5–Chapter 6: Characteristics of TPIs in the two state schools

In Chapter 5, I present the findings about the characteristics of TPIs in each of the two state school contexts. To contextualise TPIs in the school cases, I will first introduce the school contexts, before moving on to the analysis of individual teacher cases. The introductions of the school contexts are based on themes developed from the principal interviews and school fieldnotes. I also include teachers' interview data and demonstrate the process of data collection to further support and enrich these themes.

In Chapter 6, I focus on comparing TPIs in the two state school contexts to provide deeper insights into the similarities and diversities of teachers' experiences to further identify the contextual influences on TPIs. Three share narratives found among the eight SSTs discussed in Chapter 6: 1) the lack of career choices; 2) addressing challenges to support students' learning; and 3) maintaining professional authority.

When it comes to career choices, there were more universal themes than different themes across the two state school cases. Generally speaking, teachers thought becoming a teacher was more about conformity to social expectations than a matter of personal choice. In the state schools, teachers perceived themselves as being exposed to highly intensive professional training, while not having sufficient opportunities for promotion. Although the eight SSTs demonstrated their commitment to students' learning, their responses and individual strategies in dealing with barriers and difficulties at work differ from case to case. Some teachers were able to express their personal opinions, while others showed signs of vulnerability. In the interview, all the teachers had addressed the problems of family education and its influences on their sense of professional authority. Positive teacher–student interaction remains a significant contributing factor to these teachers' sense of achievement and satisfaction at work.

Chapter 7–Chapter 8: Characteristics of TPIs in the two private schools

In Chapter 7, I present the findings on the characteristics of TPIs in each of the two private school contexts. The organisation of Chapter 7 is aligned with that of Chapter 5, since I will first introduce the school contexts and then move on to the analysis of individual teacher cases. Chapter 8 focuses on comparing TPIs in the two private school contexts to provide deeper insights into the similarities and diversities of teachers' experiences to further identify the contextual influences on TPIs. Chapter 8 is organised by four shared narratives among the eight PSTs, which supplement the SSTs' narratives identified in Chapter 6: 1) students' learning and development; 2) curriculum reform; 3) job involvement and

professional image; and 4) teachers' spirituality and tangible satisfactions. It is found that the PSTs addressed the strength of their professional practices as a result of the more competitive performance management policies in private schools. In this sense, teachers constructed self-representations as PSTs. Teachers' narratives also reflected the importance of ethics and spirituality in their daily interactions and practices in constructing their sense professional identity.

Chapter 9: Comparative analysis

In this chapter, I will extend the comparative elements of this research study by comparing themes across the narratives of the eight SSTs and eight PSTs in order to identify the common and different characteristics of TPIs in the four different state and private schools. I will first summarise the comparative characteristics of TPIs in the private and state schools based on the previous four chapters (Chapters 5–8). I will then present the orientations of TPIs based on the two-dimensional matrix developed from the cross-case analysis. This section creates a matrix that demonstrates four orientations in TPI narratives: 1) flexibility; 2) regulation; 3) service; and 4) authority. The intersection of the four orientations leads to four types of identity strategy: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement; and 4) control. At the end of this chapter, I will reconnect the conceptual findings with the individual teacher cases. This helps to clarify and interpret the patters in teachers' narratives identified in this research study.

Chapter 10: Discussion and conclusion

In the final chapter, I summarise the process that has been developed to achieve the aims of the research project. I integrate the findings from my study with the existing research literature and provide a statement about the original contribution to knowledge made by this study. A portion of this chapter is devoted to exploring some of the practical implications of the findings for policy making, teacher education and continuing professional development in state and private schools. It also discusses the limitations of the study and the possibilities for further research in the field of TPI and teacher education.

Chapter 2. Primary school teachers in China: diversification and structural complexity

2.1 Teacher education and the global question on professional identity

What characterises a good teacher? Many of us have memories of teachers who played crucial roles in our lives; however, defining a good teacher is difficult, and knowing how to support someone to become a good teacher has been a subject of much debate. The shortage of well-trained teachers is a global problem. As the UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates, there is a need for 69 million teachers to be recruited worldwide to reach the objectives of universal primary and secondary education by 2030. In the Incheon Declaration, UNESCO specifically called for the Member States to "ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems". Authors worldwide from different academic fields have commented on the changing environment of school education and teachers' professional lives in the context of a globalised world. The American economist Peter F. Drucker (1993) defined the "Knowledge Society" as a modern society where land, labour and capital are no longer the most important resources; instead, knowledge has become the only meaningful resource. Drucker defined knowledge as the capacity to produce and effectively apply knowledge, which is complex, flexible and unpredictable. As he claimed, the role of school education has shifted from social transformation to the cultivation of lifelong learning by individuals. These ideas have raised a series of questions about the purpose of teaching, teacher–student relationships and the roles of teachers worldwide.

In *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Ingenuity* (2003), Andy Hargreaves analysed and discussed the challenges of school education, teaching and teachers' professional development, particularly the problem of teacher identity. He cited Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character* (1998) and pointed to the demanding challenges facing teachers in terms of their personal development and emotions. Sennett (1998) argued that personal characteristics are eroded in the context of neo-capitalism. In the past, according to the author, one's work was often carried out in one workplace alongside other people. One could cultivate positive experiences by engaging with others over a long period. However, it has become increasingly difficult for employees to find lifelong careers in ever-changing societies. Flexible work times and changes to workplaces and jobs have led to alienated and superficial relationships among colleagues. As a result, employees have become anxious and uncertain; individuals lack a sense of security and become depressed and challenged in their personalities. In many countries, researchers have argued that the increasing marketisation of education has brought about complex changes and fostered new relationships in the education sector; as a result, the teaching

profession faces new challenges, not just in terms of how it performs its professional role to meet diverse demands, but also fundamental questions about teachers' values and sense of identity (Ball, 1994; Whitty, 1998; Mok, 1997; Whitty and Power, 2000; Bartlett et al., 2002). It is particularly important for educational researchers to address the roles of teachers' beliefs and values in interpreting, adapting to and resisting such changes.

Nevertheless, the vagueness of the notion of identity could be a barrier to teachers' professional and personal development (Hargreaves, 2003: 63). Having said that, it is essential to be aware that the formation of TPIs is complex and variable, and open to influences from many sources. For example, the impact of broader changes, including educational policies on the actors involved, may differ considerably as a result of the particular cultural context within which they are situated. Elements such as national education culture, school culture and teacher culture could all play important roles leading to different interpretations of teachers' work and identities.

2.2 The context of primary education and teacher education in China

This section discusses the context in which primary school teachers have worked in the Chinese context over recent years. In this section, I develop the argument that to understand better the development of primary school TPIs, we need to understand the particular social and historical contexts of teachers' work and roles. I first review the historical status of primary teachers and teacher education in contemporary China. I then identify recent trends and the characteristics of the broader social and cultural contexts of primary education and teacher education in China.

Over the last 40 years, Chinese society has been engaged in a complicated process of development and transformation that has influenced people's daily lives, work and experiences. This process, at the same time, has also created unprecedented challenges, such as environmental degradation, an ageing society and corruption. In 2006, China initiated a 15-year Medium to Long Term Plan for the Development of Science and Technology (2006–2020). The plan sets out a blueprint to transform the Chinese economy by 2020 into one that will derive 60% of GDP growth from innovation and spend 2.5% of its GDP on research and development. The Chinese government aims to build a knowledge society, one in which its citizens' educational levels and capacity for innovation and enterprise become the key to its social and economic development.

Primary education in China has witnessed significant change and development over the last 40 years. The 99.8% net enrolment rate for primary school children in 2011 signified the early achievement of the 2015 goal for universal access to primary education in China. The expansion of primary education in China has also had a significant impact on poverty

reduction, especially in urban areas (Song, 2012: 105; Lee and Song, 2018:96). However, the disparities in terms of the quality of primary education remain wide between rural and urban areas and across different regions (ibid.). Table 1 demonstrates the number of schools, students and teachers in China by educational level. It also showed the average student–teacher ratios at different school levels. The government statistics may have painted a positive and simplified picture of what actually happens in the classroom; as Yang has pointed out, oversized classes are still common in China (Yang, 2014). Moreover, the teaching force remains undersupplied, with high turnover rates, particularly in disadvantaged rural schools in China (An, 2018) and in particular subjects (i.e. physical education, English and the arts).

Table 1 Number of schools, students and teachers in China by educational level in 2016 (MoE, 2017)

	Schools	Students	Full-time teachers	Student–teacher ratio
Primary education	177,600	99,130,100	5,537,300	17:1
Junior secondary education	52,100	14,871,700	3,997,500	12:1
Senior secondary education	13,400	23,666,500	2,591,900	14:1
Specialised schools	2,080	491,700	53,200	-

In 2005, the Ministry of Education (MoE) released the *Several Opinions on Further Promoting the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education*[5]. It was the first time the balanced development of compulsory education became the focus of educational reform in China. As the 2006 Compulsory Education Law stated: "The State Council and local people's governments at or above the county level shall rationally allocate educational resources to promote the balanced development of compulsory education", the "balanced development" was further promoted as a legal responsibility of the local governments. Offering equality and quality of primary education to every child became the new goal of primary schools in China

Meanwhile, policy makers and educators in China have been reflecting upon the drawbacks of an exam-oriented education and their educational values. The issue of the

[5] 《教育部关于进一步推进义务教育均衡发展的若干意见》 (http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/200505/t20050525_81809.html)

Decision on Deepening of Educational Reform and Full Promotion of Quality-oriented Education[6] in 1999 symbolised the start of the new curriculum reform (Cui and Zhu, 2014). The curriculum reform was expected to transform the school system and "liberate" students from the exam-oriented learning culture. As Cui and Zhu (2014) pointed out, the national curriculum reform (NCR) touched upon the entire education system from educational aims, system, to methods and contents. Guo (2012:90) summarised the six objectives of the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (on trail) promulgated in 2001 as follows:

- Changing the function of curriculum from knowledge transmission to cultivation of active lifelong learners.
- Changing from the subject-specific curriculum to an integrated curriculum structure with optional courses to meet students' diverse learning needs.
- Highlighting the relevance of the curriculum to students' everyday lives.
- Promoting constructivist learning and changing the rote learning to active learning based on students' overall abilities to process information, acquire knowledge, solve problems and collaborate.
- Changing the curriculum assessment from its selective purpose to the supportive purpose in improving teaching and learning.
- Decentralising the curriculum administration and enhance its relevance to local contexts by joint efforts of central government, local government and schools.

This approach is very different from previous curriculum reforms, as more choices and space for self-development are encouraged in education. Cultivating students' creative abilities and practical skills have been placed as the core of the reform. The process of implementing NCR, however, has not been smooth. Liu and Kang (2011) have summarised the five distinct stages of the curriculum reform: 1) curriculum ideology and planning (1996–1998); 2) the design, dissemination and experimental phase of the curriculum documents (1999–2001); 3) the compulsory education curriculum pilot and finalisation of the senior high school curriculum program (2001–2004); 4) the finalisation of compulsory educational curriculum, nationwide implementation and the new senior high school curriculum pilot (2004–2007); and 5) reflection, reinterpretation and further implementation (2007–present). Although there was initial resistance among many in the education system, empirical studies have identified a general accepting attitude towards the new curriculum and have described positive changes in local schools (Guan and Meng, 2007; Liu and Kang, 2011). Guan and Meng (2007) reviewed the eight changes in practice:

- the beginning of the three-level curriculum management mechanism;
- more flexibility in school management;

6 《中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革，全面推进素质教育的决定》（http://old.moe.gov.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_177/200407/2478.html）

- diverse curriculum structure (e.g. required course, elective course and integrated practice activities);
- more learning opportunities to improve teachers' competences so they are aligned with the curriculum reform;
- the gradual adoption of a student-centred approach;
- the adoption of developmental evaluation to cater to learners' diversity;
- the broader use of technology in teaching; and
- the enhancement of skills to help students master more life or work-related skills.

Other scholars found little evidence of change in real classroom practices. For example, Sargent et al.'s (2011) analysis of videos of demonstration lessons in Nanjing led to their conclusion that forms of student participation remained highly limited. Both progression and barriers in the curriculum reform were identified (Li and Ni, 2011). Despite the different results, both scholars and practitioners advocated that bringing changes to teachers' pedagogical and conceptual understanding and classroom practice would be the key to the successful implementation of the NCR in China. Table 2 summarises studies on the impact of curriculum reform on teachers in China. I have included studies in secondary school contexts for their reference value to clarify the broader impact of curriculum reform in the area of compulsory education in China. The literature showed that NCR has brought both professional development opportunities and psychological struggles to teachers at various school levels. These studies have also reported that the curriculum was largely welcomed by teachers, despite teachers' struggles with the structural restrictions and the beliefs in traditional teaching and learning within the Chinese cultural tradition.

Table 2 Summarising studies on the impact of the NCR on teachers in China.

Authors	***Research design and methods***	***Study population***	***Findings/arguments***
Zhong (2006)	Reflection on policy implementation		Teachers' "curriculum inertia" as a challenge for changes in subject and teaching materials; the risks of a conflictual way of thinking that leads to misunderstanding and a rejection of the curriculum reform.
Lee et al. (2011)	Survey	1646 teachers from six provinces	Teachers are positive in terms of their receptivity to the reform outcomes, and negative in terms of their participation in the decision-making process. Female teachers felt more empowered and receptive than male teachers.
Sargent (2012)	Classroom observations and in-depth interviews	Teachers in rural primary schools in Gansu province	Rural school teachers who have more familiarity and positive attitudes about the NCR have more "progressive" beliefs about teaching based on the constructivist conception of knowledge. For the "traditional teachers", success in teaching is still measured by content mastery and examination results.
Yin, Lee and Law (2012)	Qualitative case study	Interviews with 18 teachers in Guangzhou province	Teachers emotional experiences vary according to the different teacher–trainer interactions during the curriculum reform. The mixed feelings could be the result of interplay between professional orientations, power relationships and moral purposes. Teachers tended to have more positive feelings when the trainer was an expert teacher.
Qian and Walker (2013)	In-depth interviews	Principals from three "ordinary"[6] urban schools in Shanghai	Commonalities in principals' teacher development strategies across the three schools, including data-informed decision making, adaptations of strategies to school contexts, emphasis on the collaborative culture and the use of action research. Potential issues and gaps included principals' lack of confidence in teachers' capacity and commitment, the top-down manner in implementing teacher development activities, a lack of focus on teachers' creativity and a lack of informal and spontaneous learning

			opportunities for teachers to become "comprehensive change agents" in the curriculum reform.
Fang (2014)	Case study	An eighth-grade maths teacher in Shanghai	Four reform dilemmas were found in the analysis of teachers' homework practices: 1) increasing workload for teachers due to the content change; 2) lack of teachers' own ideas and experiences in informing teachers' pedagogical practices; 3) teachers' (rather than students) dominant role in homework practices; and 4) the inefficiency of formal teacher development programmes.
Yan (2014)	Interviews	Secondary English teachers from three schools in central China.	The gap between the new curriculum and teachers' classroom practices and the interrelated contextual restrictions, which included psychological challenges for teachers, students' resistance, lack of school support, physical constraints and the "backwash effect" of the examination culture in China.
Li and Ni (2012)	Reflections of debates on China's new Basic Education Curriculum Reform and observations of challenges facing teachers in implementing the NCR.		Lack of clear guidance in implementation, which led to a formulaic and simplified understanding of the concepts in the curriculum reform. There was also a tendency to adapt a simple "old or new method" divide in teacher appraisal standards. How to cope with the changing contents for teaching and keep a balance between students' inquiry-based learning and teacher guidance became urgent problems for further investigation and improvement.
Fu and Clarke (2018)	Qualitative study (interviews, observations, teachers' reflective journals and associated fieldnotes)	Eight physics teachers in one high school	The collaborative culture and openness in learning the subject of physics contributed to the teachers' sense of safety and mutual support in sharing their thoughts and offering critical feedback to each other. Concrete examples during the collective curriculum development process enabled teachers' sense of agency within their group, which may surpass other factors (i.e. government policies, textbooks and government-run professional development programmes) in empowering teachers due to the consistency of these interactions in a local educational structure.

It is worth noting that there have been active attempts to improve teachers' competency and professional development to facilitate the process of educational reform in China. In

terms of formal teacher education, China has three major types of teacher training institution: 1) the secondary teachers' schools; 2) the normal colleges; and 3) normal universities. Other institutions, such as comprehensive universities, have been permitted to run teacher training courses. The Teacher Qualification Certificate is open for individuals to apply for without a teacher education degree. In terms of teachers' on-the-job training, studies have identified the emphasis on subject matter knowledge and professional communities as the merits of teacher education programmes that benefited students' academic achievement in international tests (Han and Paine, 2010; Paine and Ma, 1993). At the same time, reviews and empirical studies have found other enduring issues in teacher education programmes and professional development in China (Gu, 2006; Zhou, 2014). One of the criticisms is the lack of evidence about the effectiveness of connecting educational theories with classroom practices (Zhou, 2014).

Formal in-service teacher education in China is mostly focusing on implementation of the NCR. The government has adopted the cascade approach[7] to teachers' professional development (Zhou, 2014). However, empirical studies have revealed problems in the top-down mandated training for in-service teachers (Feng, 2003; Zhu, 2005; Lai, 2010). Listening to government policy analysis and experts' speeches on theories of the NCR are the main activities in these formal training. Teachers, however, found it difficult to understand and implement these separate and abstract ideas in their classroom teaching (Zhu, 2005). Some of the teachers also felt that their expertise was ignored in the expert discourses (Zhou, 2014).

In addition, schools have been allowed to adopt more innovative approaches (i.e. school networks, peer support and teachers' reflective writing) to tackle problems in the structures and processes of the educational reform. Educators, school leaders and scholars have been encouraged to take advantage of university–the school collaborations, lesson study-based action research, school visits, adoption of digital technology and private–public partnerships to support teachers' reflection and professional development. The Chinese culture holds teachers in high regard. Teachers enjoy occupational prestige and society is considered highly accountable for students' learning. In a comparative study that set out to investigate the perceived qualities of effective teachers in China and the United States, Yin and Lee (2012) found that teachers' ethics constitute the shared standard for effective

[7] A cascade model of professional development presents a particular way of promoting the professional knowledge by passing from originators of the programme to local trainers and then to the target teachers. Despite its cost efficiency in brining large-scale changes, this approach is believed to have the risks of distortion and dilution of knowledge in the process (Soloman and Tresman 1999; Kennedy 2005).

teaching among different stakeholders (teacher, students and parents). The teachers also considered that teachers' professional skills and professional development were the other two elements of being an effective teacher. In addition to these three aspects, parents' high expectations of students' academic achievement constituted another important evaluative standard for good teachers in China. While the standard for effective Chinese teachers shared similarities with those identified in Western countries, the authors argued that differences in cultures and educational systems could diversify the conditions and influencing factors (Yin and Lee, 2012). Gu's investigation of the perceptions and experiences of a cross-cultural professional development programme among Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and British teacher educators has also revealed the significant differences in attitudes and perceived changes in teachers' professional knowledge (Gu, 2007). Several lines of evidence have suggested that the system of teaching and the cultural roles of teachers, rather than individual teachers' beliefs and behaviours, are the underlying basis of differences between countries in student academic performances (Hiebert et al., 2005; LeTendre et al., 2001). To date, the development of primary teachers' sense of identity in the contexts of major education reform and cultural influences has still not yet been carefully investigated in China.

2.3 Ongoing debate on the "public" and "private" in education

Education has been considered a public good (i.e. a good to be provided by the state) in global public policy at least since 1945 (Daviet, 2016:1–2). However, such claims are called into question when we witness the increasing involvement of non-state actors in education (Daviet, 2016). The fact is that private contributions – from civil societies, the business sectors and families – have long been relevant to the public education system. The distinction between the public and the private is not always clear. One the one hand, there is a general understanding of the private sector as any educational organisations and activities that are apart from the state. On the other hand, the discipline of economics tends to contrast the "state" with the "market" in determining the role and comparative efficacy of the private and public sectors in education. The situation is even more complicated in the context of the emerging global knowledge economy, where education is considered a private good for individual competitiveness as well as a public good that provides national rather than the global benefits (Robertson et al., 2012, 4–5).

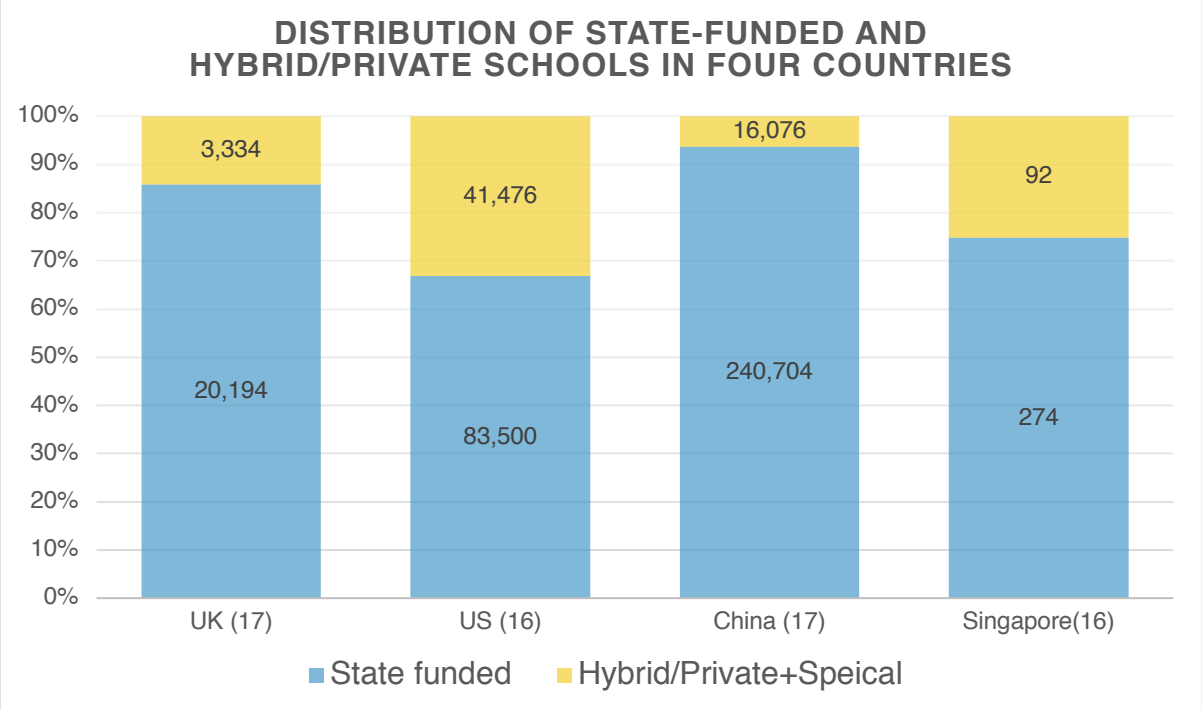
While the claimed merit of private schools is that they offer parents greater "choices", there is an increasing concern that private schools undermine social cohesion and threaten equality. Not all parents can afford private schooling, and this can create a two-tier system in features such as class size and education resources. Those who oppose private schools argue that private actors have no reason to consider its impact on the broader educational

landscape, including issues such as social stratification. The concern is particularly severe when private schools' selection of the top performers seems to have left only average or struggling students in public schools. Besides, more school autonomy may not guarantee that private schools will base their teaching on core social values.

Figure 1 presents the distribution of state-funded and hybrid (or private) schools in four countries (the United Kingdom, the United States of America, mainland China and Singapore). This table was generated from government data sources to present up-to-date comparative scales of state-funded and private/hybrid schools in these four countries. As it is demonstrated in the chart, although the number of private schools in China (16,076 private schools) exceeds those in three other countries, its proportion remains the smallest in the education system in comparison with the number of state-funded institutions.

In their discussion on the rise of public–private partnerships in education, Robertson et al. (2012:3) pointed out that the definition of "public education" (and perhaps private education) is still in dispute at various levels of national and international policies and negotiations. For instance, although the World Bank has considered countries such as Canada and the Netherlands as benefiting from large state-aided private education systems, the OECD has reported that these countries have close to 100% enrolment in public (or state) schools (2010). The distinction between the public and private, therefore, is not fixed. Instead, the public–private distinction evolves in specific exchange relationships of particular social and cultural contexts and is therefore deserving careful investigations and interrogation (Robertson et al., 2012).

Figure 1 ***Distribution of state-funded and hybrid/private schools in four countries (2016-2017)***



* (16) indicates data collected in 2016; (17) indicates data collected in 2017.

* Sources:

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys

http://www.moe.edu.cn

https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics

https://www.moe.gov.sg

2.4 The role of public and private sectors in China's education system

State schools remain the primary provider of formal schooling in mainland China. The finance and delivery of formal learning in Chinese schools, however, come from both state and private sectors. Government spending on education has grown, yet it represents less than 5% of GDP. The numbers of private schools are limited in China, but parents' demands for and expenditure on educational resources are significant. The widespread use of private tutors has become a substitute method for formal private schools. Despite the policy changes, the Chinese government has been slowly relaxing restrictions on private and foreign investment in education.

Private education has played an important role throughout Chinese history since the Spring-Autumn period (Chunqiu Shidai, 770–476 BC). The development of the private sector is a reflection of changing Chinese society. During the era under Chairman Mao, all for-profit enterprises were officially forbidden due to restrictions on capitalist entrepreneurship. Private organisations were called "*minban*/private (people-run/private) unions" and those private schools were funded by individuals, households and local communities in villages and rural mountainous areas; they were mostly closed down or integrated into state schools in towns until the reform era began in 1978. Private education – from short-term supplementary classes organised in schools and colleges to prepare students for the National University Entrance Exams to specialised vocational skill tests – re-emerged in the 1980s.

When China's economic growth became the top priority for the country's development in 1992, private schools experienced a long period of expansion (Chan and Wang, 2009; Yan and Lin, 2004; Wang, 2013). The devolution of financial responsibility from central to local governments has brought about complex institutional changes and fostered new relationships between the public and private sectors (Chan and Wang, 2009; Cheng, 1994). Local governments in China take increasingly proactive roles in improving the provision of educational services and encourage investments from enterprises and individuals alike. Following the 1993 Outline for Education Reform and Development in China, the government recognised the legal status of private schools and specified the regulations for private school establishment and management. Different forms of private involvement in education were encouraged, and schools with various financial and management forms were created (Yan and Lin, 2004).

Under state ownership, state schools are allowed to convert to state-owned-and-people-managed (gong you minban/private) or people-managed-and-state- sponsored (minban/private gongzhu). Different forms of state-to-minban/private conversions started

to take place, including key school[8] conversion, weak school conversion, community school conversion, key school and weak school alliance conversion and more (Wen, 2009). Appendix B demonstrates the basic features of state school and private school structures in China. As shown, schools are divided into four groups concerning funding, ownership, organisational structures, student admissions and teacher employment conditions. On the whole, two main types of private schools can be defined: (1) schools established by social or private capital or (2) schools converted from state schools into private schools (Chan and Wang, 2009). In spite of regional differences, the converted private schools comprise the primary type of private education available in China today (Xu and Ge, 2003).

Despite the policy changes, the Chinese government has been slowly relaxing restrictions on private and foreign investment in education. In 2003, the Law on Promoting Private Education developed the government's legal framework for regulating private schools and educational institutions. This law stated that corporations, public enterprises, social organisations, social groups, and individuals drawing on non-fiscal institutional funds together constitute the types of private educational contributors. Regulations include methods of establishment, organisation and activities, teachers' working conditions and students' benefits, capital and finance management, educational quality evaluations, government supports and rewards, as well as organisational change and termination. The release of the Law on Promoting Private Education was a milestone for minban/private education development. China's focus on economic efficiency, the enforcement of local initiatives, the highly competitive College Entrance Examination[9] system and the encouragement of individual efforts in their educational provision and achievement have led to the more vocationally oriented school curricula and a growing number of private educational institutes in higher education (Mok, 2007: 264). According to the 2013 Government Report on Education Development, there were 149,000 private schools, colleges and other educational institutes in China, with an increase of 9,057 from the previous year (MoE, 2013). The increase of 444,900 students enrolled in the private education sector became a strong indicator of the further expansion of private education.

Yan and Lin (2004) summarise the three developmental stages of private schools based on their analysis of local government policies since 1978: (1) the recovery and development stage (1978- 1992), (2) the rapid development stage (1992-1997) and (3) the normalisation stage (1997-2004). Wang's (2013) theory is based on the observation of the deceleration in growth of private secondary schools in China since 2003. He extends Yan and Lin's (2004) framework by offering a five-model development frame, which includes (1) disruption

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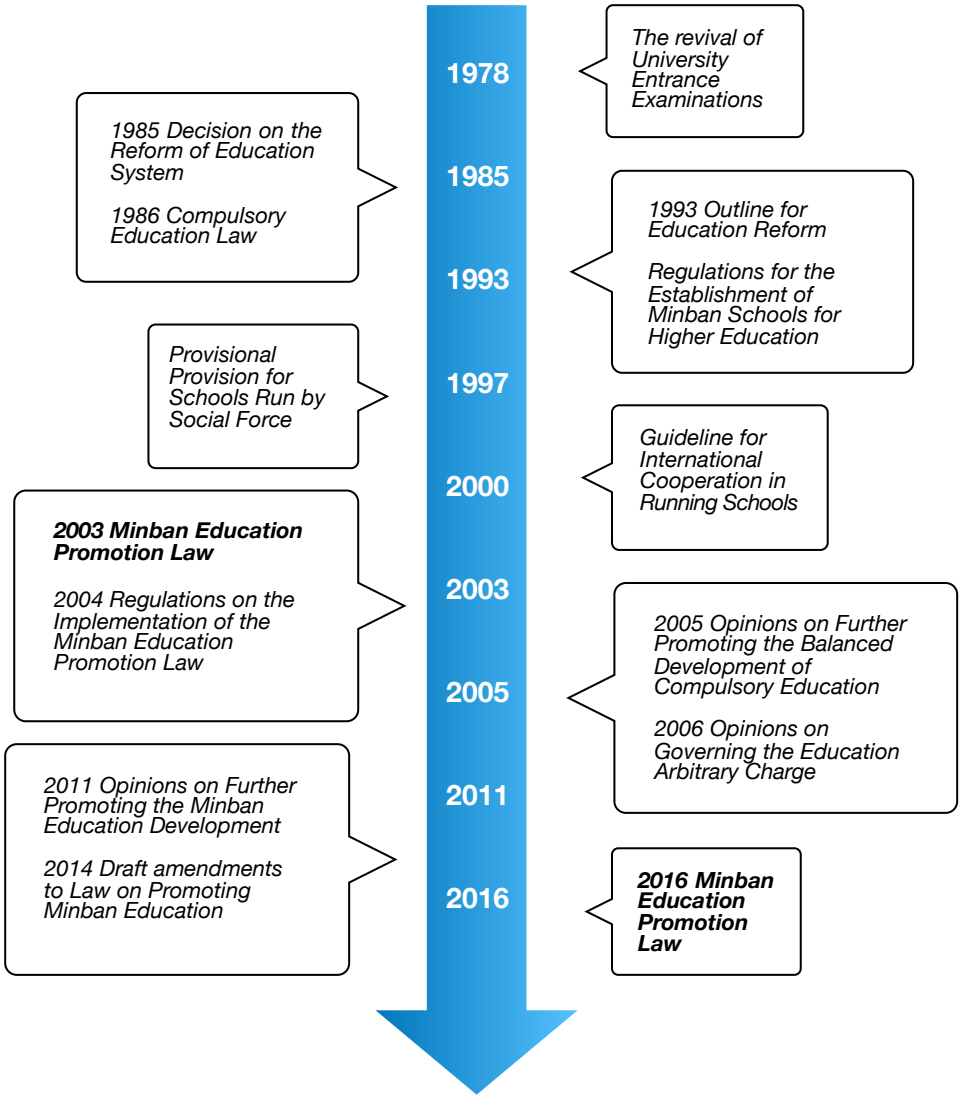
(1949-1977), (2) re-emergence (1978- 1991), (3) development (1992-1996), (4) normalisation (1997-2001) and (5) legalised regression (2002 onwards). Based on these authors' discussions and other available information, Figure 2 provides a brief overview of policy changes in private education in China.

Figure 2 ***Review of private education policies in contemporary China.***



Wu's (2012) analysis of the national statistics also reveals the increasing number of students enrolled in private schools at the level of preschool, vocational and higher education. On top of this, several problems with the expansion of private education need to be discussed. The existence of education corruption, school bankruptcy and incidences of organisers absconding have been reported in social media. The dramatic decrease in the number of private primary and secondary schools has been published in empirical studies (Wu, 2012;

Wang, 2013). There are multiple policies and social issues involved in the changes. Basing their research on private education in 14 provinces in China, Yan and Lin (2004:78-85) defined four critical issues in the development of private schools in China:

> 1. Relationships between state schools and private schools are dialectic, namely they are both competitive and complementary. The blurred boundaries between state and private schools, especially the converted schools, are accompanied by the authoritative role of local governments in managing educational resources and inspecting education quality among schools. In this sense, private education seems to have fewer advantages in comparison with their counterparts in the state system.
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> 2. Chinese regulations treat education as a public good, which has led to the controversy of using enterprise to defend private education. In China, private schools are categorised as private yet non-enterprise unities, which often holds back the autonomy of private schools in deciding their financial income and sustainability, educational administration and management processes.
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> 3. The dominant influence of the state in the ownership of private schools has significant implications for the internal governance structures in the schools.
>
> 4. The unclear role of the school board in decision making and policy implementation might lead to the relatively casual and unstable allocation of resources in private schools. Blurred responsibilities and authorities might lead to chaotic situations in school management and limit the capacities of private schools to adjust to changing social and political environments, improve the education qualities, and to meet their social responsibilities and accountabilities.

In 2005, the *Opinion on Further Promoting the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education*[10] was published by the MoE, aiming to address contrasting educational qualities and outcomes among schools and the issue of school choices. As part of China's political reform in "constructing incorrupt government", the Opinions on Governing the Educational Arbitrary Charge were published in 2006, marking a major policy change on converted private schools. The government began to rectify and regulate state-to-private school conversion, which produced resistance from local governments and schools. The "four independence" principles, i.e. independent legal personnel, a separate campus, a separate accounting system and an independent school management, were set up to

[10] 《教育部关于进一步推进义务教育均衡发展的若干意见》
(http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A06/s3321/200505/t20050525_81809.html)

evaluate which schools could be converted to private. Those that did not meet the requirements were transferred to state schools or closed. Fee-charging institutes inside state schools, such as international programmes, were also required to be dissolved.

In response to critics of current private education policies, the Opinions on Further Promoting the Private Education Development released in 2011 claimed to provide private schools with more autonomy by allowing schools to be for-profit legal organisations. In the State Council executive meeting on January 2014, Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council, announced a series of draft amendments to the Education Law, the Law on Higher Education and the Law on Promoting *Minban*/private education, which now is going through the deliberation in the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. In the amendment, a category of *minban*/private enterprise schools has been created: the management and funding of private schools will depend on whether the school is registered as *minban*/private non-enterprise organisation or enterprise organisation. For-profit educational enterprises, be it formal schools, vocational training institute or private tutoring institutes, could register with the local Bureau of Commerce and establish governing structures and accounting systems according to the Enterprise Law. Schools are encouraged to attract a wide range of non-governmental capital for their establishment and operations. The state government also helps further adjustments concerning human resources, government fiscal supports, and other financial property and social welfare policies in its support of private education. Formal withdrawal mechanisms are required for schools to be established as private schools. According to the draft amendment, school boards will be afforded more autonomy in their decisions on tuition fees, curriculum design and teachers' welfare and working conditions. Although the policy changes have come to be widely recognised, the complexities and changes of China's educational and socio-economic contexts seem to pose further challenges and raise uncertainties for stakeholders. When and how they will be implemented, and what influences they will exert on private schools and educational institutions more broadly, remains to be seen.

2.5 The status quo of private school teachers in China

The differences among state and private primary school teachers' general backgrounds and work conditions in China are summarised in Figure 3. Historically, the term *minban*/private (people-managed) teacher is most commonly used to describe teachers who taught in village-funded schools in deprived rural areas in the early stages of communist China. The term *minban*/private, and its translation as "people-managed", is explained by the fact that these teachers are not employed by the government and hence are excluded from the state system. In Mao's era, all private schools were abandoned or re-registered as

state schools, yet PSTs nonetheless retained their place as the major teaching force in rural schools. In 1977, there were approximately 3.4 million PSTs in rural primary schools, numbering 65% of the total number of teachers in primary schools in China (Ma and Long, 1999). From 1970s to 1990s, rural PSTs were paid by local communities or schools to teach primary school students from villages and they often worked simultaneously as farmers to add to their low incomes. Most of the PSTs were graduates from local secondary schools without having received professional teacher training.

In China, *bianzhi,* which refers to membership of the government personnel system, is the key institution in distinguishing the social status and welfare benefits of state teachers and PSTs. *Bianzhi* can be directly translated as the "enrolment system" and it usually refers to administrative posts in the government with state payroll in China. People who have bianzhi are mostly working in the public sectors and are often described as state employees who "eat imperial grain"[11]. PSTs who do not have the *bianzhi* status are often perceived as a marginalised occupational group in China's education system. The reconstruction of the education sector since the 1980s has had numerous different effects on the teacher education system (Paine and Fang, 2007:29) and on the lives of PSTs. All primary school teachers are required to obtain a degree from the teacher education colleges (MoE, 2002) and a series of policies have been released to differentiate teachers' pay in order to transfer PSTs to state teachers through a series of evaluations and inspections of teachers' professional diplomas and certificates (Wang, 2005).

The 1992 *Opinions on Further Improving and Strengthening Private School Teachers' Work*[12]identified a five-character plan in eliminating numbers of *private school teacher*s, namely, stopping recruitment, selection, transfer to other occupations, dismissal and retirement[13] of *private school teacher*s in state schools. Ma and Long (1999) have summarised four characteristics of PSTs in the context of rural education in China:

> 1. PSTs are acknowledged by the state and teach in rural schools.
>
> 2. PSTs are not state employees and do not possess the state *bianzhi*. They are paid by local communities and schools and may receive certain government subsidies. PSTs have rural residences with rural *hukou.*
>
> 3. The existence of PSTs temporarily solved the problem of teacher shortages in rural schools and played an important role in the development of China's modern education system.

[11] 吃皇粮
[12] 《民办教师工作问题若干意见》
[13] 关，招，转，辞，退

4. The PST is a "historical phenomenon" in the development of education in China's rural areas. The implementation of *minban*/private-to-state teacher conversion policies and the increasing number of well-educated teachers in rural state schools largely solved the problem of PSTs.

Figure 3 Different groups of teachers and the focus of this study

	Primary school teachers		
	State school teachers (SST)	***Private school teachers (PST)***	***Minban teachers/ Daike teachers***
	Teachers who are employed by the local government, most of whom work in state schools.	Teachers who works in private/minban schools. The teacher may or may not be state employed.	Teachers who are not employed by the local government, who only work temporarily in state schools.
Bianzhi	Yes	Yes / No	No
Employment	Government employee	Contract-based / government employee	No contract / temporary contract
Recruitment	Local government	Local government / the school	The school
Qualifications	National teacher qualification	Diverse educational backgrounds. Teacher qualification are required, preferably with teacher education backgrounds and teaching experiences	Local graduates/ normal college graduates. Some teachers (will) become state school teachers (SST)
Actors in teachers' in-service education	State and local governments, Universities, teacher training agencies, schools and school networks.	Depending on different types of private schools, teachers' in-service education may involve teacher training agencies, publishing companies, schools and school networks. There might be less involvement of governments and Universities.	Given limited resources, *minban* teachers/ substitute teachers are mostly trained on their job in schools.
Curriculum	State curriculum and/or school-based curriculum	State curriculum and/or alternative curriculum	State curriculum

Several empirical research studies of private teachers aiming at revealing policy processes that were intended to transform rural private teachers' status have been conducted. Meng and Ma (1999) trace the historical roots of the emergence, development and problems in the processes required to convert PSTs into state teachers. Le and Lao (2004) use a questionnaire survey to investigate teacher qualifications, income and social status, and the effectiveness of teacher training programmes in learning and communication technology for PSTs in six provinces in China. In his PhD research study, *Government, Local Community and Rural Teachers*, Li (1996) takes an "education system-social structure" perspective in order to understand the inclusion of PSTs in the state management system from the end of the Qing dynasty. The author identifies the characteristics of PSTs in terms of their relationships with the state, communities and schools in one county. In contrast with state teachers, the research found that PSTs were marginalised in terms of their occupational behaviour and sense of belongingness in the process of status conversion. Yan (2006) adopts state-society theories in his PhD thesis, which investigates state and rural PST identity formation in an extreme example of the private-to-state teacher conversion process in a particular urban location ("G town"). The author discusses the reconstruction of PST policy discourse by local governments and how it resulted in petitions advanced by the PST group. According to Yan, the conflict in the policy process is due to the gap between the condition to legitimate state policy and "local knowledge", and also reflects the power relations embedded in the social structure of G town (Yan, 2006).

Regarding teachers in urban private schools in China, Wu's (2011) ethnographic study is worth mentioning here. Wu (2011) uses critical discourse analysis to study the discursive construction of teachers' identities from teachers' stories in a *minban*/private higher secondary school in a small town in southern China. In this study, the discourse of "*da gong*" (migrant labour) is defined as a language game that constructs the reality of teachers' lives and the way teachers come to self-identify with the private school. Although these studies are not specifically focused on the impact of educational policies, they nonetheless shed light on those teachers' day-to-day interactions in the school contexts that shape their experiences.

With the exception of Wu's research, existing studies on non-state/*bianzhi* teachers have been conducted primarily in rural schools, involving rural communities and local governments; these are insightful yet may potentially limit our understanding of other types of *minban*/PSTs and their work in different social and cultural contexts. For instance, PSTs are perceived differently in urban schools in China. First of all, the notion of private school covers a very wide range of purposes, student groups, leadership styles and organisational structures in China; it includes elite and international schools, schools for migrant children, charity schools and private tutoring institutions. Teachers in private schools can also be differentiated in terms of their educational and training backgrounds,

teaching experiences, working environments and daily practices. Figure 3 summarises some key data on the different groups of teachers in primary education in China.

According to the *Opinions on Further Promoting the Minban/Private Education Development*[14] in 2011 (MoE, 2011), PSTs are as entitled as state teachers to equal access for qualifications, professional title appraisal, in-service training and education, research project application and international exchange. On the other hand, teacher policies also tend to encourage local authorities to replace the permanent state employee status[15] with short-term contracts and periodic reviews of teacher qualifications. Local government policies on promoting teacher exchanges and collaboration programmes also aim to promote teachers' learning and professional development in order to ensure a high-quality education for all students. In spite of the difference between schools and the changes in policy, many PSTs still identify themselves as "lower-level citizens" in the state education system. I would argue that teachers and teaching in private schools requires further attention by researchers. Questions of how the expansion of private primary education might influence teacher qualities in terms of the development of TPIs currently remain unaddressed by scholars.

[14] 《关于鼓励社会力量兴办教育促进民办教育健康发展的若干意见》（http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2017-01/18/content_5160828.htm）

[15] 编制

Chapter three. Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to clarify the concept of TPIs better and to review the empirical research studies on how TPIs are developed. In this chapter, I will discuss the relevant literature on the three major aspects that have informed this research study: 1) the definition and significance of professional identities; 2) relating concepts and influences on teacher identities; and 3) the construction of a conceptual framework to guide my research study. The review of existing research aims to define gaps in the literature and serves as a basis for comparison and consensus in the choice of research design and methodology to study TPIs. Based on the review, I will summarise the key messages and discuss the focus of this study, which leads on to the next chapter, on the research design and methodology.

3.1 Introduction

Recent years have witnessed intense interest in questions concerning identity in a remarkable array of social sciences and humanities disciplines. Within cultural studies, for example, identity is often connected with socially constructed labels based on a person's race, gender, classes and education. In political sciences, much research studies have focused on the "identity politics" of race, gender and sexuality. Identity is also a central concept in works on multiculturalism and ethical conflicts in education. Initially, scholars used the term "identity" as a way to describe how one person positions him or herself with relation to others' perceptions of his or her positions; it is as a process of "subject formation over one's life experiences" (Urrieta, L., 2018:4). One can find definitions of identity in many places. Table 3 gives some examples, which are mainly used in the literature of educational research studies. The primary purpose of this section is to understand the definition of TPI and to situate the concept in the broader field of teacher education. The review will also seek to understand how TPIs influence teacher practices.

3.2 Defining identity

The traditional psychological frames of identity treat individuals as fixed, and in earlier literature (e.g. Cooley, 1902, Erikson, 1968) the concept of identity tended to focus on the unity and continuity of the concept of self. As Day et al. (2006:602) noted, earlier perspectives towards self tend to focus on "the inner world of the individual and to position the self as a singular, stable essence that was little affected by context". In contrast, from a poststructuralist perspective, identity is considered multiple and dynamic, and individuals actively construct their identity on an ongoing basis. Educational research has drawn on a number of theoretical positions in investigating teachers' lives and professional identities, including symbolic interactionism (e.g. Nias, 1989; Czerniawski, 2011), sociocultural perspectives (e.g. Lasky, 2005; Tsui, 2007) and poststructuralist perspectives (e.g. Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe, 1994; Morgan, 2004).

Scholars have linked education and identity (e.g. Davidson, 1996; Gee, 2000 etc.). Some have focused on how characteristics of group identities might shape students' (or teachers') academic engagement (e.g. Oyserman, Bybee and Terry, 2003; Steele, 1997). Other scholars have focused on how a particular learning context exert influences on students' identities (e.g. Davidson, 1996; Delpit, 1995). As is shown in Table 3, there are multiple linkages between identity and educational research studies. Different RQs and approaches have evolved somewhat different conventions regarding the term.

Researchers might also have different intentions in using the term in their specific arguments. For instance, in their study on effective mentoring practices for researcher students, Griffiths, Thompson and Hryniewicz (2010) focused on the effectiveness of the programme; the definition of researcher identity was somewhat ambiguous, as it might only be used to indicate a "feeling" of being a researcher. In contrast, the auto-ethnographic study by Mertkan and Bayrakli (2018) specifically employed the poststructuralist perspective to identity in exploring the interrelations between the process of "becoming" a qualitative researcher with contextual influences. Different disciplines have different focuses when it comes to the use of "identity" in research studies. As Orde (2016:6) summarised, there is a wide range of variations of RQs on identity: psychology has addressed the importance of self-concepts; educational theory links learning process and highlights the developmental aspect of identity; sociology tends to reconstruct the social prerequisites for identity concepts; and cultural studies and media studies focus on analysing the symbolic or power-related context of identity patterns. Adding to the complexity is a range of related concepts often mixed with identity, such as identification, role identities, self-concept, self-image and personhood. Therefore, it is crucial to give the concept a more precise definition within its theoretical traditions before moving on to the context of teachers' education and professional lives. In the following sections, I will present a brief review of identity from the perspectives of three theoretical traditions: 1) symbolic interactionism; 2) sociocultural theory; and 3) poststructuralism.

Table 3 Examples of definitions of identity in educational research literature

Group	Author(s)	Nature of the study	Definitions of identity
Student/learner identity	Lawson, L. (2014) (UK)	A small-scaled mixed method research on the connections between business students' learner identities, social-economic backgrounds and subject choice.	*"A 'learner identity' can be broadly defined as how an individual feel about herself/himself as a learner and the extent to which he/she describes himself/herself as a 'learner'" (2014:343).*
	Lynda Turner and Jane Tobbell (2018) (UK)	An ethnographic study of first year undergraduate students' academic participation and its links with identity transition.	*"[…] leaners' identities as trajectory, the reconciliation and negotiation of which exert influences on the transition process"*
Teacher identity	Kayi-Aydar, H. (2017) (USA)	A narrative case study of a bilingual teachers' invested agency in developing professional identities in various contexts.	*"identities […] as teachers' selves as professionals, including personal and institutional aspects of being a teacher (Moate and Rouhotie- Lyhty, 2014).*
	Menter, I. (2010) (England)	A literature review that considers the implications of historical and political changes in teacher education on teacher identities.	*"[…] how teacher see themselves and their work […] shaped in large measure by the social settings in which any individual teacher finds her/himself, be that at national, local or school level" (page 29).*
Researcher identity	Kirstin P. McEachern and Jessica L. Horton (2016) (USA)	Two teachers' reflections on their own practices that support researcher identity development.	*"Identity is not a stagnant property, but rather an entity that changes with time, often going through stages, and is continuously modified based on the surrounding environment (Brownell and Tanner, 2012:341).*
	Mertkan, S. and Bayrakli, H. (2018) (Turkey)	An auto-ethnographic study of contextual influences on becoming a qualitative researcher.	*"[…] identity is multiple, always-in-the-making, 'a becoming not a being' (Frith, 1996:109), socially constructed and negotiated across time through Discourse (Gee, 2008) in 'inequitable relations of power (Peirce, 1995:12) in social, cultural and political contexts (Varghese et al, 2005)".*
Teacher educator identity	Griffiths,V. , Thompson, S. and Hryniewicz, L. (2010) (England)	A qualitative study to identify effective mentoring practices, forms of support and barriers or problems in developing research profiles and identities	*Not clearly defined.*
	Skerrett, A. (2008) (USA)	An autobiographical study of how the teacher educators' biography and identity influence the lived experiences teaching and stance in research.	*"teacher role identity […] (as) the way in which individuals think about themselves as teachers — the image they have of self-as-teacher" (Knowles, 1992:99) .*

3.2.1 Symbolic interactionism

We can trace the modernist approaches to identity in sociology to symbolic interactionism, which originally derives from the work of the pragmatic philosophies of Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, William James and George Herbert Mead (Crotty, 2003:73–75). Symbolic interactionism examines how individuals interact and the creation of personal identities through interactions with others. Blumer (cited by Crotty, 2003:72) first coined the term "symbolic interactionism". This includes three core principles of this theory: meaning, language and thought. Humans act towards each other and things based on the meaning they attribute to people or things. Humans also use language or symbols as tools to negotiate these meanings. Human thoughts then modify the interpretation of these symbols, when language is used in conversations.

According to Mead (1934:162), we could describe a person as a personality as he (or she) belongs to a community and takes over the institutions of that community into his conduct. Baert (1995:68) stated that the term “identity” in symbolic interactionism draws on Mead’s idea of the “self”, which indicates the individual’s ability to look at oneself “from outsiders’ perspectives”. Based on symbolic interactionism, Holland et al. (1998) summarised:

> People tell others who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves who they are and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings are what we refer to as identities. (1998:3)

Holland and Lachicotte (2007:103) further suggested that Mead’s conception of the “I-me” dynamic grounds the formation of self in the social coordination of activity and highlights the significance of the relation between “self” and the “linguistically recognized social positions and roles” to the conduct of social activities. The “Me” (as I respond to the world), other than the “I” (as I present myself to the world), plays a central role in the process of social construction, implying the self as constructed via the “generalized other” (Crotty, 1998:62).

Within this frame, the focus is on the subjective experiences of individuals as the basis for understanding the systems of a society, such as the education system. From this perspective, one could draw insights into TPIs through an understanding of how teachers view themselves as well as how they believe others perceive them. Teachers interact socially and could adjust their behaviours in response to others’ actions. As such, teachers socialise with each other as social actors and engage actively as they construct their social world. An example of such exploration would be Nias’ (1989) exploration of the “me” of the teachers’ selves that are situated in the teachers' working lives in the study in primary school teachers’ selves in England in the 1980s. She distinguished the personal and professional elements of teachers’ identities and found that teachers incorporated the social identity as “a teacher” into an individual’s self-image over time. In this sense, the

process of socialisation at one's workplace become a significant in the creation of TPIs. A teacher may share similar attitudes and norms of behaviour that the other peers have in the same organisation, as a result of the process of learning from others, which gradually became a part of one's "self". The symbolic interactionist notion of social identity implies that individuals view the world from others' standpoints; by taking the role of the other, one can imagine alternative and evaluate these alternatives based on the likely reactions of others.

3.2.2 The sociocultural perspective

Vygotsky (1978) examined the social origin of mental functioning, which is historically and institutionally situated. He developed the concept of the zone of proximal development, which serves as a model to explain the interactions through which individuals construct knowledge. In the words of Rio and Alvarez, the zone of proximal development is a "frontier territory" which consists of the "situated-embodied mind and the cognitive mind, the individual mind and the social mind, the development already attained and the development to be attained" (2007:301). From the Vygotskian perspective, identity is a higher-order psychological function that "organises sentiments, understandings, and embodied knowledge relevant to culturally imagined, personally valued social position[s]" (Holland and Lachicotte, 2007:113). As a higher-order psychological function, identity is formed in sociocultural practices. Unlike Mead's focus on the resulting linkages formed between the self and society, the stress in Vygotsky's work is on the development of mind and further expands the theorisation of not only symbolic, but also material artefacts in social and cultural structures (Vygotsky, 1981:137)

Like Vygotsky, Wenger (1998) highlights the profound connections between learning, identity development and sociocultural contexts. Leaners become involved in a community of practice (CoP), that is a group of individuals interacting with each other and engaging in common interests (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In this sense, CoP encompasses characteristics of all social relations that are contained within a community who share similar activities and identities (Wenger, 1998). Wenger further defines five characterisations of the identity in the community:

1. Identity as a *collection of self-images* as well as the lived experience of participation in specific communities (negotiated experience).

2. Identity as *a display of competence*, which relates to a world with "a mix of the familiar and the foreign, the obvious and the mysterious, the transparent and the opaque" (community membership).

3. Identity negotiation in the present context *incorporates the past and future* (learning trajectory).

4. Identity is more than a single trajectory. The multiple paths interact and influence each other through the *work of reconciliation in maintaining an integrated sense of identity* across boundaries (nexus of multi-membership).

5. People *experience broader categories and institutions*. Individuals define who they are by "negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and manifesting broader styles and discourses" (the relation between the local and the global). (1998:149)

As mentioned before, a sociocultural perspective places the emphasis on the "participatory aspects" of learning (Morgan, 2004:174). As Vanghese et al. commented, under the theoretical framework of CoP, the focus of research would be placed on the "structure of group practice in which identities are constructed" (2005:30). We could understand professional identity as a development process concerning social and cultural contexts as well as the practice of the individual's working contexts. Lasky (2005) drew upon earlier works and summarised the conceptualisation of TPI as follows:

> Teacher professional identity is how teachers defined themselves to themselves and others. It is a construction of personal self and evolves over career stage [...] and can be shaped by school, reform and political contexts. (2005: 30)

In summary, from a sociocultural perspective, identity is developed in the ongoing interaction between the personal and the professional, between agency and social structure. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) summarised the sociocultural perspective towards TPIs as "both product (a result of influences on the teacher) and process (a form of ongoing interaction within teacher development)" (2009: 177). From a sociocultural perspective, institutional settings are addressed in the formation of professional identity, which I regard as of referential value to enrich the understanding of this research study.

3.2.3 Poststructuralist perspectives

From the poststructuralist perspective, Zembylas (2003: 221) noted that "identity is formed in this shifting space where narratives of subjectivity meet the narratives of culture", or putting it another way, identity is formed "in the space between the 'structure' (of the relations between power and status) and 'agency' (in the influence which we and others can have); and it is the interaction between these which influences how teachers see themselves, i.e. their personal and professional identities" (Day et al., 2006:613). Other authors (Zembylas, 2003: Morgan, 2004; Day, et al, 2007) have pointed out that the poststructuralists challenge the notion of the unified "self"; rather, identity is conceived as unstable, dynamic, relative and multiple. Wenger (1998:145) also described identity as a "constant becoming", which is constructed within the rich and complex set of relations of practice.

Roberts (1998) conceptualised that "a teaching identity develops through exchange between our personal theories and self-concept on one hand, and the demands of our social and occupational context on the other" (1998:22). In the exploration of the contextual factors that differentiate teachers' professional identities, Cooper and Olson (1996) viewed professional identity as a multi-dimensional, multi-layered and dynamic process. They demonstrated how historical, sociological, psychological and cultural aspects shape the construction of teacher identity and how the influences create tensions between systems and individuals. In line with this, Coldron and Smith (1999) also claimed that "being a teacher is a matter of the teacher being seen as a teacher by himself or herself and by others; it is a matter of acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated" (1999:712). The authors pointed to the tension between the personal and the "socially given" dimension of teaching. They described the professional identity of teachers as a process of taking a position in social space by a particular person within the "professionally pertinent array of possibilities" (1999:714). Here, the authors described the "possibilities" as conveyed by the pedagogic traditions that teachers variously embody through their practice in the various professional communities to which they belong, and through external practice brought into critical relation to teaching. The wider social/pedagogic traditions of the craft, the moral, the artistic and the scientific were addressed as significant in teachers' educational practices. Gee (2001) placed the emphasis on the multifaceted nature of identity. He suggested that while one might have a "core identity", there are multiple forms of this identity as one operates across different contexts (2001:99). He came up with four ways to perceive identity:

1. the natural identity that stems from one's natural state;
2. the institutional identity that is derived from a position recognised by authority;
3. the discursive identity resulting from the discourse of others about oneself; and
4. the affinitive identity that is determined by one's practices in relation to external groups. (2001: 99)

According to Gee (2001), these four perspectives are interrelated and closely linked to connected historical, institutional and sociocultural forces. Each perspective provides an "interpretive system underwriting the recognition of identity by others" (Gee, 2001:108). In summary, the poststructuralist perspective tends to view identity as inherently unstable, fluid and fragmented, and as constantly changing over time and across contexts (Cooper and Olson, 1996); it is considered inextricably linked to emotion and values (Zembylas, 2003).

So far, I have reviewed the three major theoretical approaches and their different focuses in defining identity. Mead's notion of identity (1934) focused on the process of socialisation and the impact on self-formation in socially coordinated activities though symbolic

communications and the negotiation of meaning through daily interactions. The emphasis is on the means by which individuals develop in their relations to roles and status and how these identities, in turn, exert effects on motivations, actions and agency. Vygotsky (1978) noted the continuous development of mind and facilitating of technical, material and symbolic tools as important to identity development. The poststructuralist approach focused on the unstable and fragmented nature of identity and the dynamics and tensions as it is connected with not only cognitive but also emotional meaning in teachers' everyday lives. So far, I have reviewed different definitions and characteristics of TPIs in research based on various theoretical perspectives. Each approach to identity has different focuses, yet they shared the common ground that identity is changing and developing under the influences of the social contexts in which an individual evolves.

3.2.4 The personal and social identity

Despite the disciplinary and theoretical differences, the concept of identity often encompasses two interrelated aspects: social identity and personal identity. On the one hand, identity could be used by a group of people who assign specific labels to themselves or/and others. On the other hand, identity could be a set of attributes, beliefs, expectations and principles of actions that a person thinks distinguish him or her from others that gives him or her pride, orient his or her behaviours, restrict his or her actions and forms the basis for his or her dignity and self-respect (James, 1999: 11). In the language analysis of the daily use of identity, James (1999: 2) referred identity to the distinct yet significant functions: 1) social categories; and 2) the source of an individual's self-respect or dignity. He argued against the simplified idea of identity as a "social category" for that such claim often missed the process of social categories that "enter into" people's sense of selves as individuals in complex ways (ibid.). That is to say, one's social identity is often intertwined with one's personal identity. In educational studies, much of the interest of identities also comes from the implicit interaction of the social and personal aspects of identities (Menter, 2010:5). In the discipline of psychology, we can also find a general distinction between personal identity and social identity.

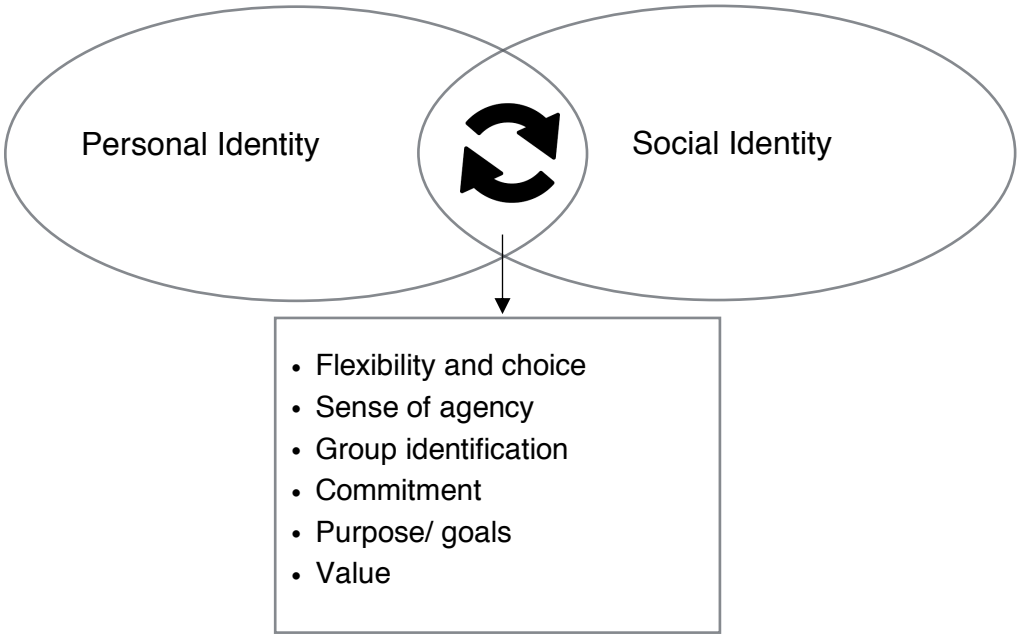
Scholars have defined identity as a unitary and continuous awareness of who one is (Baumeister, 1998; Ellemers et al., 2002). That is to say, we consider ourselves and others as continuing entities, which can be affirmed and reinforced through social interactions; most importantly, the continuity of our personal identities is framed in our own memories and the memories of others. In this sense, part of our sense of identity is independent of our group afflictions and social categories. This aspect of our identity is more personal than social. Besides this need for the continuity and unity of our personal identities, we also have to take into account the social and cultural contexts with our personal identities to have a full picture of identity. The psychological phenomena of identity are also influenced by macro-level factors such as social institutions, artefacts, social image and collective

cultural beliefs. Therefore, social identities might encompass two major parts: 1) the relational/communal sense of self as belonging to groups; and 2) the symbolic categories that define how one acts according to different situations and demands.

The personal and social identities are essentially intertwined, and different scholars have focused on various cognitive and linguistic phenomena in connecting the two. For instance, Yeager et al. (2012) investigated adolescents' career development. In their mixed method research study, the authors found that students' occupation and vocational pursuits have been the central domain in their identity formation. According to the researchers, students' sense of purposes go beyond their interests and involve the promotion of the welfare of others. The researchers identified three identity types among a diverse group of middle- and high-school students in the San Francisco Bay Area. Germeijs' (2012) study of students' decision making on college majors used Marcia's (1993) identity status paradigm as a framework that focuses on the adaptive nature of decision-making profiles. Such a decision-making process is found to correspond to identity characteristics, including identity achievement, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity diffusion.

Figure 4 represents the interactions of personal and social identities as a key issue in identity research. In what follows, I focus on the discussion of the significance of identity and its implications in teachers' practices. I will then review influences on teacher identities with reflection upon the use of the concepts in specific research contexts. These discussions help me to construct a framework to better capture teachers' sense of "identity" in this research project (See section 4.4). Researchers (e.g. Day et al., 2007; Menter, 2008) recognised the complex contexts and noted the importance of drawing upon a wide range of works to obtain a richer understanding of the process and contexts of teacher identity that represent "structure and agency, creativity and constraint" (Menter, 2008:61). In the following section, I will review recent empirical studies on how TPIs may influence teachers' practices and the influencing factors to the formation of TPIs in different social and cultural contexts.

Figure 4 Proposed **interactions of personal identity and social identity**



3.3 How does professional identity affect teachers' practices?

There are indications that professional identities can have positive influences on teachers' practices and performances. Linking TPIs to teachers' willingness to implement innovation in teaching within a changing professional environment, Beijaard et al. (2000) argued that a teacher's professional identity guides his/her thinking, actions and interactions with the students. Meanwhile, Burn (2007) argued for a professional identity that can act as a tool enabling student teachers and teacher educators to take different approaches to develop their pedagogical knowledge concerning the secondary school history curriculum in England. Taylor (2017) investigated the subject knowledge and examined how an instructor could use personal narratives to support teacher researchers' identity construction in teacher research contexts.

Relatedly, Day et al. (2005) pointed out that the failure to recognise TPIs often leads to the tension and crisis that diminish teachers' capacity in sustaining their commitment to teaching. In this sense, if teachers and policy makers could identify what is distinct about their profession, there is a chance that teachers will develop a stronger sense of belongingness and commitment to teaching in the long term. This idea is echoed in Izadinia's (2015) research, which identified the impact of positive mentoring relationships on TPIs and teachers' sense of confidence. The author also observed that negative social relationships often lead to a lack of perceived progress at work. Meanwhile, a stronger sense of professional identity may be a factor that enables integration in teaching and teachers' adaptation to changing educational contexts. Another study reported on how two

vocational teachers critically reflected on and negotiated ethical dimensions of their professional identities in response to the flow of international students and the commercialisation of vocational education (Tran and Nhai, 2013). This study identified the extension of teachers' professional responsibilities from the facilitation of students' development of vocational skills and knowledge to students' provision of pastoral care, as well as their sense of social justices for international students. In the light of these links between TPIs and the quality of teaching, it is worth reviewing in more detail how different aspect of being and becoming teachers in the state and private primary schools can be developed and fostered.

3.4 What develops and affects TPIs?

In this section, I highlight different factors that have been identified in the literature as affecting the formation and development of TPIs.

3.4.1 Teacher training and education

A growing number of scholars in the field of teacher education have argued for a paradigm shift to integrate the transposition of teachers' knowledge and skills with strategies to enable teachers to navigate the complex process of teaching and learning to develop and consolidate their professional identities. Drawing upon theories and studies that frame TPI as socially situated cognition, Dotger and Smith (2009:162) state that teaching is a "social profession" that relies on the formative intentions between students and teachers. These authors highlighted that the professional self occurs "at the intersection of their professional training, their own experiences as students, the teachers whom they hope to model, and their tacit images of classroom teacher". In an era of constant change and diversification of the teacher and student groups, TPI became a significant aspect of the scholarly debate concerning how to prepare teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners and staff development for innovating TPIs. Against this background, teacher education no longer serves the sole purpose of communicating a set of professional skills, but a process of developing the new teacher's awareness about the centrality of their self-transformation and role as agents of adaptation and change.

Researchers investigated teacher identity formation in a wide range of formal teacher learning activities and programmes. Earlier studies used questionnaire surveys to examine the impact of teachers' learning and classroom practices on TPIs. For example, Lamote and Engels (2010) focused on student teachers' perceptions of their TPIs by comparing the focuses of teaching among groups of teachers who were respectively with and without classroom practice experiences in a three-year course. The questionnaire included four aspects of TPIs: 1) commitment to teaching; 2) professional orientation; 3) task orientation; and 4) self-efficacy. Although the finding reflected certain differences between these two groups of student teachers, it is important to note that the finding of TPIs was not based on

understandings of teachers' experiences; therefore, teachers' ideas and the complexity in their development remain unarticulated in this research study.

Researchers also employed qualitative research methods in investigating the development of TPIs in small-scale studies. Kenan and Demet (2018), for example, investigated the promotion of action research in a Turkish university and its impact on TPIs for language teachers. They found that teachers constructed four main types of identities within the action research context: 1) sensitive teacher; 2) active seeker of informed practices; 3) self-reflector; and 4) empathy builder and collaborator. These authors argued that a teacher's ability to "observe" themselves, their teaching and their relationships with colleagues during the research serves as an important factor to contribute to TPI development. They further pointed out that the opportunities provided for increased self-awareness and self-reflection are considered efficient methods for the construction of TPI.

Teachers' reflective activities are important tools to employ in educational programmes to develop TPIs (e.g. Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009:182). Korthagen and Vasalos' "onion model" (2005) revealed six levels on which reflection can take place: mission; identity; beliefs; competencies; behaviour; and environment. It is argued that the inner levels of this frame, such as mission and identity, shape the outer levels of reflection, and vice versa. For this research study to better understand TPIs, it is essential to incorporate questions that invite teachers to reflect upon the critical incidence of positive and negative experiences of their roles as teachers in their personal and professional lives.

In another study that investigated teachers' participation in an online discussion forum, Sutherland and Markauskaite (2012) used the teacher reflection literature to explore the role of authentic online learning experiences in transforming student teachers into professionals. These researchers identified five levels of engagement in teachers' reflections: 1) professional analysis; 2) linking analysis; 3) theoretical, critical analysis; 4) theoretical analysis; and 5) theoretical identifying. In an interpretative case study on novice mathematics teachers, Losanom Fiorenitini and Villarreal (2018) identified the tensions and contradictions experienced by first-year mathematical teachers in schools. These novice teachers were found to confront a significant contrast between their understanding of mathematical teaching and the social and cultural complexities and restrictions in the school context. Pescarmona (2017) explored how experimenting with the *Complex Instruction* for a group of in-service teachers can develop teachers' understanding of the classroom as a complex social and cultural system. This researcher identified disorientation in teachers' experiences and sense of uncertainty, which, according to the researcher, strengthened teachers' ability to raise questions about their practices and awareness of their roles in facilitating equal participation in class. In the context of this research study, teachers recognised others as resources for solving problems and the development of professional skills and developed a sense of flexibility and openness in

their careers and the ability to connect the recognition of their learning abilities with the diversity of students.

Dvir and Avissar (2014) focused on the development of "critical professional identities" among teacher candidates in a service-learning programme that incorporated post-structural pre-service and a critical pedagogy approach to learning. These authors examined the process that teachers underwent to cope with various conflicts to enhance their understanding and relationships with the contexts: 1) deconstructing stereotypes through engagement with the "other"; 2) coping with difficulties, dilemmas or conflicts that arise from dialogue with the "other"; and 3) shifting from a hegemonic professional perception to a dialogic one. Scholars have also investigated teachers' practical and reflective arts experiences (Kenny, Finneran and Mitchell, 2015) and use of language in classroom interactions, in which teachers' strong agency against discouragement was considered key for teachers to develop a sense of their professional identities.

While looking at formal education contexts is useful to identify changes in teachers' identities, other researchers reconsidered the importance of many other areas and formats that extended the influencing factors from formal teacher education curriculum to informal interactions and exchanges in the daily and hybrid settings. In Taiwan, Wang (2017) explored how a teacher readers' club helped to support an expert EFL teacher's reader identity and its impact on her pedagogical decisions. Employing the method of narrative inquiry, the researcher recorded how the teacher developed a better understanding of herself through her reflection during the readers' club and found the reader(teacher)–text–reader (student) interaction to be the main contributing feature of the readers club. Luehmann (2008) conducted a case study that explored the affordance of weblog offered to an urban middle school science teacher in developing her TPI. In this research study, the researcher found that not only did the writing but also the teachers' use of the digital platform provided opportunities for the science teacher to become a self-directed, reflective and interacting thinker who critically engaged with her work.

3.4.2 Teacher professionalism and policy demands

As a way to understand the condition of teachers' work, teacher professionalism can help to illuminate the challenges as well as opportunities that teachers face in their daily lives. The notion of teachers as professionals, as asserted by Nixon et al. (1997), has the widest popular support in recent teacher education policies and practices. Policy makers, educational researchers and practitioners are all engaged with the question of what being a "professional teacher" means.

With regards to the changing nature of teaching and teachers' work in response to socioeconomic development, the literature on teacher professionalism provides a focused framework for the context–teacher connection. Furlong (2001) engaged with this question

through a broader discussion of teacher professionalism and identified three dimensions that characterise the concept: 1) the dimension of professional knowledge that refers to the system of knowledge used in teaching and learning; 2) the responsibility and authority of teachers' work over their students' learning experiences; and 3) and teachers' autonomy in managing and planning their work in schools. This understanding of teacher professionalism is often perceived as the fixed standard and ethical core of teaching guaranteeing an equal and efficient education system (ibid.). The nature and extent of teacher professionalism vary across systems (OECD, 2016). The OECD's recent publication *Supporting Teacher Professionalism: Insights from TALIS 2013* proposed the framework based on Wang, Lai and Lo's (2014) classification of domains of teacher professionalism (Figure 5). These three domains are teachers' knowledge base, their autonomy and their peer networks. Based on the analysis of cross-country survey results, the report identified five models of teacher professionalism (OECD, 2016):

1. the high peer networks and low autonomy model (Malaysia, Shanghai (China), South Korea);

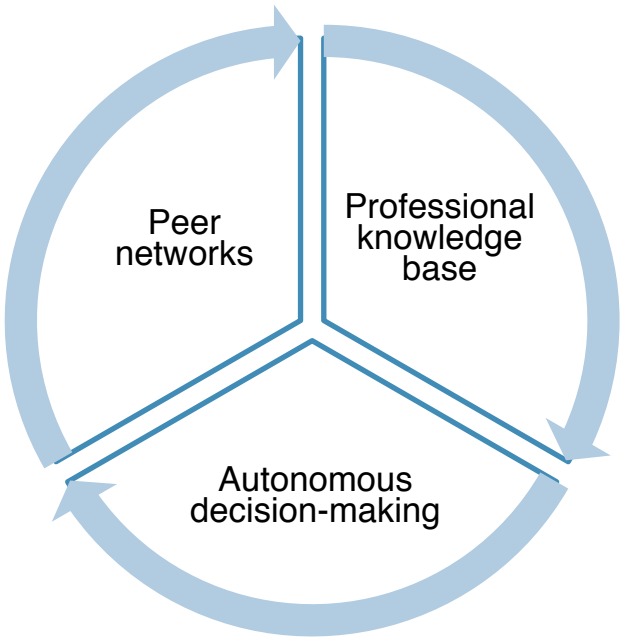
2. the high autonomy model (Italy, Denmark and Czech Republic);

3. the knowledge emphasis model (France, the Netherlands, Flanders (Belgium));

4. balanced domains and high overall professionalism (Poland, England (the UK) and New Zealand); and

5. balanced domains, low professionalism (Portugal, Brazil and Mexico).

Figure 5 Three major domains of teacher professionalism (Wang, Lai and Lo, 2014)



In many countries, issues in teachers' social roles and status, professional competence and autonomous judgments in current neo-liberal educational reforms are revealed as primary concerns in the growing literature on teacher professionalism. Ball (2003) summarised the three major policy technologies to improve education quality: educational devolution, quasi-market and performance management. As a result of these changes, accountability has become an important rationale for policy changes (Wang, Lai and Lo, 2014). As Wang, Lai and Lo (2014) summarised, scholars identified the shift from the traditional approach of professional accountability, namely the accountability to one's peers through a professional organisation, to forms of market accountability, performance accountability and contractual accountability to policy makers, funders and parents (Perryman, 2006; Ranson, 2003; Webb, 2005). The authors further indicated that, as such, teachers and schools are accountable for their own performances, often being monitored by other stakeholders of school educations (ibid.).

In addition to the theoretical discussions of teacher professionalism, scholars have drawn on their observations of teachers' actual practices in schoolwork in order to contextualise the concept of teacher professionalism. Hoyle (1980), for example, identified the phenomenon of "restricted professionalism" as teachers' tendency to rely on intuitive, classroom-focused and experience-centred teaching approaches. Nias (1989) used the term "bounded professionalism" to refer to teachers' a-theoretical and school-bounded perceptions towards educational issues. Sachs (2003) has argued for an active, flexible and transformative professionalism that links teachers' professional lives with civic meanings within broader social goals.

Evidence showed that teachers could respond to policy changes and work environments differently in order to regain their authority and autonomy (Smyth, 2000). Teachers are not passive "dupes" and "helpless agents in the reproduction of the relations of production" (Ball and Goodson, 1985:7). Instead, they are perceived by scholars as "active agents" who can resist and exert influences on the control strategies of the neo-liberal state, thereby actively constructing meaning around their work (Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991:14; Gewirtz, 1996). Day and Sachs (2004) identified the differences between two major discourses of teacher professionalism, namely managerial professionalism and democratic professionalism. Instead of treating teachers as belonging to only one or other category, these authors recognise the contingencies and overlap between the two conceptualisations. Other empirical studies have also identified the mix of managerial professionalism and democratic professionalism in teachers' work (e.g. Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Helsby, 2000; Webb et al., 2004).

Hoyle and Wallace (2010) focus on the impact of an accountability agenda on teachers' work and lives and use the concept of *situational irony* to convey the unstable and unpredictable outcomes of the reciprocal relationships between centralised policies, policy

implementation and teachers' strategies to cope with the policy demands. The authors pointed out three major modes of teachers' responses to the incorporation of professionalism within managerial trends in British schools: acceptance, resistance and mediation. The *persistence of professionalism*, as the authors further argued, calls for the support of school leadership and management development. In this sense, teacher professionalism is interpreted as a context-bounded phenomenon reflecting the changing nature and value of professional teachers in its social and historical contexts (ibid.). Milner (2013) based his discussion on a descriptive study of three high-profile reform policies in the USA – teacher evaluation policies, fast-track teacher preparation interventions and scripted curricula – to identify conflicting influences on teacher professionalisation in each reform. In the UK, Goodwyn (2010) argued that teachers still struggle with defining themselves as professionals. Fuller et al. (2013) used survey data from 849 teachers and in-depth interviews with 31 Advanced Skill Teachers to explore how this designation influenced teachers' perceptions of their professional identity and status. The researchers found that teaching grades that recognise and reward teaching excellence exerted a positive impact upon teachers' sense of identities due to the increased sense of recognition, reward the job satisfaction. They further called for objectifying the value of all teachers by finding ways of recognising and rewarding good practice more generally to improve teachers' sense of identity and status (ibid.). So far, there has been little research into the role of teachers' professional bodies, such as teacher unions and professional associations, in teachers' sense of their professional identities, which could be an area worth exploring for a better understanding of the interactions between teachers' professionalism, agency and sense of vocation.

3.4.3 Communities and collaborations

Other literature on communities and collaborations had led to a deeper understanding of the ways different communities negotiate the meanings of policy demands with their own needs and practices (e.g. McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). Researchers have addressed the interplay between teachers' collegial relationships and their professional development,and found that positive social interactions bring positive changes in teachers' learning and educational changes (e.g. Graham, 2006; Lieberman, 2008; Vescio et al., 2008). Various terms have been employed, including "learning community" (Oxley, 2001), "community learning networks" (Chen, 2003) and "communities of continuous inquiry and improvement" (Hord, 1997). The concept of CoP seems to have particularly significant relevance for research into teacher identity. In developing the theory of CoP, Wenger (1998) highlights the profound connections between identity and practice. According to Wenger (1998), developing a practice requires the formation of communities whose members have common interests and engage with one another to improve the status quo. Thus, members of the community need to be acknowledged by each other as participants.

A CoP is defined as a sociocultural context of situated learning in which groups of individuals interact with each other and engage in common interests (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The development of a CoP, however, is not an automatic or a smooth process. Instead, members' interpersonal relationships and social identities vary according to different stages of their engagement. As Vanghese et al. comment, under the theoretical framework of CoP, the focuses of researchers are on the "structure of group practice in which identities are constructed" (2005:30). Professional identity is developed in relation to the practice of the individual's working context. Individual teachers' participation and learning are a necessary part of social processes:

> [...] learn through practice (learning as doing), through meaning (learning as intentional), through community (learning as participating and being with other), and through identity (learning as changing who we are) [...] rooted in the human need to feel a sense of belonging and of making contribution to community where experience and knowledge function as part of community property. (Lieberman, 2008:227)

Drawing upon the conception of a CoP, researchers have addressed the influences of the interactions in the immediate workplace on structuring teachers' identities (e.g. Brown, 1997; Tsui, 2007). Although some studies have advocated the benefits of CoP for teachers' learning and development (e.g. Zboralaski and Germunden, 2005; Harris, 2003), I will focus on the challenges identified in existing studies. Tsui (2007), for instance, explored teacher identity formation through a narrative inquiry into professional identity with an EFL teacher in China. In this study, two sources of identity formation were reported: "The individual recognises that he or she possesses competence that his or her community values, and the individual is given legitimacy to the access of practice" (2007:675). In other words, participation plays a central role in the process of teacher identity formation; equally important is the legitimacy of access, which is often shaped by power relations in communities and broader social contexts (Tsui, 2007:676). In an ethnographic study that explores the identity formation of language teachers, Varghese (2000) looked at language teachers in professional development programmes and highlighted the importance of "the interaction between learners and the layers of sociopolitical-economic structure that is surrounding the community and the activity" (2000:30). The interaction, according to the author, is crucial to teachers' "legitimate participation" in the second language teaching profession. Anderson's qualitative research into part-time lecturers also focused on how "institutional policy and procedures can significantly affect the development of a shared repertoire within CoPs" (2008:96). In their study of teachers in an Australian university, McDonald and Star (2006) found five major challenges in the development of the CoP:

- the need for financial support;

- time pressure and institutional demands on academics;
- the lack of well-placed leadership;
- problems in quantifying the outcomes of CoP; and
- issues in ongoing support and programme sustainability. (2008:72)

Educational research must therefore address not only the possibilities, but also the restrictions on teachers' work across different contexts in order to understand how teachers' professional and learning communities might be cultivated, and how teachers' communities might influence the development of TPIs.

3.4.4 Sense of vocation and personal values

Another focus of the TPI literature is the development of teachers' sense of vocation and its intersections with teachers' personal experiences and values. Britzman (1993:24) summarises that "role and function are not synonymous with identity; whereas role can be assigned, the taking up of an identity is a constant social negotiation". In this sense, teachers' roles and functions in their work, however, may not be the defining elements of teachers' personal values and identities. We need to address teachers' own values towards education and their understanding of children's learning embodied in their specific cultural and historical contexts in order to understand teachers' perceptions of themselves and their work. Teachers' perceptions of who they are might be more closely linked with their relationships and daily interactions with their students, colleagues and parents. Therefore, the macro-level theories on teachers' work and professionalism need to be supplemented by the micro-level insights into teachers' interactions and social relationships in school contexts.

Researchers need to be cautious of the tendency to perceive teachers as rationalistic, scientific and cognitive beings when we rely only on theories of teacher knowledge. An account of teacher identity may appear disconnected from teachers' personal experiences of themselves and their changes in their work environments. The notion of teachers' personal, practical knowledge is defined as a set of cognitive beliefs and attitudes developed from wide-ranging personal experiences and backgrounds, which is considered as the centre of TPIs (Golombek, 1998; Tsang, 2004). In a preliminary study of the career stories of 12 teachers in six Belgian primary schools, Kelchterman and Vandenberghe defined five related parts of TPIs:

1. self-image: how teachers describe themselves throughout their career stories;

2. self-esteem: the evolution of the self as a teacher, how good or otherwise, as defined by self or others;

3. job motivation: what makes teachers choose, remain committed to or leave the job;

4. task perception: how teachers define their jobs; and

5. future perspective: teachers' expectations for the future development of their jobs. (1994: 55–56)

Other empirical studies identified key influences on teachers' identities. In a longitudinal study of 14 teachers' professional experiences in their first two years of their careers, teachers' biographies, pre-service training, and the school culture and leadership were found to constitute key influences on the stability and instability of TPIs (Flores and Day, 2006). Figure 3 demonstrates the ongoing and dynamic nature of the process by which teachers make sense, interpret and reinterpret their own values and experiences (ibid.: 220).

A number of studies attempt to integrate teachers' emotions in understanding teachers' lives and identities (e.g. see Hargreaves, 1998, 2000; Zembylas, 2003; Day et al., 2007). In her study of primary school teachers in England in the 1980s, Nias explored the "me" of the teachers' selves, as situated in their working lives, as well as the "I" that was considered the affective component of the self. She distinguished the personal and professional elements of teachers' identities and found that the social identity as "a teacher" is incorporated into an individual's self-image over time. Nias (1989) warns that an examination of teachers' experiences would be incomplete if it did not incorporate a discussion about emotions. This seems to be particularly the case when a teacher's identity is challenged by changes in schools, educational policies and sociocultural contexts (Woods, 1996; Flores and Day, 2005; Darby, 2008; Yin and Lee, 2011a). As Hargreaves emphasises:

> Educational change initiatives do not just affect teachers' knowledge, skill and problem-solving capacity. They affect a whole web of significant and meaningful relationships that make up the work of schools and that are at the very heart of the teaching process [...] Teachers make heavy emotional investments in these relationships. Their sense of success and satisfaction depends on them. (1998:838)

In other words, teachers' emotions, which are embedded in meaningful social relationships, compose an integral part of their lives. Teacher vulnerability, for instance, is found to be a recurring theme in educational changes (Kelchtermans, 1996). In describing the impact of teachers' values and choices, Kelchtermans (1996) noted that teachers' feelings are heavily determined by their social, historical and biographical context and by their own perceptions. Cultural influences on the perception and expression of emotion have also been raised. Yin and Lee (2011b) have described the emotional rules governing Chinese teachers' emotions in their professional practices. According to the researchers, teachers perceive their emotions as at the core of their work and a significant component of "heart-consuming" (*caoxin* in Chinese) labour is identified in teacher interviews. Two major interpretations can be identified in explaining teachers' "heart-consuming" labour.

Yin and Lee, (2011b: 63) argue that the emotional pressure a teacher feels could be grounded in the Chinese tradition of a familial relationship between teacher and students, which is consistent with the Chinese saying that "he who teaches me for one day is my father for life"[16]. Others have referred to the term a "paradox of power" to describe the situation whereby teachers with high social status in China are placed under a great burden to follow society's moral norms, which makes them more vulnerable to being shamed if they fail (Gao, 1998; Yin and Lee, 2011b).

Although one cannot be certain that teachers' emotional discourses actually affect how teachers really feel about themselves, teachers' talk about their emotions could reveal important aspects of their lives influencing how they perceive themselves as teachers. School cultures and teacher education, for instance, might inform what ought to be felt in pre-defined classroom teaching and workplace relationships; understandings of ways to "properly" express themselves could be another influence on teachers' emotional experiences. Zembylas (2005) proposed a different theoretical perspective for defining teachers' emotional work. Based on a poststructuralist perspective of identity and place of emotion, Zembylas asserted that a teacher's emotion, as a part of the teacher's discursive practices, is more than a psychological phenomenon located in individuals. Instead, emotion is a social construction based on teachers' social and political experiences. In Cornelius' words, "the experience and expression of emotions is dependent on learned convictions or rules and that, to the extent that cultures differ in the way they talk about and conceptualise emotions, how they are experienced and expressed will differ in different cultures as well" (Cornelius, 1996: 188). In Zembylas' discussion, the emotional discourse constitutes a crucial part of teacher identity and is found to be closely linked with teachers' self-knowledge in the process. The "emotional geography" approach taken by Hargreaves (2000, 2005) defines emotional labour as:

> The spatial and experiential patterns of closeness and/or distance in human interactions and relationship that help create, configure and colour the feelings and emotion we experience about ourselves, our world and each other. (2005: 968)

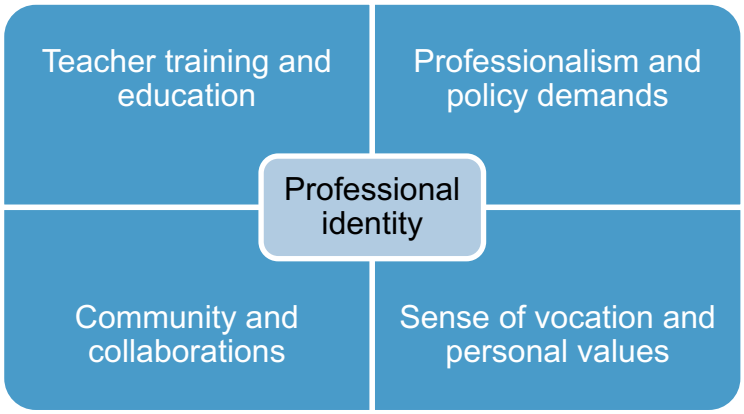
These "emotional geographies" include sociocultural, moral, political, physical and professional dimensions, and are ways teachers describe their relationships to others. As Hargreaves points out, the nature of "emotional geography" will vary in accordance to culture and context, the rules of which are neither natural nor universal.

So far, I have reviewed the empirical literatures on TPIs and summarised four major domains that could demonstrate a holistic view of influence the development of TPIs: 1) teacher training and education; 2) teacher professionalism and accountability; 3) teacher

[16] 一日为师，终身为父。

community and collaborations; and 4) teachers' sense of vocation and personal values (Figure 6).

Figure 6 Influences on TPIs



The framework is drawn from TPI literatures in a wide range of institutional, social, political and cultural contexts (i.e higher education, secondary schools and primary schools in different countries). Though these aspects are all helpful in understanding current debates around TPI development, there have been limited studies on teacher identity in the specific context of this research study, that is TPIs in different state and private primary schools in the Chinese context. Nevertheless, the review helped to identify a few research requirements and gaps that would be of particular importance in the field of TPI. Firstly, research is needed into the types and perhaps the prevalence of tensions in the process of developing TPIs, and the main factors influencing how changes in TPIs can be assessed. How does TPI development in different cultural and social contexts equate to professional identities in other school contexts and in the service and industrial sectors? How can cross-sectoral learning be improved (e.g. health and education, technology and education, public and private sector, higher education and primary education, etc.)? What are the means by which barriers to the formation of TPIs at institutional level could be removed? Research studies are also needed on the contributions of individual and professional strategies in supporting the development of TPIs and negotiating barriers and boundaries, and who depends most on them. The impact of technology on TPIs also requires better understanding and further exploration.

The next section draws from a preliminary study to further inform the conceptual framework to guide the research process. This framework was based on the VITEA study (Day, et al., 2005) and further informed by the empirical findings of the ten teachers' interview I conducted with ten private tutoring institute teachers in my MSc research in Shandong province in China. This framework is further extended based on the literature review found in previous sections.

3.5 Developing a conceptual framework

This DPhil research project focuses on groups of teachers and sets out to ask about the roles that school contexts may play in the realm of their identities and the particular changes and challenges in different identity development. In her study of Chinese teachers' cross-cultural learning experiences in the UK, Gu (2007:122) defined a teacher as primarily "a social being and teaching as a social activity, which bear distinctive meanings and values in specific sociocultural settings". A teacher's identity, which generally refers to ways that teachers see themselves and their work, is a term widely used to explore the interactions between individual teachers and the given social and cultural conditions. This tension is commonly referred to as a tension between agency and structure in social theories. In a systematic investigation of the literature about TPI from the years 1998 to 2000, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004:108) identified four fundamental features as essential to the definition of TPI:

Dynamic: Identity is an ongoing process of the interpretation and re-interpretation of experience.

Contextualisation: Identity involves both the person and the context. Within the context, teachers learn professional characteristics while attaching their personal values to these characteristics.

Multiplicity: Sub-identities exist within teacher identities, which may be in conflict or harmony with one another according to the context.

Agency: Identity construction comprises teachers' active participation and control over teaching and their pursuit of professional development and learning.

According to the authors, there is a general acknowledgement of the multi-faceted and dynamic nature of identity, which is influenced by both internal (e.g. emotion and stories) and external (e.g. contexts and relationships) factors. In social theories, the use of "agency" often embodies the idea of individuals' or groups' beliefs and desires that drive individual or collective decision making capacities and goal-oriented behaviours in changing certain aspects of their surroundings; the term "structure", when it is used in relation to agency, often signifies forms of material and possibly ideological forces that explain the behaviours of an individuals or group. The above discussion sees teacher identity as neither located entirely within the individuals nor entirely a product of their social settings. Rather, an emerging perspective on teacher identity supports the idea of the coexistence of teachers' agency and structure. Figure 7 demonstrate the concept map that I have developed to guide this DPhil study. It is informed by the literature review and my earlier MSc pilot study of 10 private tutoring institute teachers in Shandong (Liu, 2012), which was informed by an empirical study that bridged agency and structure in a four-year longitudinal study with 300 primary and secondary teachers in England (Day et al., 2007). In this study, the

researchers identify three interacting and competing dimensions of TPI: professional, situated and personal identities:

The professional aspect of teachers' sense of self is described as "open to the influence of local and national policy as well as social trends".

The situated or socially located aspect is defined as the aspect of teachers' sense of self within a particular school, department or classroom.

The personal identity is the dimension that relates to a teacher's personal life outside school. Various influencing factors are suggested, including gender, family and friends.

They concluded that teachers' identities are constructed from teachers' personal lives outside schools, but also from organisational, professional and cultural influences on teachers' perceptions of being a teacher. Recognising a wide range of personal, social and professional influences, the researchers argue that TPI is "neither intrinsically stable nor intrinsically fragmented"; rather, it is "more or less stable" depending on teachers' ability to manage the interaction and dominance of those dimension(s) in various social settings (Day and Kington, 2008:9). Teachers are found to take a combination of strategies in managing their identities: accommodation, tolerance, resistance, acceptance, engagements, adaptation and subjugation, etc. (ibid). Although the research context of this study is different, my analysis resonates with the researchers' efforts to develop a holistic perspective that sees TPI development as the dynamic interrelationship of different aspects of teachers' knowledge and experiences in the policy process of education reform in China. As it is shown in Figure 7, multiple layers of interactive influencing factors may contribute to the development of TPIs. The framework is developed in three steps: 1) Adjustment to inform the preliminary study; 2) development in the preliminary study; 3) extension by literature review in the doctorate research. Each of these steps were informed by literatures and observations in the Chinese and private school contexts.

1) Adjustment to inform the preliminary study (*Before the MSc fieldwork*):

a. identifying influencing factors in different dimensions of TPIs based on the literature.

This is to show that TPIs, together with the multiple contexts, could change and transform when they were narrated across chronological orders. In the centre of the three contexts is an arrow that lead to the manifestation of TPIs, that is, what TPI actually means or is constituted of:

i. Factors in the category of *personal experiences* include the teacher's gender, his or her relationship with families and friends, role models, personal biography, prior experiences and educational background.
ii. Factors in the categories of *professional context* focus on the influences of

school or other organisations that provide support or regulate a teacher's work. A wide range of influences are identified in the process of professional identity formation, including colleagues, students, parents, school culture and continual professional development (CPD).

iii. In terms of influences of the broader social context, literature identified politics, culture and curriculum as among the influencing factors in teacher work (Liu, 2012).

b. identifying different foci of investigation for development of the research instruments and design of the data collection process;

In the centre of the three dimensions is an arrow that lead to the manifestation of TPIs, that is, what TPI actually means. As it is shown in the bottom of the Figure 7, the framework draw from Mockler's (2011:521) framework of TPIs and defined professional identity using three main aspects: 1) "being" a teacher, which includes the teacher's definition of a good teacher, teaching practices and experiences, as well as the teachers' professional qualifications; 2) "belonging" to the community, that is ,a teachers' sense of connection with the students, colleagues, the school management and significant others; and 3) "becoming" in the contexts, which indicates teachers' aspirations, sense of satisfaction and professional status. The literature examined helped to define four main conceptual lenses that may mediate the manifestation of TPIs: teachers' knowledge and beliefs, teachers' practices, teachers' personal and professional reflections, and teachers' emotions.

2) Development in the preliminary study (i.e. *integrating key findings of the preliminary study in the conceptual framework*).

a. I adjusted the content of different TPI dimensions, and added the following factors to refine the primary framework:

i. Factors in the category of *personal experiences* include the teacher's gender, his or her relationship with families and friends, the perceived characteristics of the teachers' personality and his or her role models, prior learning experiences and personal biography. These influences could be from outside of the workplace of the specific school, yet they may create a significant impact on the teachers' values, commitment and emotions.

ii. A wide range of influences are identified in the process of professional identity formation, including induction training for the teacher, the work conditions, the teacher's relationships with colleagues, interactions with

students, and the role of pupils' parents and their attitudes and expectations for schools and teachers.

iii. Other employment opportunities, exam-oriented educational system, teaching profession in the public sector and the Confucian heritage (Broader social context) (Liu, 2012:64-68). Given that teaching is also a social activity, the development of TPIs could be influenced by the broader social context. Limited employment opportunities with *bianzhi* and the exam-oriented educational system in China could significantly influence how teachers experience and perceive themselves in teaching. The framework also draws attention to the cultural contexts of the Confucian heritage in education in China. In the previous MSc study, I found that most of the private tutoring school teachers considered their job as only temporary; they all hoped to teach in state schools and attain the *bianzhi* status, while they may have different perceptions of the teaching profession in the public/state sector. Therefore, I included "teaching profession in the public sector" as a potential influencing factor in this DPhil study as well.

b. I identified tension and constraints as the key characteristics of TPI in the particular research context and the foci for future studies in the MSc dissertation.

c. I added the arrows between different dimensions to demonstrate the hypothesised interconnections of influencing factors across the personal, social and professional dimensions based on the analysis of teachers' interview data from the MSc study.

d. In this framework, I included the indicator of time which was directed to the past and to the future. This is to show that TPIs, together with the multiple contexts, could change and transform when they were narrated across chronological orders.

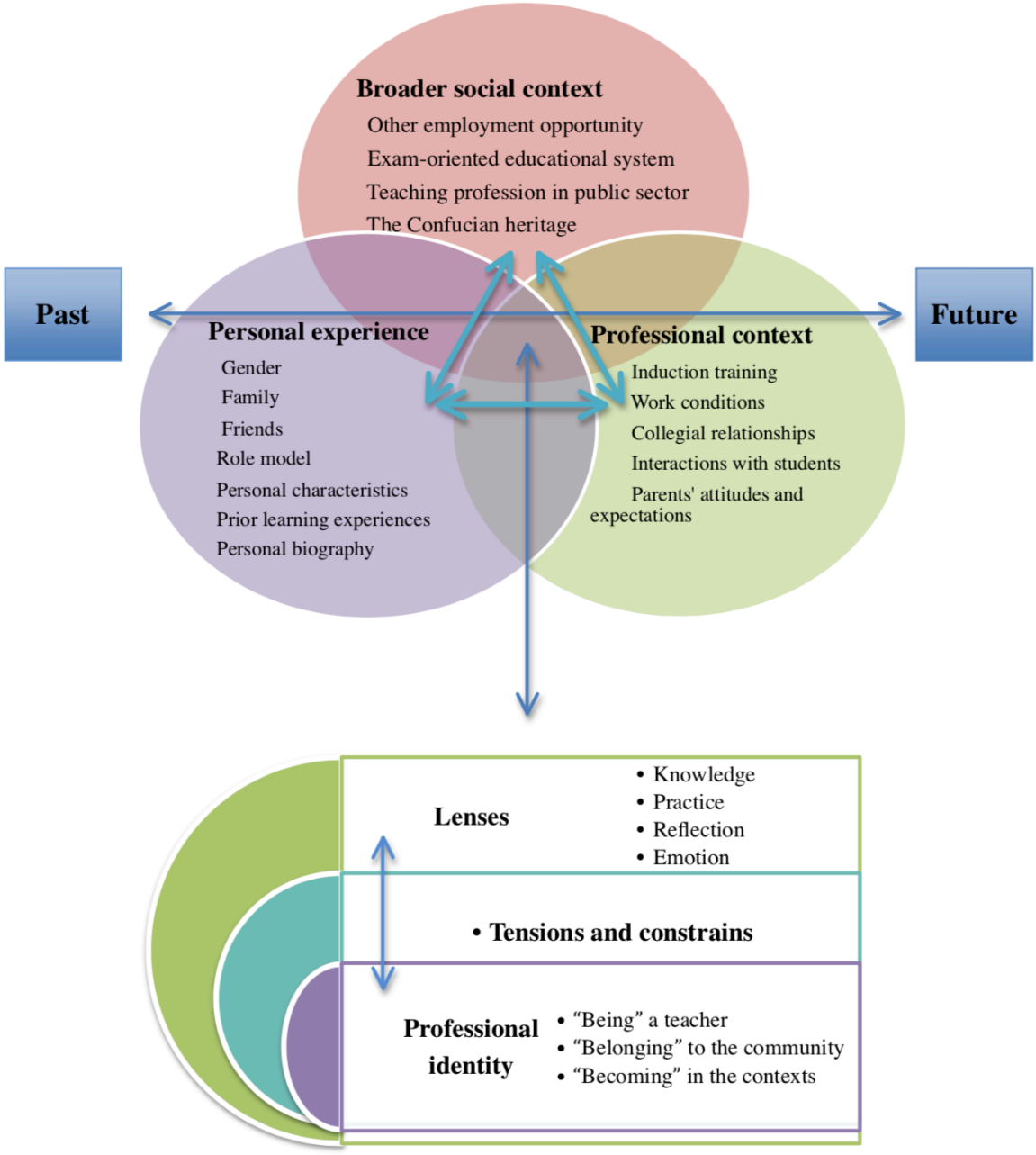
3) Extension in the doctorate research study (*before the DPhil fieldwork*):

The framework remained the same (figure 7) to guide the organisation and conceptualisation of this larger scale research study. The literature review of the doctorate project further informed the process of investigation by extending the investigation to teachers' perceptions of the following areas that might influence their TPIs. These areas are teacher training and education, professionalism and policy demand, community and collaborations, sense of vocation and personal values.

This framework also addressed the characteristics of tension and constraints in the exploration process, as it is a necessary yet undeveloped area in the field of TPIs. The framework added specified types of tensions and constraints, as well as teachers' strategies in the TPI development based on the literature review. This framework is expected to be

further developed in the larger-scale comparative studies of teachers from both state and private primary schools. Chapter four provides the explanation of how this framework is applied in the research contexts.

Figure 7 The conceptual framework (Liu, 2012)



Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on both theories and empirical studies of TPIs. The review covered four main topics:

- The broad implication of identity in different disciplinary areas and different

theoretical perspectives towards identity in educational research.

- The co-existence of personal and social identities.
- The effect of TPIs on teachers' performances and practices.
- Influences on TPIs in different social and cultural contexts.

The concept of TPIs has been broadened out in the growing number of empirical studies. There is a broad recognition of the multidimensional, dynamic and complex nature of TPI and its development. One of the key findings in reviewing the literature is that TPIs cannot be understood using a single approach. Instead of being a homogeneous concept, identities vary between individuals, groups and communities, and over time. While the formation of TPIs is certainly important for teacher effectiveness and professional development, there are often multiple layers of and rapidly changing contexts that shape the process of becoming a successful teacher and composition of what it means to be one. There is also usually great differentiation of TPIs even within a particular group of teachers. Both positive and negative connotations are found to be related to the idea of forming an integrated professional identity in ever-changing educational contexts in China and around the world.

The literature included a wide range of factors and contexts that various authors viewed as being particularly important in developing TPIs. Few are backed up by comparative analysis of different groups of teachers and focus almost exclusively on the effectiveness of a particular teacher education programme. In teachers' everyday lives, it is almost impossible to balance the various factors claimed as important for the development of TPIs. But teacher commitment, professional reflection and professional community are the most supported in the literature. Gradually, teacher vulnerability, identity crises and tensions have appeared in recent empirical studies, yet there is a lack of well-developed theory and accepted indicators for further identification and measurement. There do not appear to be many generalisable findings in the literature about tensions and teachers' coping strategies.

In addition to identifying the gaps in existing studies, the literature review has also allowed me to develop a concept map to organise key topics related to TPIs and has assisted the framing of the RQs (section 4.1). In terms of RQ 1, the literature review has aided me by identifying the three theoretical approaches to identity – symbolic interactionism, the sociocultural perspective and poststructuralism – and the different focuses in exploring TPIs in the Chinese context. It has also aided me to adjust the conceptual framework to connect the major topics and concepts for a more coherent picture of how the ideas might be related to TPIs within the research. These topics and concepts include teacher knowledge, teacher emotion, professional reflections and teachers' engagements with tensions. As for RQ 2, the literature examined has helped me to be aware of multiple layers of contextual influences on TPIs in different school contexts in China. In the literature, it

became evident that variable personal, social and professional factors could exert a significant impact on the development of TPIs. Scholars had adopted both constructivist and pragmatic approaches to map the complex influences on teachers' experience of the formation of their TPIs. In practice, the concept of TPIs is also used as a pedagogical tool for education innovation and evaluations of teacher learning, professional development and policies. Further, the literature review has also helped me to identify the lack of comparative studies on TPIs in state schools and private schools.

Although the literature review is specifically focused on TPIs, in the broad scope of professional learning and development it should not be forgotten that educational research can gain a great deal from other fields of academic research and general models of professional development. Nevertheless, the literature examined has helped me to frame this DPhil research by identifying the different focuses of the different theoretical perspectives towards identity and by indicating key influences, issues and gaps related to the TPI concept.

Chapter 4. Research design and methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach I adopt to investigate TPIs in four different state and private schools in China. The first section outlines the RQs derived from discussions in the literature review. This leads to the subsequent discussion of the use of the narrative approach to investigate and compare TPIs in private and state primary schools in China. The second section explains the sampling scheme adopted in this research, including purposive sampling and snowball sampling. It also gives an overview of the school contexts. The third section deals with the process of data collection and covers issues such as the development of the interview guide and the negotiation of entry to the research field. In the following section, I will present procedures for data analysis, which focus on individual teachers at this stage. Issues related to assessing the quality of the qualitative research are discussed in the fifth section, with the strategies adopted to build upon the rigour of this research study. The final section draws this chapter to a conclusion through discussing issues of reflexivity, research ethics and some limitations of the research study.

4.1 Origin of the study

This research stems from my personal experiences teaching English to primary school students in a local private school. In this role, I witnessed the efforts made by teachers to support students' learning. Teachers are considered key to the success of schools and education in general in modern China. As I communicated with the students and their parents, I became aware of their different attitudes towards teachers in state and private schools. On the one hand, there are teachers who are highly respected for their professional skill and ethical conduct; those well-recognised teachers are always in very high demand. On the other hand, I also heard students and parents complain about the low quality of teachers, which is closely related to the phenomena of corporal punishment and fee-charging tutoring in schools. I became increasingly interested in understanding the changing attitudes to teachers and how they themselves understand their lives and negotiate their own positions in the wider educational environment.

My own story as a teacher in a private tutoring institutes led me to ask myself: "What is important for teachers? What do teachers want people to know about their profession and lives? What strategies do teachers take to resist discouragement and what helps them to define themselves as teachers? How do teachers know where they really belong?" The research methodology emerged as my interests in the teachers' stories grew. I wanted to embrace different modes of understanding while exploring ways in which teachers' experiences and beliefs are linked and integrated with the personal, social, cultural and political contexts. To achieve this objective, I needed a research approach that enabled me

to focus on the lives of individuals and groups and co-construct meanings while participating in the study.

This research draws upon elements in narrative inquiry approach because the nature of narrative inquiry applies most aptly to the objectives of this research. One way to improve existing theories about the professional identities developed in the context of neo-liberal educational reform is to incorporate the patterns and changes in non-Western societies, which is also a challenge faced by scholars in the field of education. To transcend the limited knowledge about teacher identities and professionalism, I believe that I need to turn to teachers' narratives to consider how their professional identities and cultures are actually established through processes of contested negotiation, rather than through abstract theoretical models. Before explaining the application of narrative inquiry in framing this research, the following section begins with a review of research aims, objectives and questions.

4.2 RQs and research strategy

4.2.1 The RQs

As mentioned, this study investigates and compares the development of TPIs in private and state schools in Nanqi in China. My aim is to find out how PSTs' experiences and identities differ from those of SSTs. As stated in Section 1.2, the main research aims of this DPhil study are: 1) to explore the processes and influencing factors of professional identity constructions in different primary school contexts; 2) to investigate teachers' strategies to reconcile tensions and uncertainties in these processes; and 3) to compare the characteristics of TPIs across individual and school cases in both state and private schools.

The following ROs seek to facilitate the achievement of these aims.

> **RO1:** Identifying the perceived factors impacting the changes and development of individual teachers' sense of identity at work.
>
> **RO2:** Assessing teachers' perceptions and experiences of their engagements with others in their particular school contexts and how this might influence teachers' professional self-efficacy and sense of belongingness at work.
>
> **RO3:** To identify the tensions that teachers experience in constructing their professional identities and their perceived conditions and strategies to address those tensions.
>
> **RO4:** To further record and theorise teacher's narratives of the processes of reacting to these perceived tensions and uncertainties, which may or may not further influence teachers' sense of their professional identities.

RO5: Identifying the differences and similarities of school contexts that are relevant to TPIs.

RO6: Identifying characteristics of individual TPI constructions and comparing these characteristics inside and across four school cases.

Embedded in the general inquiry are the following specific RQs:

RQ 1: What characterises teachers' sense of their professional identities in four different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools) in Nanqi in China?

- Sub-question 1: How do teachers within each school construct their professional identities?
- Sub-question 2: How do teachers experience tensions in each school?
- Sub-question 3: How does the construction of TPIs relate to ways teachers negotiate tensions at work?

RQ 2: What personal and social factors do teachers consider important in shaping their professional identities?

RQ 3: What are the differences and similarities in the TPIs in the two state schools and two private schools in Nanqi?

To achieve the primary purpose of the enquiry, I chose to explore the comparative characteristics of TPIs using an interpretive approach and by adopting interviews as the method. I investigated the meaning-making practices of individual teachers in different school contexts through teachers' descriptions about their work and roles. Thus, the first RQ identifies the characteristics of teachers' personal experiences and reveals the ways in which teachers construct their sense of professional identity in their own way. The second RQ investigates the perceived personal and social factors that may influence teachers' sense of self and of their own professionalism; it also attempts to explore how individual teachers respond to multiple structural restrictions and opportunities in their professional lives. This question also allows for an exploration of other factors that may shape teachers' experiences beyond the school context. The third question further examines the similarities and differences of TPIs in the four different private schools and state schools.

4.2.2 Drawing from the tradition of narrative inquiry

Because the focus of this study is teachers' personal and social experiences and the quality of their working lives, I consider qualitative methodology informed by the tradition of narrative inquiry as the most appropriate approach to use to address my RQs. Narrative inquiry is increasingly used in educational research to explore the phenomena of human experiences (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin (2006: 477) support the narrative view that takes human experiences as "storied lives":

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world by which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry.

In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner (1987) also distinguishes two ways of knowing: (1) the paradigmatic mode of thought; and (2) narrative knowing. The paradigmatic mode of thought is described as the process of reasoned analysis, logical proof and empirical observation used to explain "cause and effect" and to create unambiguous, objective "truth" that can be proven or disproved. In contrast, the other side of the mind, namely the "narrative mode", is the human act of imagination, which constructs knowledge and creates meanings through stories of lived experiences, helping people to make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives. In this sense, knowledge is not a fixed entity; instead, it is socially constructed and changes according to contexts and social relations. By translating knowing into story-telling, individuals can make meanings and link their experiences of the world together. Of course, there is no single perspective about the centrality of narrative in human experiences. Polkinghorn (1988) claims that narrative is the impetus for those seeking to create coherence in interpreting human existence. He suggests that experience forms and represents itself in one's awareness of narrative in its original literary form. In this view, actions will be inconsistent, and time will be experienced as incoherent without the use of the narrative formation as a sense-making device. Packer (1991) considers narrative not as a primary mode, but as a need of human beings to engage with and construct meanings in particular situations:

> Understanding is, first and foremost, a way of grasping the entities around us in the active and engaged manner. Through this grasping, we comprehend ourselves at the same time. Mostly, these entities, and the network of interrelationships among them, are transparent and invisible to us, but when practice breaks down, the entities are their interrelationships stand out and troublesome. At this point, in our practical deliberations on breakdown, we undertake interpretation articulating aspects of our project, its objects, and its setting, in order to resume smooth practice [...] Interpretation is the articulation – the laying out and explication – of possibilities that have been projected and have become available in practical understanding. (1991: 71)

White (1980) supports the idea of story-telling as a primary tool for meaning-making by stating that our initial experience is not as fluid as narrative. Instead, narrative serves as a representation of the meaning we give to that experience. Lived experiences cannot be presented as "objective" facts. It is subjective, and it is situated in time, language and culture, and limited by the memories that are used to interpret the experiences. Connelly

and Clandinin (1987) define "narrative unity" as a person in place and time, claiming that the desire for coherence and unity emerges in narratives of experiences. As they state, "the notion of narrative unity is not merely a description of a person's history, but is a meaning-giving account, an interpretation" (1987:131). The authors further identified the co-existence of three commonplaces to define narrative inquiry (2006: 479), that is temporality, sociality, and place. These three commonplaces are considered as key to guide a narrative inquirer to predict and determine the process of investigation yet remain aware of the series of events, relationships and the contexts (Hutchinson, 2015).

Bruner (1991:21) further argues for sociological concern with group lives in narrative inquiry by claiming that the "cultural tool kits" and "exchanges in a linguistic community" support narratives, as a "conventional form of knowing". In other words, stories have a typical structure. An important development of the idea here is that narratives are not merely personal constructions of meaning; they are developed in particular social contexts. By drawing on narrative inquiry, this study also conceptualises research as an active and constructive process, one through which I can pursue a deeper understanding of teacher identity development by integrating my own role and viewpoints with those of the participants. The narrative approach helps me to bring together the multiple layers of the personal and socio-cultural aspects of teachers' lives, and how these lead to changes in TPIs. The shapes of teachers' stories also support my attempt to understand the ways in which teachers interpret key events in their personal and professional lives and how their values, beliefs and experiences guide those interpretations in this research study. The local knowledge gained, which is characterised by multiple voices and perspectives, helps me to better identify social discourses that may impact on teachers' knowledge development in their own specific contexts. This point is further supported by the interpretative tradition of hermeneutics and selection, and by the framing of research methods, as I now explain.

4.2.3 The tradition of hermeneutics

From within the discipline of anthropology, Michael Agar (2008) describes the process of interpretative qualitative research as a dialectic cycle in which the researcher goes back and forth between data collection and analysis in attempting to negotiate the shared interests, knowledge and intentions of the researcher with his or her participants. The methodological approach of this study is influenced by the interpretative tradition of hermeneutics, which originates from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, meaning "to interpret". Hermeneutics is conventionally understood as a methodology for reading and interpreting texts (Davey, 2013). It was developed for use in biblical interpretation and philological investigation of the classics and has been extended to the reading of non-biblical texts. The contemporary understanding of hermeneutics is strongly influenced by Hans-George Gadamer, who argues that the process of textual interpretation is constituted by continuous interactions or conversations between authors' and readers' "horizon[s] of

understanding", that is, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer, 1979:143). This means that interpretations are influenced by the preliminary experience of personal life, lifestyle and culture of the participants (both the actors and the researchers) (Hekman, 1984; Patterson and William, 2002). Unlike more relativistic interpretative paradigms that seek to set aside researchers' prior knowledge, hermeneutic epistemology explicitly recognises the positive function of researchers' primary understanding, or "prejudice[s]", on their conclusions (Hekman, 1984). In this sense, a teacher's professional identity can be understood as constructed in a dialectical process in the encounters between the participant teachers and the researcher throughout the process of research.

Instead of assuming objective structural similarities based on predetermined theories, a hermeneutic epistemology suggests beginning with the analysis of individual cases (i.e. idiographic-level analysis) and then combining conclusions with other individuals (i.e. nomothetic-level analysis) at a later stage (Terwee, 1990). The focus on individual cases in hermeneutic analysis reflects the belief that each situation should be recognised as unique. This is not to deny the existence of shared meanings. The flexible and open-ended nature of narrative inquiry enables me to trace the twists and turns in the conversations, in which certain topics are chosen or avoided by the teachers. In this process, I can explore how the research process and my own identity help (or hinder) teachers in making meaning of their work in relation to their professional identities. For example, teachers in this research may not want to directly address the curriculum or educational reform. They might instead recount their stories of learning, teaching, working and family lives. Themes such as the perceived characteristics of a successful teacher might not be directly addressed but might emerge as a topic within detailed accounts of different teachers' narratives.

4.3 The previous study

Before the main qualitative investigation, a previous study was carried out in April 2011 as an MSc dissertation research project. This aimed to offer a first glimpse into TPIs in the context of private educational institutes in China. This study grounded the topic of TPIs in the context of PTIs. Combining the research aims, research questions and the pragmatic concerns of time and resources for conducting the research study, I adopted an interpretivist perspective using semi-structured qualitative interviews with a purposive sample of ten teachers of English from three PTIs in Shandong province in China. The consent form and interview guide were developed and used to collect narrative data about teachers' experiences in PTIs and their reflections on their professional practices, decision and identities. This process helped me to refine the interview guide and its Chinese version to avoid vagueness and misunderstandings. I was also able to get feedback on my interview techniques and gain an initial understanding of the significant experiences of teachers in

this study. Below is a brief summary of the key points and processes in developing the interview guide and the key findings from the study.

Purpose of the in-depth interview

1 To gain detailed and in-depth information about individual teachers' subjective perceptions of their work.

2 To build personal rapport with participants and encourage them to provide more information on issues that might be sensitive.

3 To co-construct the narrative that allows participants to reflect on their assumptions, emotional engagement and experiences in the research.

Drafting the in-depth interview guide

1. To confirm that the potential respondents are aware of the purposes and scope of the research study and the amount of time the interview would take, I drafted and used a consent form and probed for teachers' concerns before the interview questions.
2. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. All interviews were conducted and later transcribed (in Chinese) for analysis. Two transcripts were translated into English for the purposes of transparency.
3. The interview guide was developed to address the research questions and informed by the reading of literature on TPIs.
4. According to the initial conceptual framework, aspects of the interview guide included (see Appendix B):
    - **Personal background**: the teacher's age, education and position.
    - **Knowledge**: what a teacher knows and thinks about specific aspects of teaching and his or her work in general.
    - **Behaviours**: what a teacher does at work and in the classroom, as well as how he or she plans to achieve his or her career goals.
    - **Feelings**: how a teacher feels about specific issues in his or her work.

Wording of questions

1. To keep the questions neutral and open-ended, I avoided questions with yes or no answers or those that might generate strong emotional reactions.

> Example: Instead of asking "Are you satisfied with your performance in teaching?" (你对自己的教学表现感到满意么？), I asked, "For you, what are the most satisfactory things about teaching?" (对你来讲，教学当中最让你满意的事情有哪

些？）

2. To keep the wording clear and simple, I avoided jargon and technical terms.

> Example: Instead of asking "What is your career plan?" (你有哪些职业规划？), I asked: "Where do you see yourself in five years' time?" (你怎么看自己 5 年以后的样子？)

3. To keep the interview more natural, I also shared personal knowledge and experiences in the questions.

> Example: Instead of asking "How do you compare yourself with state school teachers?" (你怎么拿自己和公办学校教师比较？), I asked: "Some people say that teachers in PTIs are different from those in state schools, what's your opinion?" (有人说培训学校教师和公办学校教师不同，你对这一点怎么看？)

Order of questions

1. To engage participants in the interview, I started the interview with less controversial questions, for example about educational background, age or career choices.
2. The interview questions were ordered chronologically to support teachers' reflections on their current perceptions and circumstances.

I asked the participants to give feedback or talk about any issues they thought important and which had not been addressed in the interview.

Main findings

The findings indicated the differences as well as the commonalities in the negotiation of the professional identities of PTI teachers. Both contextual and personal factors were identified as contributing to the participants' understanding of themselves as PTI teachers; at the same time, conflicts and tensions were apparent in the negotiation of their identities in their workplaces. The result led to a refinement of the initial framework.

4.3 The sampling strategy

A sampling scheme is defined as the specific method used to select the data, including where the study is to be conducted, who and what events it includes and how the participants are to be identified (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). For the optimal selection of the research participants in the main study, I used two sampling strategies in accordance with the research design: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In this section, I first introduce the research site providing the specific contexts for the sampling before describing the sampling strategies I used in this research study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) classify sampling techniques into two broad types: probability sampling and purposive sampling. Probability sampling is described as a method of randomly selecting a relatively large number of units from a group or subgroup population. In this sense, the

inclusion of every unit in the samples is determinable. As a result, the research finding can be generalised and applied to a larger defined population or setting (ibid.). Purposive sampling, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that the researcher needs to identify and select the sample that can provide valuable information or develop or test certain theoretical ideas (Maxwell and Loomi, 2003). This sampling strategy is often used in exploratory and descriptive qualitative research.

The involvement of the school principal in this study might lead to a more complete perspective on the school context. This is also informed by some research that identified the influence of school leadership on TPIs (e.g. Day et al., 2007). Because the school principal is responsible for school management, he or she can offer complementary perspectives on school changes, the quality of education and teachers' development. Given the exploratory nature of this study, I included two state schools and two private schools and interviewed teachers from a wide variety of age groups, occupational life phases and types of school.

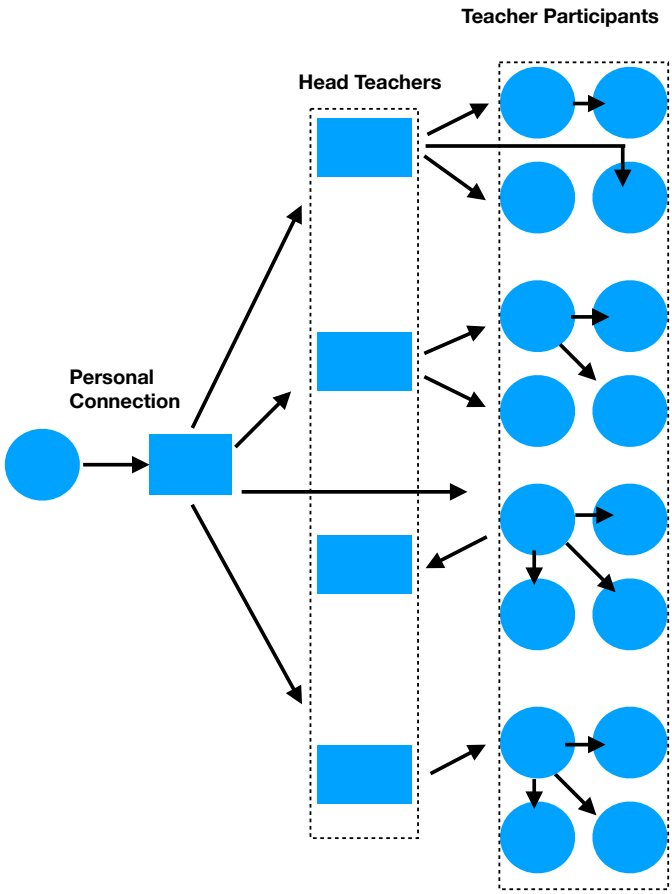
Maxwell and Loomis' (2003) claim that the selection of a sampling scheme is closely related to research questions, research methods and available resources. This study has an explicit focus on TPIs in both state schools and private schools, and proper participants need to be selected to answer the research questions. As such, the study employs a purposive sampling strategy to determine the target population and to select participants who can provide rich information with respect to the goal of the study (Kemper, Stringfield and Teddlie, 2003; Patton, 1990). My intention in this study is not to generalise from the findings of a limited group of teachers, but to offer an in-depth picture of a group of teachers' perceptions and experiences in specific contexts. Another factor in the sampling decision is the practical limit on the scale of private education in Nanqi : there were only two formal private primary schools when I conducted my fieldwork. Considering the depth of the investigation, the time limits and limited access I have for the data collection and analysis, this research study used data collected in two state schools and two private schools and interviews with sixteen teachers from the four schools. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011:161) argued, there are no clear rules on the size of sample in qualitative research; size is informed by "fitness for purpose". In this research, the sampling allows me to identify the relevant factors that contribute to differences and similarities among the participants TPIs in different state and private schools and to compare them. After conducting the interviews with the four participants, some participants voluntarily introduced their colleagues to participant in my research. In these cases, I would provide the following sampling criteria for them:

1. Participants must be interested in the topic and willing to participate;
2. Participant teachers will be drawn from either a private or a state school in the

purposive sample of four schools (two private and two state schools);

3. Both state teachers and private teachers must be included; and
4. Participants must be at different professional life phases (e.g. less experienced and more experienced).

Figure 8 The sampling strategies



Teachers are considered key representatives of their schools and school qualities; some of them may define themselves as part of the government. Being aware of teachers' social status and the difficulties in gaining access and building rapports to the participants, I added the elements of snowball sampling to build trust with the participant teachers. I conducted the fieldwork from April to June 2016. After arriving at Nanqi, I first made contact with the principal of the Willow School, Mr. Chen, through my personal connection. Mr. Chen then introduced me to another two Chinese teachers. These teachers then introduced me to another two teachers, who became participants in this study. I took similar approach to my fieldwork in the other three schools, while keeping the flexibilities in this process. Figure 8 demonstrates the process of sampling in this research study. In this process, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. According to a definition provided by Vogt (1999), snowball sampling is a useful tool for researchers to find research

subjects, who will then introduce another subject and so on. Snowball sampling seeks to take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to approach potential contacts (Thomson, 1997). Having introduced the sampling strategies, I will now delineate Nanqi as the research site and the sampling strategy and the four types of school I chose for my fieldwork.

4.4 Introducing the research site

Gatekeepers control access to schools and teachers; therefore, they played a significant role in this research (Miller and Bell, 2002). In my attempt to gain access to schools, my experience of working in Nanqi gave me an advantage in building trust with the school principals and teachers. As Lee suggests, "social access crucially depends on establishing interpersonal trust" (1993:123). I will now move on to explain how I chose and accessed the research field for this research study.

This study was conducted in Nanqi, which is in the north-eastern province of Shandong. In China, the word county (*Xian*) is used to refer to a settlement at the third level of the structural hierarchy of administrative division. Shandong province has 137 counties in total. The county is on the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy of urban areas in China. Since the 1980s, the demographics of Nanqi have seen a trend towards rural–urban integration due to the dramatic urbanisation process (BoS, 2015). The vast majority of Nanqi's population, however, are rural residents (BoS, 2015). Many families from rural areas have moved to urban areas to work, and in the hope of getting their children enrolled in good urban schools. This has resulted in increased pressure on both the parents and schools to compete for better educational resources. As the birthplace of an ancient Chinese philosopher and educationist, Nanqi's development has always been shaped by its cultural significance. Since the 1980s, Nanqi has been considered a successful example of China's socio-economic development in harmony with cultural richness. Education is considered one of the major drivers for building a harmonious and prosperous community. This process is fuelled by a strong demand for education and the development of cultural industries in Nanqi (i.e. commercial production or arts, crafts and other artistic output).

The six-year primary schooling period is one of the four major parts of China's education system, achieving a 99.93% enrolment rate in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2017). According to Nanqi's *12th Five-Year Plan for Education Development* (Bureau of Education, 2013), in 2013 there were over 120 schools and about 60,000 students in this county. The numbers of primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools were approximately 90, 20 and two, respectively.[17] There were also five junior vocational training schools and over 140 kindergartens. In terms of the teaching profession, Nanqi had about 5,500 full-time state

[17] I used the approximate number to maintain the confidentiality of the county and the school information.

teachers. Primary school teachers account for about half of the total and make up the biggest proportion of the state-employed teaching population. Nanqi also has a large proportion of older teachers: about half are over 40 and over one-fifth are in their 50s.

Like most of the urban area schools in counties in China, schools in Nanqi typically operate with two semesters a year. The first begins in early September, the second in early March. Chinese and mathematics are the two major subjects in the primary school curriculum and are required for the graduation examination and so for progress to secondary schools. Other compulsory subjects include English, physical education, music, basic science, history and geography. Education is highly valued in Nanqi and has been strongly influenced by the educational philosophy of Confucianism. The close association between better education and attaining higher social status is a strong belief among parents, who also have very high expectations for their children's academic achievements. Another influence is the one-child policy, which is thought to have exerted a strong influence on parents' hopes for their children's academic success.

The gap between greater demand for high-quality education and the restrictions in terms of finances and spaces facing state schools represents a huge challenge for local governments and schools. In the state schools that I visited, the numbers of students in each class exceeded 80, a tremendous challenge for teachers and schools in managing their classrooms and guaranteeing the quality of teaching. In 2015, the provincial government released the *Notice on Solving the Problem Related to Overcrowded Classrooms in Urban Areas*, requiring local government to "solve the problem of overcrowded classrooms" by the end of 2017, directly suggesting the principle of "city-district planning, county-leading, one policy for one county, mainly through school expansion and amplifying the urban educational resources". In the policy document, the number of newly established schools is specified. This is to encourage innovation by the school management and the "civil force" (*She Hui Li Liang*) to establish new primary and secondary schools in different types of state–private partnership (private school, state-sponsored private school, hybrid school, etc.). In 2016, Nanqi had one private charity school with two more private schools under construction. While I was doing my fieldwork, I was also aware of the influences of another international private school on educational experiences and choices in Nanqi. Some parents in Nanqi are considering sending their children to that school despite its location (about one and half hours by car from Nanqi) and the expensive tuition fees (in comparison with the free state schools).

For the state schools, the increase in demand for high-quality education in the era of urbanisation is the major issue. Although the government has increased its investment by improving the infrastructure to cope with the increase in students, the number of qualified state teachers remains the main obstacle to solving the problem of overcrowded classes and meeting the need for high-quality education in general. In China, however, state

primary schools have no authority to determine the number of students and staff they recruit. Instead, the local government allocates the quotas, which largely determines how the school is funded, and so how the teacher shortage is dealt with. On the other hand, the shifts towards decentralisation in China are "giving more autonomy and responsibility to local authorities for primary and secondary schools and strengthening the power of principals to make decisions regarding their schools" (Lewin et al., 1994: 202). In 1986, the government released the *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China*, which was the major initiative to decentralise the control of education and place the management of primary schools at the district or county level. In addition, a guideline for school management was included in the Communist Party of China (CPC) central committee's *Thinking on the Problems of Deepening Reform of the Education System and the Development of Education* in 1988. Among many other government and party documents, it suggested that the school principal should assume more responsibilities and be central to the school management. In Nanqi, the school management committees are composed of the principal, the CPC secretary, the vice principal, the heads of teaching and research, and the association heads of representatives. As in many of other counties and cities, the CPC secretary and school principal are the most powerful authorities inside state schools. Observers of China's education system have argued that the decision-making power balance of the school principal and the CPC secretary are not always fixed; instead, it is largely influenced by the politics of the local government (Sautman, 1991). Despite the changes with the swings towards "hyperpoliticisation" and "depoliticisation" during different periods (Sautman, 1991), state school principals are taking more power to focus the school management on improving school achievement and the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

I chose Nanqi as the research site for three major reasons. First, the societal context of Nanqi is characterised by a mixture of influences of the government, the market, the traditional culture and broader international trends in education. Although they do not show all the characteristics of the education system in China, schools in Nanqi have played key roles in the recent national education reform and typically reflect the educational contexts of a small, third-tier city in northern China. Secondly, considerations of personal and practical issues have been included in making the research decision. Since I have spent time studying and working in this county, I had always wanted to understand more about its education landscape. My experience has also provided familiarity with local educational contexts. This was a very important factor in facilitating my approach to potential participants, particularly when the rapport between the researcher and the participants became a primary factor in validating and applying the research findings. Thirdly, geographical proximity was a factor. Through personal connections, I was able to get in touch with schools in Nanqi. Also, given the city's particular socio-economic situation and

cultural historical legacy, my research findings may indicate how the local context might influence teachers' social relationships with parents and students, as well as their changing role and identities in state and private schools. This research could provide new insights into the question of alternative ways of thinking about the role of the market, resource distribution and local contexts in education in contemporary China.

4.5 Brief introduction to the school sites

4.5.1 The Willow School (the sub-district state school)

The first school is a sub-district primary school, which is located in the rural–urban continuum of Nanqi. In 2000, the Willow School was merged with another local school due to the policy of optimising the school layouts in Nanqi. As a sub-district state school, the Willow School is also administered by a district secondary school. The school is under the command of the Education Bureau at the county level, which means the county government is responsible for funding and managing the school. This school runs the six-year-long national standard curriculum. In 2016, it had 36 classes with 2,400 students and 160 teachers and staff in total. This means that each class had over 80 students and the number of teaching staff fell seriously short of what was needed.

4.5.2 The Aspen School (state school directly under the city/county government)

Aspen is the second sample school, which is a school under direct city/county government control (*shizhi*). This means the school is subordinated directly to the Education Bureau at the county level. Established in 1933, Aspen has been a demonstration school (*shifan*). This school is located in the centre of the old county and is very close to the tourist area. Aspen covers the largest school district area population and is the biggest primary school in terms of student population. It currently has more than 60 classes and over 4,000 students. It has also been evaluated as one of the best schools in Nanqi.

4.5.3 The Redwood Charity School (private charity school for "sub-orphans")

Redwood is a charity school that accommodates the educational needs of two groups of students: "sub-orphans" and impoverished children. The concept of "sub-orphans" has been created to define children who have lost one parent and have been abandoned by the other while they were of school age. Most of the "sub-orphans" have grown up with their grandparents without fostering and remain outside the national social security system. Impoverished children are a broader category that includes: (1) children living in poverty who lack access to nutrition, education and medical care etc.; (2) children with disabilities and who have difficulties in recovering, receiving medical care and social integration; and (3) children who are threatened or injured by abuse, abandonment, accidental injury or unlawful infringement due to the lack of guardianship (The State Council, 2016). Unlike charity schools that are funded by non-governmental and charity organisations, Redwood

is fully funded by a local estate development company and runs as an "enterprise-run school". As the third charity school established by the same company, Redwood is located in the development area of Nanqi and has about 800 students, 23 classes and 40 teachers, who work on a contract basis. It uses the "6+3+2" model: students receive 11 years' of education, which includes six years primary, three years lower secondary education and two years vocational training.

4.5.4 The Ash International School (private international school)

Ash is an international one located in the high-tech development zone of Nanqi. This zone was established in 1992 as a provincial development area. The school was first established to provide primary and secondary education for the children of employees of foreign companies in this area. To develop its capacity for setting up and managing an international curriculum, as well as to help the process of internationalisation, the school established collaboration with a local state school (Acacia) from another province. The managing team has been taking charge of the school curriculum, teacher recruitment, management of foreign teachers, teaching, etc. The collaboration took the form of a cross-regional school partnership overseen by the local management committee. The Ash International School is considered a sign of internationalisation in Nanqi and a new experiment in cross-regional school partnership (Jia and Xia, 2010).

Table 4 Brief introduction to the four schools

	State schools		Private schools	
	Willow	***Aspen***	***Redwood***	***Ash***
School type	Sub-district primary school	*Shizhi* primary school	K-12[16] Charity school	K-12 International school
Students	About 2,400	About 4,000	About 800	About 3,000
Teachers	About 160	About 300	About 100	About 200
Funding	County government	County government	A local real estate company	The development district of Nanqi
Management	Bureau of Education (BoE) (county level)	BoE (county level)	Professionals employed by the funding company	An independent educational cooperation
Curriculum	National curriculum	National curriculum	National curriculum	National curriculum and international curriculum

Table 5 Teacher participants in this research

School	Pseudonyms	Gender	Teaching experience	Subject	Education background
Willow	Chen	Male	20 years	Leadership	College diploma
	A1. Xiwen	Female	1 year	Chinese	MA
	A2. Haoting	Male	10 years	Maths	College diploma
	A3. Yifan	Female	30 years	Maths	College diploma
	A4. Ruolan	Female	3 years	Chinese	BA
Aspen	Dezhi	Male	20 years	Leadership	College diploma
	B1. Qizhen	Female	20 years	Chinese	College diploma
	B2. Xinxin	Female	3 years	Maths	BA
	B3. Zhe	Male	3 years	Chinese	BA
	B4. Jianguo	Male	5 years	Maths	BA
Redwood	Hong	Male	30 years	Leadership	College diploma
	C1. Linjia	Female	1 year	Maths	BA
	C2. Ting	Female	1 year	Fine art	BA
	C3. Meng	Male	2 years	Maths	BA
	C4. Wei	Male	1 year	PE	BA
Ash	Gongyu	Male	8 years	Leadership	BA
	D1. Zhulin	Female	8 years	English	BA
	D2. Cong	Female	20 years	Maths	BA
	D3. Baihe	Female	10 years	Maths	BA
	D4. Yu	Female	4 years	Chinese	BA

4.6 The use of interviews

How to turn the theoretical concepts of narrative inquiry into a practical interview process was my primary concern. Various researchers have written about interview and interview conversations, including Briggs (2003), Gubrium and Holstein (2003), Kvale (1996) and Mishler (1986). An in-depth interview can be a powerful research method that generates narrative accounts of individuals' lives and everyday experiences (Elliott, 2005; Kvale, 2009). As Kvale (1996: 5–6) states, the purpose of an interview is to "obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of described phenomena". Tuckman (1972: 197) provides a more specific description of the merits of qualitative interviews: "By providing access to what is 'inside a person's head', [it] makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)." In order to understand the school context and the influences on a teacher's perceptions and work experiences, I adopted interviews as the primary method to collect rich qualitative data about teachers' lives in the study. This allowed me to explore teachers' knowledge of the school contexts, and their educational values and teaching beliefs. I also invited participants to reflect upon issues of teacher quality and education and elicited the stories they told in making sense of other aspects of their working lives including incidents from their past lives and present work contexts.

Collecting interview data can be done in different ways. One of the differences is the extent to which interviews are structured. In this research study, I employed the semi-structured interview, which is defined as the type of interview that has predetermined questions with modifiable orders according to the interviewer's perception of what sees as most appropriate (Robson, 2002). Question wording can be changed, and explanations given; particular questions, which seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones included (ibid). Bryman (2008) also argued that semi-structured interviews could help by assuring cross-case comparability, which suits the purpose of this research project in comparing TPIs in state and private schools. I used an interview guide in this study for three reasons:

1. To keep the conversation fluid and keep good foster a good sense of timing;

2. To include specific issues indicated in the literature view, such as teachers' educational backgrounds, workplace relationships and their outlooks; and

3. To help to offer a comparative dimension in analysing patterns of experiences in different personal and work contexts.

To bring teachers' voices and experiences into the research process, I gathered their qualitative data from different private and state schools. As reviewed in Chapter 2 of the thesis, existing literature indicates that aspects of teachers' identities could be influenced

by their earlier education and personal backgrounds, as well as by access to participation in school communities. Hence, I included four key topics in the teacher interview guidance:

1. Teachers' educational background and earlier experiences;

2. Teachers' career decisions and motivations to work in private and/or state schools;

3. Teachers' perceptions/experiences of their work; and

4. Teachers' expectations of school education and their career aspirations.

In this research study, I also included interviews with school principals to gain familiarity of the school contexts and negotiate access to interview teachers. I consider school principals as important informants and gatekeepers. Interviews with them helped me understand the different situations of school management and the expected roles of school leaders. The school principal interview protocol includes three main topics:

1. Introduction to the school;

2. School policies on teacher recruitment and education; and

3. Leadership and organisational vision.

The interview schedule can be found in Appendix A, which was translated into Chinese for data collection. It is important to note that I use the interviews with principals only as supplementary contextual data to discuss the findings in the analysis.

Building rapport with the participants was comparatively easy for me given that teachers got to know me through reliable personal connections. Still, I believed I needed to pay attention to rapport-building with the participants due to the nature of the research. The aim of building rapport in the interviews is to support and encourage teachers to talk about their lives that give voice to themselves. Creating the impression that we share a similar outlook was the key in this process. To be more specific, I employed a few strategies at different stages of the interview.

Before the interview

I found it was easier to build rapport with the participants by introducing myself as a student researcher who is also from Shandong province. Sometimes, I would use dialect if that was the language the teacher used in our first meeting. I would also initiate informal conversations before the interview by finding out details and current issues around the school. I paid attention to my dress, making sure I was dressed in a comfortably casual way and not carrying distracting items.

Starting the interview

I started my interviews with open-ended questions in order to encourage the conversation. By maintaining eye contact and occasionally nodding my head, I showed my interest in a friendly and relaxed way in order to ensure a positive beginning to the interview.

During the interview

During the interview, I would occasionally mirror the participants' body language, echo his or her responses and show my understanding by giving positive feedback. By doing so, I could show my genuine interest in the interviewee's life and concerns. I also tried to avoid talking about distracting and potentially controversial topics such as politics or religion. Keeping to topics that are relevant to teachers' identities and school lives was important to maintaining a good atmosphere for the conversation.

After the interview

I followed up the interviews with a thank you text message directly to the participants. I also gave a small souvenir gift from the university to the principals and teachers. I consider this as a way of showing my gratitude for their time and my appreciation of their stories.

Meanwhile, I am aware that teachers' responses could be more than the objective description of discrete experiences. Rather, narratives as a "text" also take into account how and why stories are presented in certain ways, as Munro (1998) says in her critique of narrative interviews:

> We need to attend to the silences as well as what is said, we need to attend to how the story is told as well as what is told or not told, and attend to the tensions and contradiction rather than succumb to the temptations to gloss over these in our desire for "the" story. (Munro, 1998: 12–13)

Gubrium and Holstein (2003) also assert that in-depth interviewing not only helps in the construction of the subject, but also puts the researcher at the centre of the experience being researched. In this process, I needed to be conscious of my responsibility to be ethically sound and to respect participants' professional and personal boundaries. I also needed to take into consideration my participants' welfare, which is particularly crucial as my focus is primarily on individual teachers' personal stories. I prepared to engage by first following the participants' lead and facilitating the telling of the stories by asking open-ended questions or by probing for clarifications. I openly acknowledged that, although I had worked as a teacher in another school setting, I did not know very much about teachers' lives in the selected schools and I could only seek to learn more about the meaning of these with particular teachers by listening to their stories. I also acknowledged that the interview process itself fundamentally alters the nature of the data. At the same time, the interview conversation with teachers who participated in this research gave me

the chance to hear stories from people who are committed to teaching; it also gave me the chance to share stories of my own experiences as a teacher. In this way, my interview participants and I could experience "reciprocity" by acknowledging each other's identities (Lieblich, Tuval-Masiach and Zilber, 1998).

4.7 The fieldwork and use of fieldnotes

In addition, observational data were collected in this study to add to the contextual interpretation of the interview data. The fieldwork did not involve the extended period of immersion that is commonly referred to as "ethnography" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 1). Instead, I used unstructured fieldnotes to collect supplementary data to understand the social and educational context of the actors in terms of their own interpretation of their experiences. When there were times, I was invited to observe teachers' classrooms, their offices and formal and informal interactions with colleagues. This helped me keep record of the observations and my interactions with the participant, build rapports and trusts with the participants, and probe for more interview data during the fieldwork. The following is an example of the field notes:

> Mr. Chen is over 50 and often wears a dark shirt. He is not very tall but looks like a very active person. We together arranged our meeting for 3pm in his office. Shortly after I talked about my research study, Mr. Chen found a pile of notebooks and put them on his desk. He told me that these were his diary for the past six years and suggested that I read these before our interview. He said very confidently: "All you need can be found in my diary. You could bring these to your home and have a close study. You can come back to me any time you wish." He then kept looking for more materials for me. "I have a staff meeting at 3.30pm, if you'd like to join, please feel free to come," Mr. Chen said to me.

Field notes were also used to record the interview circumstances, the dynamic of teachers' interviews, signs of reactions and hesitations, and my own thoughts. I shared their interview transcripts with participants for verification and to encourage further comments.

4.8 Data analysis

In analysing the interview data, I am aware that my authority as a researcher needs to be supported by a rigorous scientific research method in creating the portraits and generating and interpreting findings. I drew on Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggested framework for the process of coding and data display; this focused on three components throughout the analysis:

- Data reduction: the component that includes the coding of data (transcript) without losing the context. In the authors' words, it is "a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data that conclusion can be drawn"

(Miles and Huberman, 1994: 10).

- Data display: the process of displaying data with diagrams, charts or models, which runs alongside the data reduction components.
- Conclusion: drawing conclusions throughout the data analysis process. Early conclusions may be vague but are verified during the analysis.

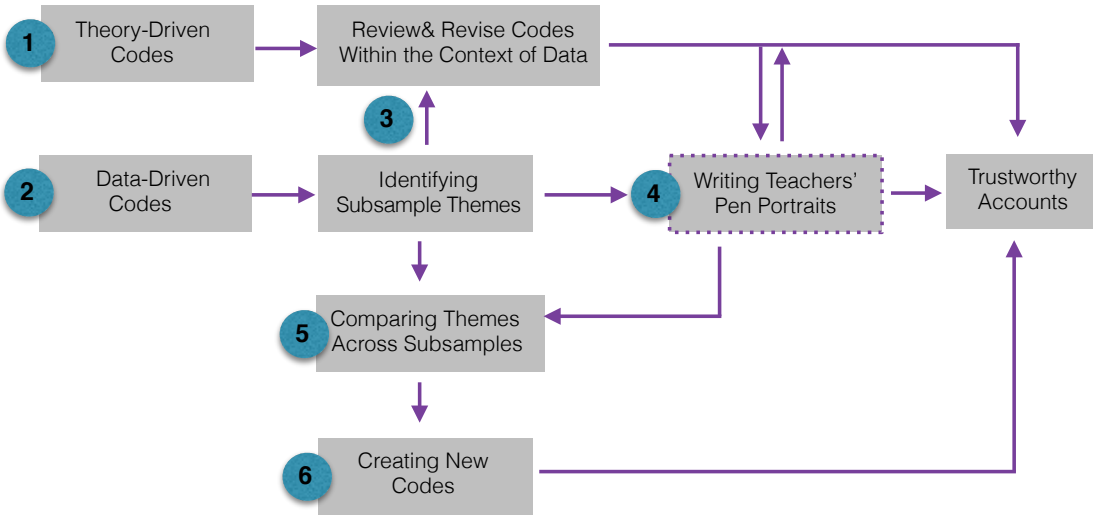
In addition to Miles and Huberman's (1994) framing of the analysis process, I used three structured tools to ensure the validation of the process: 1) a hybrid approach to thematic analysis with inductive and deductive coding to demonstrate the reliability of the analysis (see Figure 9); 2) close attention to the transcribing and translation process to enhance the validity of cross-language qualitative research; and 3) reflexivity to examine my own assumptions and preconceptions that I may have brought to the research. I will first discuss the definition and use of thematic analysis in this research, and then move to strategies adopted for transcribing and translation in developing the teachers' pen portraits. The following chapter includes examples to display the coding process.

4.8.1 Codes, categories and theme development

A hybrid approach that combines induction and deduction guides the data analysis in this research study (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). As explained in the previous section, this research adopts the concept of "hermeneutic circle" that Gadamer (1979) borrowed from Heidegger. Therefore, the conceptual framework acts as the template to help me interpret the data, which is further adjusted based on the analysis of empirical data. In summary, the data analysis process in the present project includes two distinct but connected cyclical processes:

1) A deductive process: using the themes emerging from the literature review and theoretical background to analyse the data. This process is theory-driven.
2) An inductive process: using open coding and categorisation of data to generate analytical themes in a grounded way, which contributes to the reformulation of the conceptual framework to further develop theory.

Figure 9 ***The graphic presentation of the data analysis process***



The initial interpretative framework was derived from the literature review (see Chapter two). It is composed of the initial categories that were generated from the conceptual framework, research questions and interview topics.

RQ1: What characterises teachers' sense of professional identities in four different state and private primary schools in Nanqi?

RQ2: What personal and social factors do teachers consider important in their professional identity development?

RQ3: What are the differences and similarities of TPIs in different state and private schools in Nanqi?

Key topics in interview questions on four major areas of teachers' lives.

Interview Topic 1 (IT1): Personal background and career choices (probes: educational background, career choice, year of teaching, job tasks).

Interview Topic (IT2): Perceptions of the teaching profession and roles in schools (probes: status of teachers and the teaching profession, benefits and disadvantage as teachers, motivations and supports from school).

Interview Topic 3 (IT3): Perceptions of their relationships with others in school contexts (probes: others' views towards teachers' job, relationship with parents, students, families and other actors).

Interview Topic 4 (IT4): Aspirations and expectations (probes: successful teacher, professional goals and expectations for future).

Applying the framework to raw data is a key step in the development of the analysis framework. It is important to note here that the analysis of text is only guided, rather than confined, by the preliminary codes. By reading the transcripts, I was able to apply inductive methods to identify themes in segments of data, and hence I developed some additional codes. These additional codes either expanded the preliminary codes or became a separate part of the framework.

I now provide a description of the meaning of *code*, *category* and *theme* in this research, and the method adopted to conduct my thematic analysis and to develop themes. A text may include multiple meanings; their identifications require careful thought and processing in the analysis. Appropriately conveying participants' subjective meaning and social realities is a central issue in qualitative data analysis. Therefore, the definition and clarification of terms are crucial for developing themes in this research. "Codes" are the label the researcher attaches to a short phrase or section of text. For example, I used "classroom teaching" for each mention in the text of any practical matter in classrooms. "Category" is the grouping of coded segments to reduce the number of codes in the analysis; they are often considered ideas that are directly expressed in the text. "Themes" are implicit topics that organise a group of repeating ideas, enabling researchers to address their research questions.

Table 6 The framework for data analysis

Name of category	Rationale for category	Related to
Extent of stability	To what extent do teachers develop a stable professional identity? What are the tensions that teachers experience?	RQ1, IT1, IT2
Sense of autonomy	To what extent do teachers perceive themselves to have the capacity to direct their own professional decisions and behaviour?	RQ1, IT3
Belongingness	What characterises teachers' sociality and relationship to others? How do these lead to a feeling of belongingness?	RQ1, IT4, IT3
Aspirations	What do teachers aim to achieve and strive to accomplish for their future?	RQ1, IT4
Settings	Teachers are aware and orient his/her attention to the surroundings. How do teachers decide what they can do in their settings?	RQ1, RQ2 IT2, IT3
Roles	How do teacher determine what is or is not part of their roles at work?	RQ1, RQ2, IT1, IT2
Satisfaction	Why are teachers either satisfied or dissatisfied with their job?	RQ1, RQ2, IT2, IT3, IT4
Support	Do teachers feel supported by schools and their communities?	RQ2, IT2 IT3
Strategies	What strategies do teachers employ to cope with tensions at work?	RQ1, RQ2, IT2, IT4
Resources and tools	What resources and tools are used for teachers' professional identity development?	RQ2, IT2, IT3.

The process of categorisation involves reading, listening to and summarising the interview transcripts. It is considered a thread of underlying meaning at the interpretative level (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). For instance, "strategies" covers the codes with reference to teachers elaborate and systematic plan of action to achieve goals (often under conditions of uncertainty). Categorisation, as the descriptive level of text and the explicit manifestation of the participant's account, serves as the initial stage of the theme development to clarify things. Themes, as a higher level of categorisation, require the researcher to "go beyond" the content of the original data and use both codes and categories as subdivisions to obtain

a comprehensive view of data and uncover possible patterns in the participants' responses in relation to the research questions.

At the stage of connecting the codes and identifying the themes, I aimed to discover themes and patterns in the data, and therefore clustered the codes and categories under headings that are directly related to the research questions. "Corroborating" is the term used to describe the process of confirming the findings (Crabtree and Miller, 1999: 170). At this stage, I aimed to show the connections between the list of themes and subthemes linked to the research questions. Similarities and differences between groups began to emerge; these indicated the area of consensus and conflicts in response to the research questions. I also found differences within each group by clustering the codes; for example, experienced teachers tend to share more similarities in response to my questions. To enhance transparency and trustfulness, I paid attention to data saturation, description and reflection on the original context of data collection. The following themes were developed from the analysis of Xiwen's (Chinese teacher, the Willow School) interview transcript.

Theme 1: Develop professional confidence and sense of autonomy through ***critical engagement*** with others.

- Becoming humble and recognising others' suggestions and opinions.
- Learning from colleagues.
- Listening to students' voices.
- Being decisive and steady in front of unreasonable questioning.
- Focusing on the analysis of the text and individual needs to bring change.

Theme 2: Motivate students and cultivate the identity as ***active learner***.

- Developing a series of strategies to cultivate students' critical thinking skills.
- Adapting teaching methods to students of different grades.
- Encouraging students to learn outside the classroom and develop identities as autonomous, independent and active learners.
- Resisting the uncritical acceptance of teachers' authorities in teaching.

Theme 3: Keeping flexibility through ***reflection***.

- Understanding that there is not "a best model" for supporting students' learning.
- Reflecting upon students' way of learning and living and thinking about how teaching could adapt to their needs.

In this section, I have provided an illustration of steps in the process of thematic analysis. Both deductive analysis (categories derived from the theoretical framework) and inductive analysis (themes and subthemes emerged from interviews) were used. Through this process, I was able to generate themes from the data and uncover meanings in relation to professional identities for these participants and how TPIs inform their personal and

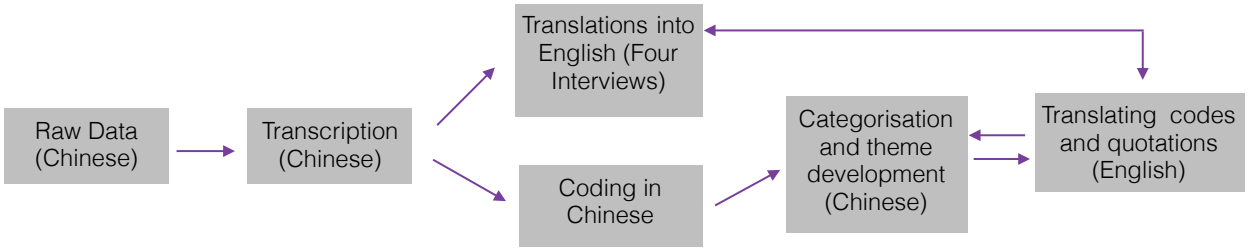
collective values in teaching. In the next section, I provide a discussion of the transcribing process and translation issues to go beyond thematic coding in this research.

4.8.2 Transcribing and translating

After the fieldwork, I first transcribed the recorded interviews on spreadsheets for further analysis. This process served as the initial stage of the data analysis process. By listening to and typing out my conversations with teachers, I was further able to embed the analysis of the qualitative data into the framework of the study. Glaser (1992: 27–30) used the term "theoretical sensitivity" in order "to define the process of generating concepts from data and systematically developing the concepts in relation to the data during different stages of the research study". In this research, the process of transcription required me to draw on more implicit information, such as body language and the tone of voice, for the data analysis and this can be considered a facilitating stage contributing to my reflection of the content and context of the interviews. I also developed some of the initial codes as I transcribed the interview data.

After I had transcribed all the interviews in Chinese, my primary concern in data analysis became the language which I should use to analyse the data. From an interpretative perspective, as Berger and Luckmann suggested, language "is capable of becoming the object repository of the vast accumulation of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations" (1966: 52). Accordingly, language is key to trace the participants' generalised patterns of meaning and experiences (Inhetveen, 2012: 29). In qualitative studies, the close distance between experienced meanings and interpreted meanings is crucial to research validity (Polkinghorn, 2007). Compared with English, the Chinese language is characterised by its loose structure, general meaning and rare use of conjunctions, subjects and predicates, and a tendency towards repetitions (Cui, 2015). My background as a native Chinese speaker gives me the advantage in the analysis of the data in its original verbal form (Chinese). The first language differences occur when interpretations are discussed with my supervisors in the form of writing pen portraits for each teacher and in creating codes. Multiple meanings were revealed and discussed in this process. For the discussion, I first translated two interview transcripts in full and then listed the codes and their explanations in English. In this process, it is crucial to be sensitive to both the verbal form and meanings to address issues of the representation of the main concepts in English. In this research study, I have employed several methodological tools to address the issues of trustworthiness, including: 1) a hermeneutical perspective to meaning; 2) explanations of specific words, jokes and proverbs in the cultural context; 3) specific attention to "local language" (dialectic, slang, jargon etc.); 4) the use of "back-translation" (see figure 11 in page 97); and 5) consultation with native speakers and experienced translators. Figure 10 provides an overview of the translation process and decisions.

Figure 10 Transcribing and translating in the research study



Hermeneutical perspective to meaning

As discussed in the chapter on research design and methodology, this research study is rooted in a hermeneutical perspective of meaning and knowledge. Hennink (2008) claims that epistemological perspectives also play an important role in the treatment of cross-language interview material. A hermeneutic perspective is particularly useful in addressing the problem of bias and the dialogical dimension of understanding in translation because of my dual role as researcher and translator. The hermeneutic treatment of the problem of bias is to engage these biases by constant and transparent analysis and examination of the process, as Schewandt (2000: 195) claimed:

> The point is not to free ourselves of all prejudice, but to examine our historically inherited and held prejudices and alter those that disable our efforts to understand others, and ourselves.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1960) addressed the problem of foreign language in understanding and pointed to issues in translation. According to Gadamer, the translation of a foreign language is an "extreme case of hermeneutical difficulty". Translation, as a form of understanding and interpretation, is a part of the meaning production process. In order to reach understanding, the process of and reflection on translation needs to be included.

One of the problems in translation in achieving language equivalence is that it assumes one can always identify sameness or similarities between languages, and this may not always be fully possible. Chinese and English belong to two different language families and have different linguistic structures. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family, which is an ideographic language of paratactic structure that represents ideas and things rather than the sound of a word. English, in contrast, is an Indo-European language that is alphabetic with a hypotactic structure and represents the sound of a word. In this study, I borrow Nida's idea of *dynamic language equivalence* to shift my focus to the function

of translation in this research study.[18] According to Nida, what justifies the possibility of such a transformation is the logical organisation underneath the surface structure of the language. Therefore, we can establish equivalence with reasonable accuracy to the receptor's culture and match the cognitive framework by restructuring the constitutive elements of the text (Nida, 1984: 13).

The focus on the dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence is helpful for the researcher in conveying the meaning in teachers' stories into another language as it takes into account the receptor's response to the translation. My role in this process includes guaranteeing that the English language users understand accurately the message carried by the Chinese-language source texts. Moreover, this research study embodies several additional strategies to improve the quality and detect biases in the translation process, including: 1) paying attention to specific words, jokes and proverbs; 2) explaining "local languages"; 3) using "back-translation"; 4) consulting with Chinese and English native speakers and experienced translators; and 5) including the Chinese version of the keyword in quotations for further reference. I will now explain the use of first these major strategies in this research study.

Paying attention to specific words, jokes and proverbs

The following table (Table 7) demonstrates the process of adaptation I used in translating cultural-specific use of words, jokes and proverbs in teachers' interview transcripts. The special attention I paid to the meaning and context of the words, jokes and proverbs helped me to reflect upon the contexts of the language use and better identify and communicate the meaning to audiences in a different language.

The use of "local language"

In Nanqi, people often speak the local dialect, which is strongly influenced by the local culture. For example, title serves as an important indication of one's position in the social hierarchies. As Ma discusses, the use of titles in the Shandong dialect is characterised by the expression of ties and affection between family members and the highly ordered social etiquette to distinguish distances in relationship and to draw boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Ma, 2015). Although all interviews were conducted in Mandarin, the older participants still used dialect during our informal conversations. Paying attention to their use of local language is very helpful to identify the positioning of interviewees in relation to the researcher.

[18] E. A. Nida set up four criteria as building principles in translating: contextual consistency; dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence; the aural (heard) form of language over the written form; forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for which the translation is intended over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious (Nida and Taber, 1969: 14).

Table 7 Attention to specific words, joke and proverbs in the cultural context

Chinese and literal translation	Free translation and the context	Dynamic equivalences
恨铁不成钢 Hate the iron can't turn into steel.	I hate when someone cannot meet my expectations. Used when the teacher was talking about the gap between her high expectation and students' actual performances.	What a let-down.
喝茶看报 Drinking tea and reading newspapers.	The sedentary and idle lifestyle at work (often used to describe workers in the state system). The teacher talked about her work as overloaded and cluttered with small tasks, which is in contrast with how society thinks of teachers' work.	Killing time.
大道至简 Great doctrine leads to simplicity.	The complex and grand theory of Tao is simple in nature (a famous quote from Taoism). After a period of learning and adapting to different policy changes, the teacher defined the nature of teaching based on her own understanding.	Less is more.
亲其师，信其道 Close to teachers and trust their principles.	A close and harmonious teacher–student relationships leads to better learning (a famous quote from *Liji*[19]). The teachers addressed the importance of building rapport and trust with their students to motivate them to learn.	Trust the teacher and believe in her guidance.
有心无力 Strong in will but weak in power.	Passionate in mind but restricted in actual ability to achieve. The teacher wanted to help all the students, but the oversized class restricted her abilities to do so.	I can't make it on my own.

Use of "back-translation"

Back-translation is to translate the target language (i.e. English) back to the source language (i.e. Chinese), to allow the equivalence between the source language and the

[19] *Liji* is also called the Book of Rites, which is a collection of Chinese classic texts describing social norms and ceremonial rites of the Zhou dynasty.

target language to be evaluated (Brislin, 1970). Figure 11 shows the process of back-translation in this research study.

Figure 11 The back-translation process



In this process, I draw on observations of two main characteristics that differentiate Chinese from English:

1. Chinese is characterised by parataxis and English is characterised by hypotaxis (Nida, 1982:16), which means that Chinese tends to have loose and unclear relations between sentences, while English speakers give more attention to cohesion.

2. In Chinese, different ideas seems to be equally important, and so the relationships between ideas are often not very clear, while in English, people tend to place the most important information in the statement first.

To further demonstrate, the process of back-translation can help achieve dynamic equivalence. Table 8 demonstrates the different translation of a teachers' quotation. Maintaining the quality of data analysis is a crucial aspect to educational research. As a part of the data analysis process, rigorous translation is important to enhance the quality of the text narrating the meanings as perceived by the participants. Langdridge (2007) proposes three elements that contribute to the quality of hermeneutic phenomenological research: analytical rigour (a not-taken-for-granted attitude during data analysis); a persuasive account (quality and appeal to convince readers of the personal experience); and participant feedback (participants' opinions on the writing). Accordingly, rhetoric (in English) in writing teachers' stories became a primary concern in improving the quality of this study. According to Lynn, rhetoric refers to instruction strategies as well as to ways of making an argument and persuading others more effectively (2010). Because hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elicit the essence experienced by participants, the translation process adopts rhetoric helping to express what the participants intended. To further confirm the adaptation of rhetoric, I also consulted with native speakers and experienced translators to improve the accuracy of the translations of the codes and quotations from Chinese into English.

Table 8 Example of using "back-translation"

Versions	Contents	Reflection in translation
Translated version 1	I think if we are going to use one system, it's best to be persistent. Don't just learn one system for a few years and then change it to another. If it didn't work, we then learn from other system. In the end, we are not authentic in any of them. Individual teachers can't have any development and the school fails to promote its name. So, persistence is important.	*This first version is close to a literal translation of the interview data. I didn't change the structure of sentences, nor did I add conjunctions to connect them.*
Back-translation	我认为在借鉴办学模式方面，持久性是最重要的。不断地更换办学模式对教师个人和学校品牌都没有好处，因为教师没有充足的时间在实践中得到任何深刻的见解。	*I aimed to make the meanings in the English version clear and logical. I highlighted the main point in the beginning, which is followed by the main argument and explanations.*
Translated version 2	I think persistence is the key in borrowing from other school systems. Constant system changes are neither beneficial to individual teachers' professional development, nor do they help improve the institutional brand, because teachers will not have enough time to gain in-depth insights from any of the systems in practice.	*This version is informed by the back-translation version that aimed to enhance the coherence of the statement.*

4.8.3 Writing up and using teacher pen portraits

It is crucial to understand individual cases as a whole for further references to the interpretation of the data. In this research, I use pen portraits to frame teachers' accounts of their working lives. One aim of writing teacher pen portraits is to make the participant "come alive" for the reader. The pen portraits are largely descriptive and provide enough information against which subsequent interpretations could be assessed. In this way, the reader can gain a grasp of the participant who figures in the findings chapter, allowing what is said about him or her to be meaningful. To grasp the "whole" in the pen portraits does not mean that the teachers need to be perceived as consistent, coherent or rational beings; rather, the characteristics of teachers' identities might become visible by concentrating on the "fractures" in teachers' stories. The focus on the fragments could serve as stimuli for deeper reflections on the reason for their existence. The idea of using pen portraits is informed by the portraiture method in social science inquiry. In 1983, Sara Lawrence- Lightfoot published *The Good High School: Portraits in Character and Culture*, in which she introduced the research community to "portraiture". Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997:pg.xv) provided the following description of this practice:

> Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organisational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voice and their vision – their authority, knowledge and wisdom. The drawing of a portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image.

Portraiture can be a highly useful tool for examining the culture of educational systems by illustrating the ways in which different individuals appear to understand events and environments in different ways. The technique of portraiture to discuss individual teachers has also been used in other studies of their professional lives (e.g. Day et al., 2005; Cassie et al., 2015). Without the use of portraiture to give richness and complexity to teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers, we would lose the dynamic and storied nature of teachers' identities. The variation of teachers' perceptions can provide a composite representation of various beliefs regarding an individual and group of teachers' views of their role in their specific school setting through the integration into the "'canvas of the institutions' portrait" (Hackmann, 2002: 57). In this research study, more specifically, I developed 16 pen portraits using the conceptual framework to illustrate the characteristics of teachers' identities and how they experience the factors at work that influence their identity constructions.

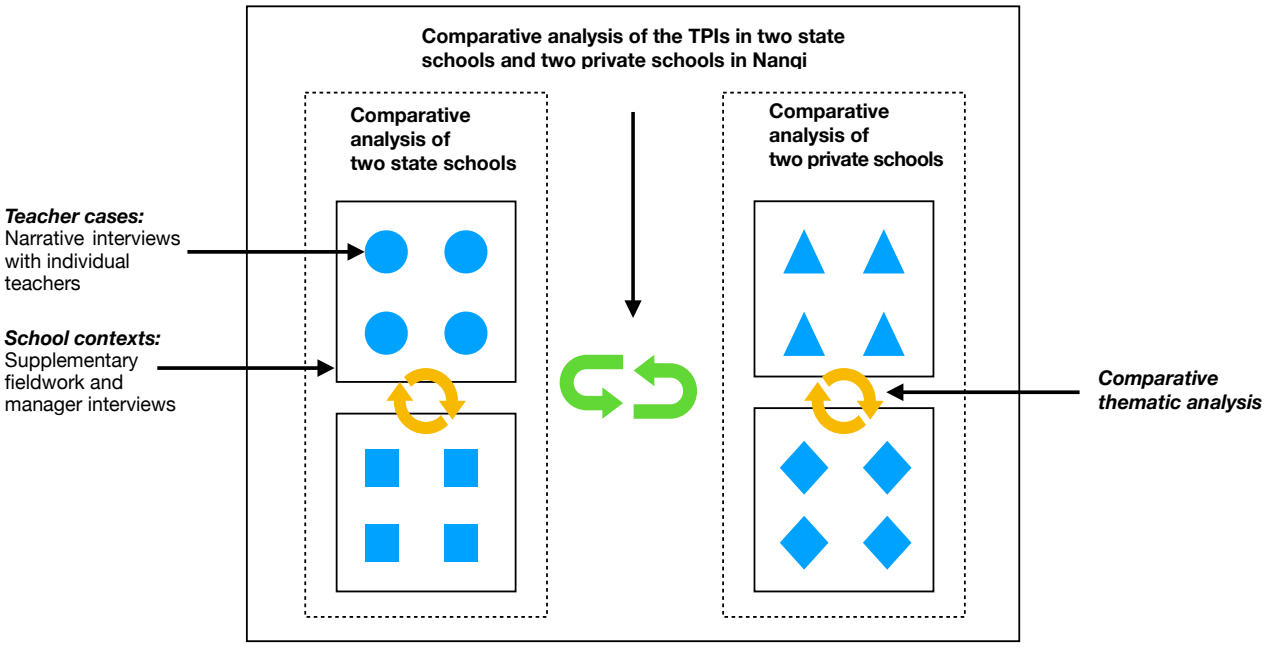
4.8.3 Strategies of comparative analysis

One goal of this study is to establish elements of analysis for teachers' construction of their professional identity in private schools and state schools in China that accord weight to themes and dynamics distinctive to the school cases. The second goal is to account for similarities and differences between sectors of schooling – the state and the private – recognising that these two sectors are not necessarily separate from each other, so to better understand the differences in their particular social and organisational contexts.

As I have discussed in the introductory chapter, professional identity constructions in private schools are under-investigated, but they are not necessarily worse or better than comparisons made from other perspectives. But how can our understanding PSTs' lives not be reduced to be either "in the shadow" or "the parallel" of the SSTs? Here is my strategy. First, I compare the main themes of SSTs' professional identity construction to the changes and characteristics in PSTs' professional identities. I then explore the rationales, contexts and significance of the differences. After analysing the characteristics according to the framework, I evaluate possibilities for SSTs according to the private school standards in order to introduce comparisons not usually made by contemporary analysts. This strategy

allows me to qualify and revise existing insights rather than just discard them as inappropriate for the context of my study. These comparisons then can be used to extend and revise the common existing frameworks in the field of TPIs (see Figure 12).

Figure 12 Cross-case comparison of the role of contexts in the construction of TPIs



4.9 Ensuring the rigour and quality of qualitative research

Working within the qualitative research framework, I do not assert research rigour in the positivist claim upon the analytic approach, which relies on the criteria of validity, reliability and generalisability, but rather refer to the field of qualitative research, which addresses the analytic value in the "apparency, verisimilitude and transferability" of social experience provided by public and personal narratives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 7). The differences between quantitative and qualitative studies are increasingly recognised. Scholars have constructed alternative terms to evaluate the quality of research project, such as *trustworthiness* (Winter, 2000), *credibility* (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), *consistency* (Kerlinger, 1973) and *legitimacy* (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006). Other scholars have provided more systematic criteria. For instance, Yardley (2000) put forward the following criteria for assessing a successful qualitative study:

1) Sensitivity to context

   Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; socio-cultural setting; participants' perspectives; ethical issues.

2) Commitment and rigour

   In-depth engagement with topic, methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.

3) Transparency and coherence

   Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentations; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.

4) Impact and importance

   Theoretical (enriching understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers, health workers).

Despite the concerns surrounding the use of terminology in quantitative research, as compared with qualitative research, Maxwell (2010: 279) redefined the term "validity" in terms of qualitative research, identifying it as a component, instead of an outcome, of a successful research project. As he argued:

1) Validity is a goal rather than a product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted.

2) Validity is relative: it is to be assessed in relation to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-dependent property of methods or conclusions.

3) Threats to validity are reduced by evidence, not methods; methods are only a way of

obtaining evidence that can help the researcher rule out these threats.

According to this view, validity is no longer a series of scientific rules or methods for eliciting the "objective truth", but a critical component of the qualitative research design that builds up the credibility of different sorts of account of a certain phenomenon (description, interpretations, explanation and conclusions, etc.).

The following table (Table 9) presents a simple representation of the strategies that I adopted to rule out specific threats to meeting the criteria for interpretations and explanations in this study. Recognising that validation frameworks cannot be taken as mandatory guidelines to ensure research rigour, I borrowed from Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012: 99–101), combining their ideas with relevant criteria (Bassey, 1999; Charmaz, 2006) to enhance the development of this research design. The developmental stages of the study are divided into three major parts, all of which are connected: research design; data collection; and data analysis. Researchers can go back and forth between different stages in developing the study.

Table 9 Methods used in addressing issues of validity

Criteria and developmental stages	***Methods used***
Research Design - Has the researcher achieved familiarities with the topic and the research settings (Charmaz, 2006:182)? - Has the researcher engaged with research participants (Bassey, 1999:75)? - Is the research giving sufficient account and sensitivity to the context (Charmaz, 2006:182)?	***Drawing on literatures*** of the research topic and backgrounds to form the development of research design and use of research methods (See chapter one and two). Using ***informal observations and conversations*** inside and outside schools to gain familiarity with the research setting and the research participants. Employing ***multiple methods***, including document analysis, observations and interviews to provide opportunities to compare findings in analysis for convergence or divergence. ***Piloting*** research instruments to ensure questions and concepts make sense to participants. Developing a ***comparative sampling frame*** to compare and contrast those teachers inside and outside of the interest group (i.e. teachers in private schools) to add on insights of differences in experience that arise from different social settings and attitudes and the connections between broader practices of education policy.

Criteria and developmental stages	*Methods used*
Data Collection - Are the data sufficient to merit claims about research aims in this study (i.e. the range and depth of interview and observations) (Charmaz, 2006:182)?	For the exploratory purpose of this research, the ***maximum variation sampling*** strategy is employed. The researcher will deliberately seek out teachers with varying age, experiences and backgrounds (Wellington, 2015:199-120). In an exploratory study, researchers need to ***keep the flexibility*** in using the research instruments and be able to make adjustments according to changing contexts. Adjustment could also be informed by ***emerging themes*** when the researcher goes back and forth to fieldwork memos, literatures and previous studies to improve the quality and consistency of data collection. Eliciting ***feedback from participants*** after summarising the interviews and provide clarifications when needed.
Data analysis - Has your research provided enough evidence for your claim to allow the reader to form an independent assessment –and agree with your claims? - Are their strong logical links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis (Charmaz, 2006:182)?	Using ***transcription*** to provide the verbatim account of data collection event. Analysing data in Chinese language and providing ***translation for reviews*** of coding and summaries. Keeping ***documentations*** of analysis steps and codebook revisions to make the analysis process more transparent for others to assess. Conducting ***constant comparison*** to validate convergence of data from different data sources; Providing potential reasons for divergence of data. Using ***verbatim quotes*** in the presentation and directly connecting the researcher's interpretation with the empirical data.

4.9.1 Research ethics and limitations

Qualitative research is based on human interactions and involves the development of human relationships. Such relationships are particularly important when they involve narratives and personal stories. This leads to the acknowledgement of ethical issues in research and strategies to address transparency, as well as to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. This section considers some of the relevant issues and how I employed strategies to recruit participants and enable teacher engagement in the qualitative research exploring different characteristics of TPI construction.

4.9.2 Engagement and ethical concerns

Conducting ethical research, as Oancea (2011: 4–6) has argued, is more than applying rules: it is about the "acting out of duties", "bringing about good results" and "acting in accordance with the virtuous person". The key to establishing a close rapport or an unbiased relationship is not finding a "preferable identity framing", as Holstein and Gubrium suggest, but recognising that "the presentation of any identity is an activity that must be considered and can, to a degree, be actively manipulated to facilitate talk about relevant subject matters" (1995: 41). By being honest about my own multiple identities as a student researcher, a young female doctoral student studying at a British university, and a co-founder of and part-time teacher at a private tutoring school, I hope to actively engage participants and frame the research interview as a friendly conversation.

Kimmel (1988: 36–40) argue that three levels of the research process can be affected by ethical problems: (1) individual participants; (2) the broader society; and (3) the community of social research. While actively engaging participants, my constant and explicit self-analysis throughout the data collection and analysis remains a crucial tool in addressing the ethical issues and integrity of the study within the wider social and research community. Patton (2002: 495) argues for three categories of question that must be asked: 1) self-reflexivity (e.g. What do I know? How do I know what I know?); 2) reflexivity about the participant (e.g. How do the participants know what they know?); and 3) reflexivity about the audiences (e.g. How do those who receive my findings make sense of what I give them?). These three categories are employed in this study to minimise the bias that could result from the influence of my personal assumptions and prior experiences.

This study also follows the guidelines laid out by the British Educational Research Association (2011) for obtaining ethical approval from the Central University Research Ethics Committee before conducting a pilot study and fieldwork (see Appendix C). School principal letters and informed consent forms were provided when I established contact with the schools for interviews and collected further data from teachers. I also carefully addressed the principles of voluntary participation and confidentiality throughout the research process. Participants were informed that their rights to refuse to answer certain questions and limit the time of their participation would be respected. I provided and explained the consent form in Chinese and asked for participants' permission (in the form of a signature) before the interview. I also asked questions about the consent form to help participants understand the practical and ethical considerations surrounding the research project. Before recording the interview, I also asked for participants' permission to do this.

4.9.3 Power and reflexivity

In this research study, I attempted to reduce the power differences between the participants and me and encourage disclosure and authenticity. During the data collection

process, I aimed to create an open, safe and relaxing environment in which my participants were willing to share personal stories. However, the reliance on human relationships in data collection introduces issues of power that are also influenced by broader social structures. According to Grenz (2005), power is fluid in that nobody actually possesses it; instead, we could define power in terms of its movement between the researcher and the participants. Such movement is influenced by the different positions that different actors take in a given context.

The multiple identities that I brought to the research encounter shaped the negotiation of power in my dialogue with participants. Some of the identities are related to my gender, educational background and shared cultural norms. As a researcher, I had lived in Nanqi, yet spent many years studying abroad. I did not have the same higher education experiences as many of the participants. Other aspects of my identity were different from the participants', such as my own work experiences in a private tutoring school. I am also a female student. These specific positions interacted with one another, helping me to construct a fluid "insider and outsider" identity. My insider status as a teacher and local person is constantly negotiated. While there are aspects of local experiences, social capital and networks that can be unifying factors, the issues of gender, age, social status and power are constantly at work, shaping the power discourse in the research relationships.

Although I am aware that my identity as a student researcher will appear non-threatening and non-authoritarian with different participants, one particular aspect of being an overseas student placed me in a vulnerable position, so that I often felt unsure of the cultural and organisational norms in specific schools. Unlike researchers who had worked with or within certain types of organisations, I had not had formal collaborations with the participant teachers. Social capital and networks are crucial for building rapport and gaining access to the participants. It was also my identity as an overseas research student that shaped most of my encounters with the participants. For the aims of exploration and learning, I encouraged help from the local community and school principals to connect me with individual teachers and used snowball sampling to invite more teachers to participate afterwards.

In this process, I received different comments and suggestions from sample teachers about their participation. For example, Xiwen asked me a few questions about my methodology at the end of the interview, after which she asked: "How were my questions? I hope these are helpful questions for you." Unlike many other teachers, Xiwen (female, Chinese teacher, one year's experience, the Willow School) did not want to be seen as an outsider to a research community. Instead, she asked critical questions that demonstrated her understanding of educational research and competency to engage with the research project. Xinxin (female, maths teacher, six years' experience, the Aspen School) commented at the end of the interview that she had enjoyed talking with me about the

challenges she had faced and the hopes she still has. I also noticed that for many teachers, being interviewed was not a common experience. When the interview with Zhulin had to be paused for the lunch hour, I asked if I could continue it the next day; Zhulin (female, English teacher, eight years' experience, the Ash International School) seemed surprised and said to me in a delighted tone: "What made you so interested in me?" These informal dialogues helped me to forge closer ties and reflect on and understand my own identities, as well as the participants' experiences in the research process. The conversations also demonstrated that participants in research were able to present themselves not only by responding to my questions, but also by engaging with me to make sense of the research contexts, and even by analysing their own life experiences and circumstances during the interviews. The following section briefly summarises the limitations of this research study.

4.9.4 Limitations

This research carries with it several limitations. This study is limited to the development of TPIs in the two private schools and two state schools in Shandong province. Both the state and private education sectors in China are very large, and so limiting my analysis to a small number of schools in Shandong province restricts my ability to generalise beyond teachers from these schools. In addition, this study is also limited by time and scale as a doctoral study, the financial resources available and restrictions on access to schools and teachers.

Summary

The motivation for this project originates from my experiences working in a private tutoring school and my interest in the potential differences between PSTs' and SSTs' experiences in their work. A pilot study was carried out during my MSc programme, during which I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten teachers from three private tutoring schools. This doctoral study aims to extend the study to teachers in different private and state schools and to focus on the implications of policy changes in China.

The literature on TPIs is reviewed in Chapter 2. Given that this research study is exploratory in nature, the themes and categories defined in this chapter are useful for informing the research design and providing the basis for comparison and consensus in data analysis. To understand teachers' work contexts and experiences, I employ interviews and non-participant observations in this study. This study also involves an awareness of my position as a private teacher and research student.

Chapter 5: Characteristics of TPIs in willow school and Aspen school (state schools)

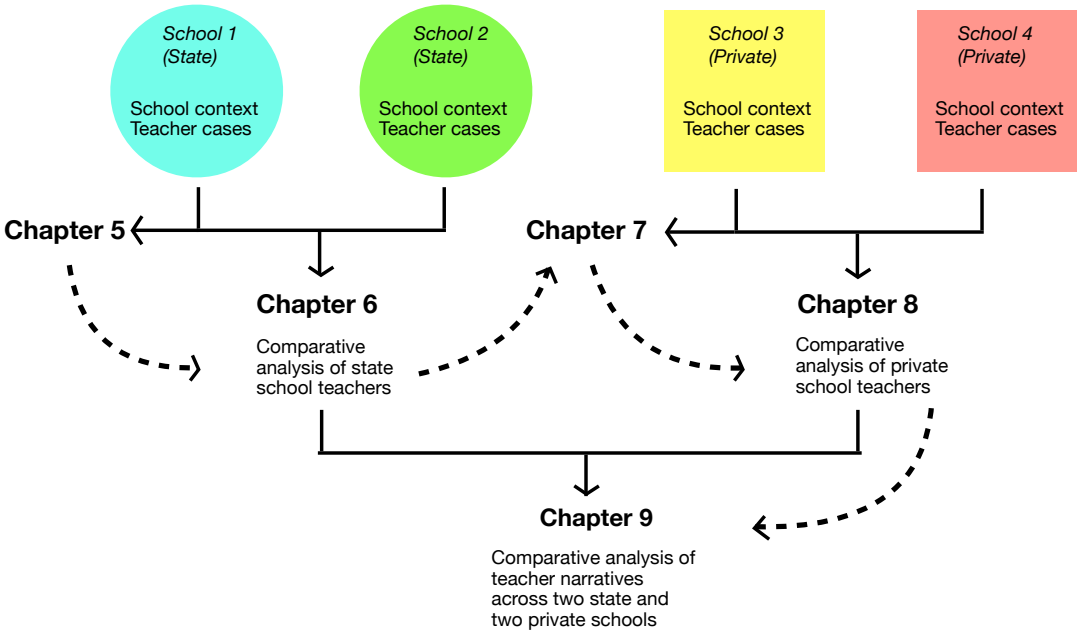
5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the main characteristics of TPIs based on an analysis of data collected from teachers in one of four different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools) in Nanqi. It focuses on analysing interview data obtained from four teachers working in this school to explore the main characteristics of TPIs in different school contexts. The teacher cases are presented and discussed as embedded in the context of the school. The purpose of the analysis is to deconstruct and reconstruct teachers' narratives and explore the characteristics of TPIs in the Willow School context. It also aimed at exploring the relationship between TPIs and teachers' experiences, and the negotiation of tensions in the context of work. To address the first research question based on findings in the context of the Willow School, I present findings based on the analysis of data collected from each school. Figure 13 demonstrates the structure within each of the four schools in this chapter. Each school section includes three parts:

- ***School contexts***. I will describe the characteristics and contexts of the school based first on the qualitative field notes of observations made during my school visits, school documents (school websites and reports) and principal interviews. Themes drawn from interview data are used to examine the perceived characteristics of the school contexts and possible impacts on teachers' construction of their professional identities.

- ***Teacher cases.*** I will present four teacher cases after introducing the school context. The purpose of this section is to organise and describe the data set in rich detail and to examine the ways in which events, school contexts, teachers' experiences and other aspects of their work life affects the range of discourses about their professional identities. Based mainly on Day et al.'s (2005) conceptual framework of TPIs (see literature review chapter), I included three main components in presenting the findings. The three aspects of teachers' professional identity examined based on this conceptual framework are: 1) teachers' ***social selves*** – what it means to be a professional teacher; 2) teachers' ***personal selves*** – what defines teachers' learning and professional development; and 3) teachers' ***professional selves*** – what characterises teaching as a profession. The organising structures are indicative of a range of professional, personal and social contexts that teachers engage in to construct their professional identities. In the end of each teacher's case, I will present a table that summarises the main characteristics of individual TPIs.

Figure 13 Structures of the finding chapters (Chapter 5-chapter 8)



To sum up, in this chapter, I address the research questions via three layers of presentations: the school; the teacher cases; and the cross-case analysis of teachers within each school. These findings will be used as the basis for further cross-case analysis and discussion of the overall patterns that emerge in teachers' narratives in each school context.

5.2 Introducing the Willow school (state school)

The Willow School is a primary school with 2,400 students and about 100 teachers and staff in total (2015 figures). This sub-district primary school is located in the developing residential area of eastern Nanqi and it is close to the centre of the county. The residential area is composed of a few major housing estates, shops, shopping malls, banks and a sports park. According to the local policy of the *Area Divided Enrolment and Exemption Admission*[20], the Willow School is assigned an area that serves many rural-to-urban migrants. The street in which the Willow School is located is alive with a large number of grocery and stationery shops, learning centres, restaurants, salons, bookshops and fast food chains. Many cars, electric vehicles and bikes run through the willow trees by the street, especially during rush hour.

The school was first built in the 1990 and relocated to the current address in 1999. After receiving a large donation from a businessman from Hong Kong to build a new campus, it was renamed as the Willow School. One year later, the Nanqi government decided to promote a better distribution of schools and merged two small rural schools with the Willow School. The school now occupies an area of 26,669 square metres with three main teaching buildings and one large sports field. According to the sub-district primary school principal, Mr. Chen, the school needed to rely on the government and central school for financing the school building, maintenance and construction, as well as the recruitment and appointment of teachers.

The open gate leads to a named road and on to the main buildings. The campus is beautifully decorated with lawns, a small pavilion and a long corridor with blossoming Chinese wisteria by the left side of the building. The corridor leads to a further open space between two teaching buildings. Trees surrounded by stone chairs create more space for students to sit or play. The main teaching building is a five-floor modern building, which is also equipped with a reading room, a computer room, an auditorium, a laboratory and an audio-visual classroom. Each class is equipped with two blackboards (one in the front and one in the back), a computer, a projector and an air-conditioner. By the side of each classroom are displays of students' works, including colourful paintings, clean and appealing brush drawings, literary works and calligraphy.

When I visited the school, the large number of students in each class was noticeable. Each classroom had about 80 student desks in alignment, using the traditional side-by-side rows-and-columns setup. This left only one to two aisles for students and the teacher to walk and move about in. In the centre of the front of the classrooms were large computer

[20] This policy was first released in 2014 by the MoE to ensure the admission of students in primary and lower secondary schools without entrance examinations. According to the policy, each county government will set out the priority admission area for each school according to the school scale, the student population and distribution of schools.

desks, behind which were the teaching platforms. Although equipment and facilities had been significantly improved, there seemed to be an urgent need for more classrooms and qualified teachers given the student numbers and cramped space. As the school principal, Mr Chen, said, one of the major issues facing the Willow School is over-crowding classroom.

The campus was also extremely crowded, students were walking and running energetically through corridors, stairways and the sports field. The large sports field was located in the eastern side of the campus. It was equipped with a red plastic running area and large field of plastic lawn. In the middle of the morning, all the students were required to gather in the sports field to take part in exercises. All the students would stand in lines that could extend outside the sports field and on to the pathways, which again shows the lack of space in the school.

5.2.1 School-based changes to address students learning needs

I was allowed to shadow Chen for an afternoon. Most of his working hours in school seemed to be spent on hosting management-level meetings and supervising teachers' instructions and learning outcomes. He told me he was also involved in teacher meetings and parents' meetings. In front of the main building of the Willow School hung a striking red banner, which read "30% teaching and 70% managing for an effective classroom". According to Mr Chen, this summarises the nature and form of classroom reform to achieve better learning outcomes and improve students' learning capacities. Chen explained that he encouraged teachers to pay close attention to classroom behaviour management: "We borrowed this policy from other schools. Teachers need to first pay attention to keeping students' focus in listening and learning in classes. Before implementing this policy, our classes were muddled up. The school was at the bottom of the district school ranking." As Mr Chen described it, classroom discipline remains the priority of classroom teaching and a pre-condition for student engagement in learning. Table 10 outlines the timetable in Willow.

Table 10 The school timetable (the Willow School)

			Morning session
Opening gate	7.40 am		
Preparation	8.00 am		
First class	8.10 – 8.50 am		
Second class	9.00 – 9.40 am		
Morning break	9.40-10.05 am (exercise)		
Third class	10.05- 10.50 am		
Fourth class	11.00 – 11.40 am		
			Afternoon session
	May. 1 – Sep. 30 (Summer)		Oct. 1 – Apr. 30 (Winter)
Preparation	2.40 pm	Preparation	2.10 pm
Fifth class	2.50 – 3.30pm	Fifth class	2.20 – 3.00 pm
Afternoon break	3.30 – 3.55 pm	Afternoon break	3.00 – 3.25 pm
Sixth class	3.55 – 4.40 pm	Sixth class	3.25 – 4.10 pm
Office hour	4.50 – 5.30 pm	Office hour	4.20 – 5.00 pm

As it is shown in table 7, each class took 40 minutes and students could have 10 minutes' break between. There were also two longer breaks that were used for specific exercise: the morning session for Diabolo and afternoon break for eye-relaxing exercises. Diabolo is a traditional Chinese yo-yo sport, in which the Willow had won a series of national and international awards. "Next month, the Bureau of Education and Sports will hold an announcement conference to promote this sport," said Mr Chen. He was eager to improve the school and construct a distinguished identity for Willow, which seemed to be an important part of his responsibility as the leader of the school. He later talked about the "experimental class" in which students were given the cucurbit flute (a traditional Chinese music instrument) class. After the class team successfully won the Shandong TV prize, Chen aimed to offer the lessons for more students. In his own words: "This will become another distinguishing feature of our school. [...] This is all very good preparation for our kids."

5.2.2 Implementing the school reform and enhancing teacher quality

Like many primary and middle schools in Shandong province, Willow began to adapt the well-known model of Dulangkou Middle School and implement the school-based teaching

reform as the main approach for school improvement[21]. To match the pedagogical and managerial demand, teacher training has become a key focus in Willow. One problem in the teaching staff in Willow was the aging teacher group. According to Mr Chen, 30 out of 90 teachers in Willow are over 50 years old. The difference in age groups could add a challenge for school leaders to address the needs of a heterogeneous group of teachers in achieving the goals for school improvement. Nevertheless, a series of school-level and county-level training sessions have been held to enhance teachers' professional skills: this has involved lesson observations and the weekly open demonstration classes, teacher reading groups, teachers' collaborative learning group, school visits and exchanges, expert teacher lectures and teaching competitions. At the school level, Willow school's teacher-training scheme included three main parts to improve young teachers' practices and meet external accountability. These three parts are:

> 1) S***ending "Backbone Teachers"[22] to Rural Schools***: Experienced teachers in urban schools were assigned the role and responsibility to teach in rural schools for a few months to share professional expertise. This is also considered as a learning opportunity for the urban teachers to adapt their teaching to different group of students.
>
> 2) ***Daily appraisal:*** Each teacher was assigned to demonstrate their classroom teaching in the auditorium for other teaching staff. The principal would attend the demonstration classes and could give the teacher feedbacks based on his or her teaching on the stage. The open appraisal took place in the afternoon of every working day.
>
> *3)* **T*eaching competition:*** Teaching competition was considered as an important activity for evaluating the teachers' competencies. Teachers were encouraged to select a topic, design, and demonstrate the teaching the selected topic to the students and evaluated by a group of experienced teachers and educational advisors from local school community or the Education Bureau.

Mr. Chen addressed that significant attention is given to developing the young teachers in the school. According to Chen, staffs and teachers in leadership roles, for instance, are required to observe teachers' classes and give direct and constructive comments to young teachers. The Daily Appraisal was a very intensive and potentially stressful event for teachers in Willow. Although direct instructions and supports were given to young

[21] According to the limited literatures on this model in China, the headmaster of Dulangkou Middle School first named this model the "10+35 classroom" in 1997, which meant "10 minutes" for teachers to give lectures and "35 minutes" for students to lead the discussion. According to the test results, students from Dulangkou school had made significant progress. It is believed that Dulangkou's success was related to this strategy, which led to huge improvements in students' test scores.

[22] 骨干教师

teachers in terms of their teaching practices, the school seemed to pay less attention to teachers' emotions and self-assessment. In the following sections, teachers were asked to reflect upon their experiences and the effectiveness of these professional learning tasks.

5.2.3 The demand for better education

There is a growing number of parents, especially from suburban areas, who have noticed the opportunities to send their children to better schools by moving to the expanding commercial real estate in this area of Nanqi. Purchasing apartments near the Willow School is considered as the simplest way to locate their children to an urban school. Even so, however, parents need to negotiate with the school and their efforts may still be in vain.

Many of the parents associated with the Willow School are from poorer socio-economic and educational backgrounds. The parents attempted to seek additional support for their children in various school subjects and extra curriculum learning as well as after-school care. Alongside the Willow School, there were over 30 chain tutoring centers, fine art centres, and after-school care centres or "little dining table" (*xiao fan zhuo*), many of which are run by non-professionals without legal registration. While I visited some of the centres, parents often complained that children are doing too much, but they still do not want their children to "lose at the starting line". The high demand and pressure to improve children's learning outcomes was apparent in these expanding commercialised learning centres.

5.2.4 The crisis in school–parent relationship

Although Mr. Chen had positive relationships and shared information and gained emotional support from local leaders and other school principals, he summarised his experiences as the school principal: "Recently, parents have expected much more than before. Everyone wants to enjoy a good education. But the quality of state schools cannot meet that expectation. My job has become very exhausting." Mr Chen as well a participant teacher in this research study also spoke of the urgent need for legal protection for schools and teachers when the school authority is threatened by the demands of the "new generation of parents".

"The school cannot develop without a consensus with parents," Mr Chen addressed during the interview. He added that the relationship between school and parents was "very strained" and that the excessive number of students had added extra administrative burdens. Later in the teacher interviews, the four participant teachers also supported Mr. Chen's claim and talked about the complexity added to their work in managing their relationships with parents. The most commonly mentioned issues included the permissive parenting style (four teachers), a lack of understanding and collaboration in managing students' homework (three participants), corporal punishment in school (two teachers) and the inadequate school safeguarding (one teacher). There seemed to be a consensus among educators that the tradition of "honour teachers and esteem teaching" was being destroyed

because of the lack of financial support and professionally qualified teachers to meet parents' growing demand for better quality education. Table 11 summarises the school context based on the principal interview and observations in the field.

Table 11 Characteristics of the Willow School

Location	Busy residential area near city centre
Neighbourhood	Expanding real estates and increasing residents
School finance	Determined by school of higher administrative level and supplemented by profits from the kindergarten
School staffing	Determined by local government Shortage of teachers
School facilities and equipment	Good facility but short of classrooms and school spaces
Number of students	About 2,400 students
Number of teachers	About 100 state teachers
School–parent relationship	Barriers and conflicts
Role of national curriculum	Remains dominant, but supplemented by two extracurricular activities as school characteristics
Staff support/ supervision	Strong and high intensity in training for better teaching skills, with a focus on young teachers
Focus of class reform	Promoting group learning, and encouraging students' engagements and focus on the learning outcome
Teacher job progression	Stability but a lack of progression
Leadership	Instructional and administrative leadership style

5.3 Four teacher cases

The findings indicate that teachers draw on a variety of personal experiences, including their teacher education and professional development experiences, as well as self-reflection, to negotiate their professional identities. In addition, individual teachers' working contexts, including the teacher policy environment, students, parents and colleagues, as well as the support from the school and the government, exert significant influences on the way teachers make sense of their professional roles and identities. Finally, although teachers need to constantly engage with the conflicting influences, individual teachers might develop various strategies and levels of adaptation in managing the conflicts.

5.3.1 Teacher A1- Xiwen

Basic biographical information
Age: Late 20s
Gender: Female
Education: Master of Chinese Language and Literature (Normal College)
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 1 year

Xiwen is a female teacher in her early 20s. She was in her second year of teaching Chinese at the Willow School. She had been trained at a normal university (*Shifan daxue*), where she received her teaching qualification. Xiwen received a master's degree in Chinese language and literature from a local normal college[23]. Through the interview, I learned that Xiwen was a competitive student in college. She was hardworking and driven in her learning and was engaged with various aspects of her college life. Mr. Chen had suggested Xiwen to be my interviewee for that she was a good example of a primary school teacher who makes great efforts and has been successful in her professional learning. Without hesitation, Xiwen invited me to her office.

- ***Early stage of teaching***

Before Xiwen became a teacher in the Willow School, she wanted to become a civil servant. After she failed the civil service examination, Xiwen decided to take "the easier path"- to become a Chinese teacher. Xiwen considered primary school teaching as failure in the beginning of her journey. She believed her parents were disappointed and that she lost her competitiveness to her friends and peers. Due to the perceived drawbacks and inferior social status of the job, Xiwen had major difficulties in building her confidence in

[23] A normal college is a school established to train high-school graduates to become teachers. Most of such colleges are now called "teacher-training colleges" in many other countries.

teaching. As she said: “I first denied the meaning of this job and I denied my own worth”. Without much time to adjust herself, she started teaching and experienced some unpleasant interactions with parents and students. Only until later could she reflect on her simplistic assumptions about primary education:

> [...] plus, I didn’t consider the pupils and their parents are well-behaved or educated. I was annoyed by their questions and negative feedback. I thought my ideas were the best. They should just understand and accept whatever I provided in the class.

Xiwen recounted incidents during interview when parents questioned her teaching skills. She recalled that a student’s assessment result had shown the lack of basic sentence construction skills of s grade 2 students.

- ***Embarking a journey of transformation***

Becoming aware of her own arrogance and assumptions, Xiwen embarked on a journey of transformation. She took an assertive attitude in front of critiques, became aware of her own attitudes and started to create an environment for honesty and effective communication. She claimed that this change had further enhanced her understanding of teaching and herself as a teacher. Her active engagement with reflection seems to be a very helpful tool for her to make sense of her relationship with others and her professional identity as a teacher in practices as a “problem-solver”. As she summarises it: “After I changed my attitude, everything began to change.”

Her growing awareness of the problems and increased confidence in solving these problems had further developed her sense of self efficacy: “Every day I ask myself what else I can change, what else I can do to make it better. Now I can see my class is getting in shape.” Xiwen recognised her personal growth, which also gave her a sense of autonomy when she faces criticisms as a new teacher. In her view, change in one’s thinking or actions needs to be based on one’s own choice and judgements：

> I realise other people’s opinions belong to other people, including those of my parents. But I must carefully listen to and think carefully whether that’s really my problem. If so, I will take actions to change; if not, I don’t think it’s necessary to get involved. Because I belong to myself.

The interview analysis suggests that Xiwen had developed a strong belief in her competencies in solving relational and pedagogical problems and developing her teaching skills. In this process, Xiwen become able to claim and defend her position as a teacher, which also seem to have a direct impact on the way she interacts with others and her ability to improve students’ learning. By “learning”, Xiwen aims to address students’ ability

to actively and critically engage in questioning and understanding what they are taught in school. As she describes it:

> In our education, there is something absent. That is, teachers are cramming and giving lectures, while students have to follow and listen to what the teacher says. Although we often talk about how we should encourage students to think independently, it's far from being put into practice. This is a problem we need to solve.

With a strong belief in the development of her students' independent learning skills, Xiwen thinks a holistic approach to learning would be beneficial for students in the long term. She argued that reading can be very helpful in diversifying students' learning experience. Xiwen mentioned a few times in the interview that students at primary school level are very active; hence they needed to learn from a wide range of activities and grow in multiple aspects. As she explains:

> I think life in primary school need to be colourful. Students need to learn outside of the curriculum. Do students in Beijing only study the textbook? Of course not. Otherwise they would not be able to develop a wide range of learning skills. I'm not sure how other teachers would do it, but I'd like to try this after grade three.

In summary, Xiwen appears to have developed a strong sense of commitment to develop students' learning that is in line with the value she places on education. The vision requires a certain amount of resources, flexibility and professional autonomy. She briefly commented that the Willow School had not get enough resources and spaces for creating an ideal environment for students. Nevertheless, Xiwen could align her sense of autonomy with the perception of students as autonomous beings. According to her, the teacher's job is to help students identify their strengths. As she further explained in her narrative that:

> I need to let them know that they are not just young children. They can also help and protect others who are younger and weaker.

With a strong belief in her students, Xiwen think she can influence students in various ways: her classroom teaching, via the subject of Chinese, being an effective class master, and a successful role model. On a few occasions in the interview, Xiwen talked about the importance of her work to "inspire the students, activate their (the students') thoughts and lead students to learn by asking more questions", although she does not believe that such goal could be achieved easily in her school. In addition, Xiwen thinks it is fundamental to understand and engage with students in order to make impact through her work. She seemed to hold a negative perception towards the impact of Chinese culture that teachers were given the priority and authorities without being questioned. In contrast, she argued that students' voices as the most authentic source of feedback that can support teachers' learning and professional development:

> I think, especially for our educators, students' voices are the most real and authentic. [...] If students are happy and passionate, and if they learn a lot of things then that class is a successful one.

- ***Facing barriers and conflicts***

Xiwen often feels overwhelmed by the pressure at her job. These pressures are from parents, the school inspections and heavy workload. She believed that the implementation of curriculum reform had left teachers with little space for creativity. Xiwen argues that there should not be "one best model" for everyone. Instead, she believed that teachers must be allowed to use different methods to support students' learning. One of the major problems facing Xiwen is to create a learning environment for her students. She was yet to find her answer.

The nature of primary school teaching seemed to be a significant influence on Xiwen's identity development. Xiwen believed that primary education required a collaborative culture among all stakeholders. For a few times during the interview, Xiwen claimed that there are a range of restrictions she needed to face in Willow: The lack of autonomy in school; shrinking private time for herself and her family; and growing regulations on teachers' qualifications and work have all been undermining the development of a school community. "I don't know Xiwen also considered teacher appraisal as a part of school administration, rather than a mean for teachers' development. This seemed to create more pressures than its promised benefits.

Moreover, parents' ignorance of teachers' work and high demand for quality education for their children, however, increased the conflict to arise in teachers' day-to-day works. The school–family relationship is a key aspect of teachers' professional life. According to her, the teaching profession lacks a support system to deal with the blames and unreasonable requests from parents. She argued that this accountability crisis was depraved by the increasing media exposure of teachers' unprofessional conducts. This seems to disturb Xiwen's sense of normalcy as a teacher and an individual human being. While feeling threatened, Xiwen needed to seek strategies to solve the conflicts and negotiate their roles with students' parents. To navigate the tension of the professional and personal spaces, Xiwen had changed her communication strategies with parents, including switching off her phone after work and being direct with others to gain her. When it comes to problems with students' behaviour in schools, Xiwen addressed the importance of focusing on her communication with students in the hope that parents will change their attitude to the teaching profession in general and be less anxious about their children's learning in school. In addition, the lack of protection of teachers' rights, reputations and voices as a profession concerned Xiwen. Nevertheless, the lack of empathy among parents and media

were particularly burdensome for her. Lack of mutual understanding seemed to become a part of her living experiences as a teacher, as she pointed a few times in the interview:

> Now I think becoming a teacher means accepting demands and high expectations of the parents. [...] They only think of their children, but never understand the teachers.
>
> The parents do not respect you. This is the problem that I have, so what does it mean to choose to become a teacher? It's very heavy.

- ***Hopes for the future***

"I like it when everyone can be him or herself," Xiwen said. She told me that she wants to become a leader that can help and influence many people and make a change in education. Xiwen defined teaching as a collective endeavour in which individual teachers need to be actively seeking help and support from their students and colleagues. International research literature has identified a range of benefits associated with collegial support for teachers. When I informally shared some of my own struggles as a teacher to make the interview more informal and "conversational", Xiwen also suggested that one should not try to do one's work on one's own. She said it is better to work with colleagues. Xiwen also advocated intra-professional collaboration where a wide range of actors could take collective action to both protect the rights of teachers and to foster a better education system. When asked about her career goals, Xiwen employed the metaphor of a growing tree and a hardworking Asher to portray her own development as a lifelong learner:

> I'd rather become a big tree, or even a small tree. I can see it is growing, and its roots have already extended to the entire field. I'd rather be the person who is silent and not that many people pay close attention to me. I just want to be ploughing and weeding quietly and attain some achievements. This won't stop me from humbly learning from other teachers. I really need to ask other teachers – they are really experienced.

In the other words, Xiwen perceptions of her leadership role is less of a heroic one; rather, it is embedded in her normal work and everyday interactions with others in the school. "Humbly learning from others" has become the perceived solution to achieve her success. Looking confident and assertive as she spoke, Xiwen not only adopted a range of strategies for coping with the tensions in her work, she also reflected upon the problems of deteriorating and fragile teacher identities as well as immortalising experiences connected these with the broader social influences of the media, the citizen, the state and labour unions: "I think this is when we need collaboration between different parts. The rule is fixed, but people are flexible. It is a matter of coordination." Through talking about the problems, the strategies, her expectations and the social contexts of her relationships with

parents, Xiwen seemed to have constructed multiple identities as an active problem-solver and decision-maker as well as observer in her work in the school.

- ***Summary***

In Xiwen's narrative, we see how she constructs her professional identities through her engagement with the interview questions about various aspects of work. Xiwen typically adopted a professional identity supporting students' development and teachers' self-improvement. She also seemed to avoid the discourse of teaching as a caring profession and adopted one that is characterised by collaborative leadership and social impact. Nevertheless, we could find tensions emerging from her conflicting roles that she needs to understand better in order to navigate the tensions.

5.3.2 Teacher A2- Haoting

Basic biographical information
Age: Early 30s
Gender: Male
Education: Bachelor of Mathematics Education (Normal College)
Current position: Maths teacher
Years of teaching: 10 years

Haoting is a maths teacher in his mid-30s. He has been teaching maths at the Willow School for 10 years. I was invited by Mr Chen to attend his open class and was able to introduce myself during the break. Haoting grew up in a village and was a high achiever at school. When he was about to graduate from the secondary school, Haoting's mother became very ill. He had to choose a normal college, which could provide him extra funding for food and living. Although Haoting worked hard to receive qualifications of high school teaching, he only had the chance to teach in a primary school due to the teacher recruitment needs. From 2005, he began to teach the lower grades in the Willow School. As an experienced teacher, Haoting seem to be under huge pressure in coping with conflicting personal and professional demands. Through the interview, Haoting seemed to struggle in negotiating the multiple aspects and expectations in his personal and professional lives. At the end of the interview, he told me that he believed he had occupational burnout and had thought about leaving the teaching profession. What kept him in the job were practical issues, especially the need for a stable income for his family.

- ***The relational aspect of being a teacher***

Haoting has been receiving support from colleagues in the school. During the interview, Haoting mentioned that he had received direct guidance and advice from the previous principal, who was a maths teacher with 30 years' experience. Haoting felt that the "teaching by doing" process was very helpful for him to understand the dynamics of real classroom teaching. Haoting thinks that observing other teachers' classes and receiving feedback from others can help him make consistent improvements. He considers training in supplementary skills such as making PowerPoint files and drawing as important components to add to current teacher education preparation courses in China. In contrast, Haoting's own past formal teacher education experiences did not seem to have had a strong impact on the development of his professional identity. For instance, Haoting argued that the focus on content knowledge in his formal teacher training was as helpful as other practical skills such as painting or playing music in the workplace.

According to Haoting, teachers' practical knowledge is the key to the primary school teachers' success. He thinks that the strong focus on subject matter knowledge in college

was not helpful for him when he began to teach. Despite two years of teaching experiences in the DS, Haoting does not seem to have developed a very positive self-image as a teacher, particularly when he compares himself with national model teachers. He pointed out three major issues he has in teaching: (1) a lack of competence in speaking good Mandarin; (2) a lack of experience in class design; and (3) the difficulty in integrating pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge and textbook knowledge in the classroom context. In his words, his knowledge is fragile and "broken into pieces".

In school, Haoting kept positive relationship with his students and colleagues. According to Haoting, he is close to his students, although he still finds problems in communicating with lower performers. He considered his students' progress as the major source of his job satisfaction. Haoting also enjoyed his relationships with his colleagues and liked having casual conversations with them. Despite the heavy workload and low wages, Haoting thought of his life as "relatively simple", in that it is less interrupted by the complexity outside of the school.

- ***Struggles between personal beliefs within the structural restraints***

When I asked him to define a successful teacher, Haoting first defined an ideal student and what good education can do for his mind. Haoting argued that the priority in education should be cultivating morally integrated human beings. For him, students' creativity and well-being are of vital importance for good education. Haoting said he was influenced by the suicide of his cousin a few years ago. This unfortunate event in Haoting's personal life seems to have had an important impact on his educational values; Haoting began to take a strong position in constructing what a good education meant in his narrative. As he said in the interview:

> However, I think, first of all, a student must develop integrity. In China, the suicide rate among young students is very high. Of course, these students reacted in an extreme way. My cousin is an example. He went to one of the top universities in China. But he killed himself by jumping from a high building. He [was] excellent at studying but he could not feel connected with others. Small life issues could be extremely difficult for him to cope with. That's why I think an integrated personality is the key (to education).

Realising his ideals is not easy. Despite the firm belief in an education that cultivates students' moral development, Haoting seems to have difficulties in negotiating the conflicts of being a teacher in the current context of educational reform in China. This is particularly the case when he is under pressure to prepare students for examinations. Haoting's description reflected one major conflict he faces – the conflict between students' learning experience and the importance given to the league tables for students' academic

progress and teachers' appraisal. As an experienced maths teacher in the DS, Haoting described the situation at the beginning of the interview:

> I think persistence is the key in borrowing from other school systems. Constant system changes are neither beneficial to individual teachers' professional development, nor do they help improve the institutional brand, because teachers will not have enough time to gain in-depth insights from any of the systems in practice.

Haoting struggled in choosing his personal belief and the culture of examination in the Chinese educational system. As he described, teacher appraisal, which was still tightly related to students' academic performances, were the source of teachers' inner conflicts when it comes to changing their pedagogical approaches. In Haoting's view, the education system in China puts too much pressure on students. He thinks that the educational reform is a good attempt, but is very difficult to implement, for it often conflicts with the examination-focused evaluation system in education. Haoting feels that the focus on students' exam results has restricted his capacity to realise his educational values.

> I can see the end of my career and I will basically be a teacher my entire life. My level is basically set and [...] that means there's not much space for development.

- ***Frustrations in an era of changes***

In this process, he perceives himself as becoming a part of the "school machine" by simply following orders. The top-down approach to curriculum reform was accompanied by changes in leaderships and school policies, which seemed to further break off the development process of Haoting's professional identities. Haoting mentioned a few times about his frustration about the consistently changing school policies:

> I think if we are going to use one model, it's best to be persistent. Don't just learn one model for a few years and then change it to another. If it didn't work, we then learn from other models. In the end, we are not authentic in any model. Individual teachers will not develop, and the school will fail to promote its name. So, persistence is important.

Moreover, the maths curriculum in China, according to Haoting, has set too high a standard with an emphasis on abstract knowledge when it is compared internationally. To make a difference in education, Haoting argues, the national curriculum should be the first thing to be changed. In addition, Haoting seemed to be frustrated by the low income and lack of career advancement in teaching[24]. Moreover, Haoting is also perplexed by what he sees as parents' low expectations for students' performances in the school.

[24] During my fieldwork, teachers and school principals mentioned the decreasing number of teachers who could be promoted as *mingshi* or "star teachers".

> I do what the school asks me to do. It's different from what I think and believe. There's lots of pressure from the school and it's impossible for me to achieve what I imagined. To make the classroom more relaxing [...] is impossible.

- ***Summary***

To sum up, Haoting seems to experience tremendous pressure at work mainly due to the structural problems he faces in WS. These problems include: 1) the high-stakes, outcome-driven system; 2) the inconsistency in school policies; 3) the high standard in the maths curriculum in primary schools; and 4) a lack of collaboration by parents to support students' learning at school. Although Haoting understood the situation well, his professional identity development seems to be interrupted by multiple demands and restrictions he faced as teacher. Haoting's narrative is characterised by the conflictual experience of "compromised belonginess": one the one hand, he developed sense of helplessness in meeting multiple personal and professional demands. On the other hand, Haoting felt satisfied with the supportive collegial relationship, which he believed to be unique in his school work at the Willow School.

5.3.3 Teacher A3- Ruolan

Basic biographical information
Age: Late 20s
Gender: Female
Education: Bachelor of Primary Education (Normal College)
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 6 years

Ruolan is a Chinese teacher in her late 20s. She graduated from a local teacher education college and started to teach at the Willow School six years ago. I met in Ruolan in her open class and Mr. Chen introduced us to each other. She needed to return to her classroom, so I text messaged her to confirm another date for the interview. Ruolan has a Bachelor's degree in primary education. After graduating from college, Ruolan did not want to become a teacher. She liked music and dancing and hoped she could find a relevant job.

- ***Choosing and being chosen as a state primary school teacher***

Before becoming a state teacher, Ruolan had to follow her parents' suggestions to work in Willow school as a substitute teacher. This is mainly because being a state teacher offers the stability and status as a state employer, therefore is considered as most ideal for female college graduates in small towns like Nanqi. However, the status and payment for substitute teacher was very different from government employed teacher even inside the same school. Ruolan believed that she was disadvantaged and marginalised as a substitute teacher in Willow, therefore she quitted her job to explore better opportunities. During this time, she shared her thoughts with her friends. She was finally convinced that teaching is the best available opportunity for her. As she described:

> I talked with many other people about work, the future and what's next. And I felt, at that time, just as what my friends agrees, the "iron rice bowl" is the best job, especially for a girl.

Ruolan prepared for two years to pass the teacher exam in 2013. After that, she became a full-time, state-employed state teacher at the Willow School. Although, gender stereotyping from family and friends seems to have been a major driver of her decision, the success gave her a sense of achievement and offered her the status of a legitimate and deserved member of the teaching profession. As Ruolan reflected:

> After that (I became a state teacher) I was considered someone who is guaranteed food and clothes for life. Also, I remember how parents tell the students looked down their noses at me because of my status as a substitute teacher. [...] This hurt

> my feeling, so I must leave and pass the exam. I must show them that I can pass the test and become a state teacher one day.

Despite the sense of achievement as a state teacher, Ruolan also reveals the struggle with the stereotypes and unfair public opinions about having the "iron rice bowl". She said that state teachers are often seen as those who only kill times, which is hugely mistaken. As a teacher, Ruolan described her work as one with tight schedule, heavy workloads and a tremendous amount of emotional labour with children and student's parents. As she described:

> Let me put it this way, teaching is not an easy job. Teachers are facing the future and the owners of our future, so we all hope for the best and to be helpful for students' development. Honestly, teaching is very tiring. Some people think we could have more personal time after work, while that's not true. Especially when it is close to the exam period, we need to bring back the test paper and correct them at home. Think about it, 80 papers, 3–4 minutes for each one, it would take over 3 hours to finishing marking them. It is very demanding. Students in higher grades also have writing tasks; the teacher then needs to read, evaluate, praise, correct the errors, plus leaving space for students to reflect on their own. It really is tiring. I had to work at home while I taught grade 5.

- ***The emotion work in teaching and caregiving***

Among her busy schedules of activities, Ruolan considered safeguarding as the most important part of her work in the Willow school. She explained that all the details could have educational impact. Ruolan said she observes very carefully when students walk out of the school gate. According to her, she could know if students had a good day by simply observing them. In addition to this, Ruolan addressed supporting the development of students' characters as another professional responsibility for primary school teachers. For Ruolan, students' character development and positive life -attitudes can also benefit students' future lives. Ruolan often defines herself as someone who takes care of other people.

In terms of classroom teaching, Ruolan claimed her professional goal was to bring a joyful climate to the classroom and encourage students engage with her questions. She believed that a teacher's emotions play a vital role in changing the class atmosphere, and hence in addressing students' engagements:

> I think teachers' emotions exert an influence on students. For example, if I'm happy today, the class will be relaxing, that would be how the students' feel. They would be very active and look happy in responding to my questions in class. But if I'm in a bad mood because of their poor performances, I'm sure students will be very quiet in class. Their attention would begin to wander.

Ruolan considers a "lively but harmonious" class atmosphere as essential for successful teaching, while she finds keeping good order with 80 students in one class very challenging. Although Ruolan had close relationships with her students, it had been very difficult for her to include everyone in her teaching. As a result, Ruolan seemed to be burdened by the students' expectation for emotional supportive and guidance in learning. The demand for communication and caretaking in primary teaching is a demanding aspect of teachers' everyday lives. When it comes to very difficult situations, Ruolan often find herself incapable of controlling her emotions. As she spoke out: "I'm not the God, and I can't control my emotions all the time."

The frustrations were also from the mixed demands and lack of collaborations from the parents. While feeling frustrated, Ruoban seemed to internationalise the parental demand for students' good academic outcome. She used the Chinese phrase "*Hen Tie Bu Cheng Gang*" (What a let-down) to describe her inner struggle when her students could not make satisfactory academic progress. She argued that the responsibility for students' learning and development needs to be shared by families, and Ruolan seemed have a sense of helplessness in carrying out her professional responsibility when students are not supported by their parents:

> The parents really pay zero attention to their kids. How can we help? It the kids already know that no one cares about them, no matter how hard the teachers work, the kids will not be well off.

- ***Lack of time and effective support***

In terms of her relationship with the curriculum, Ruolan considered her responsibility as to deliver the "messages" from the textbook in the pre-defined process. Although she tried to incorporate her own ideas, she found hard to realise these ideas due to the limited time she had to cover the contents of the textbook. Regarding teachers' in-service learning, Ruolan enjoyed informal learning opportunities in the school, such as discussing key knowledge points with her colleagues in the office. In contrast, formal learning in the school context were mainly public lectures, which she found difficult to guide her practices. Ruolan's following comments on these programmes are rather negative:

> In fact, theory is theory; what we need is practice. No matter how good or persuasive the theory is, it needs to be grounded in real practice.

Her negative attitude to theory might be aligned with her identities as a *practitioner* and *caregiver* in the Willow School, as this can be identified in the following claim:

> Because I'm the practitioner and I'm with children most of the time, it is pointless to have so many theories without applying these to real lives.

- ***Summary***

To summarise, Ruolan's identity as a teacher appears to be characterised by the tensions between different professional goals. Although Ruolan could draw on some strategies and resources to help keep herself emotionally resilient, her overall experience of teaching seems to be characterised by emotional exhaustion, particularly in negotiating the realities of multiple and seemingly contradictory expectations for good teaching in the context of educational reform. What she chooses to do is to manage her identity as a "happy teacher" by using the "mirror rule" as a self-love exercise: "When you wake up every day, and before you go to work, you can smile to yourself in the mirror and tell yourself 'today will be a happy day.'"

5.3.4 Teacher A4 - Yifan

Basic biographical information
Age: 60s
Gender: Female
Education: Bachelor of Primary Education (Normal College)
Current position: Maths teacher
Years of teaching: 40 years

Yifan is a returning math teacher from her retirement. She was 60, and had been teaching math for 42 years. During the era of the Cultural Revolution, Yifan was selected for the local teacher-training college through the recommendation system. She used to be a private teacher and became a state teacher in 1978. Being a private teacher, Yifan found herself moving between different school. Nevertheless, Yifan claimed that she felt supported in terms of class preparation and methods in classroom teaching by accepting mentoring from another teacher in a rural school. Yifan still perceived her job more favourably as a satisfactory vocation. For a few times in the interview, Yifan addressed that teaching was a fit job for females for respectable social status and satisfactory work experiences. Yifan gave a rather linear description of her journey to becoming a state teacher through the recommendation system and claimed that she never wanted to change her job. After becoming a state teacher, Yifan finally settled in the Willow School in 1988. In 2011, Yifan retired from the Willow School. She then accepted the offer to return to teach.

- Teaching in accordance to students' aptitudes

Yifan enjoyed learning maths since she was young. When she became a teacher, she was able to build rapport with students in class and through one-to-one tuition after classes. Having taught for 40 years, Yifan told me that she had maintained a good relationship with her students. Yifan's narrative is also supported by her description of her work tasks. Since she is already very familiar with the curriculum, her focus in preparing her class became understanding students' characteristics and motivating them to engage in learning. She said she follows the idea of "*Yin Cai Shi Jiao*"[25] (teaching students in accordance with their aptitude) to connect the curriculum and students' characteristics. She also enjoyed the process of helping her students solve mathematical problems:

> I feel truly happy when I see my guidance had helped the students solve the problem.

[25] 因材施教

Yifan believes that the most efficient approach in teaching maths is through practice. She saw the limited explanation of mathematical knowledge in the textbooks were in significant contrast with the broad applicability and variety of questions in exams and real life. For Yifan, this is the distinguishing feature of mathematical knowledge. Students' flexibility in applying the abstract mathematical knowledge became the key to succeed in learning maths.

In her narrative, Yifan argued for the teacher's role as to activate the students. "The current trend", as she described it, "is to allow more discussions and responses from students. The teacher does not lecture unless students have problems or learning barriers." Yifan then quoted the "70% management and 30% teaching" division to address the importance of class management as the characteristics of her job in Willow School. She summarised that teachers must talk less in order to let students discuss and respond to questions. Although she often needs to ask help from younger teachers in applying technologies in her teaching, Yifan felt pleased about the new school facilities and classroom technologies in the Willow School, which was in huge contrast with how she learned in her school. As she described: "The pedagogy has changed. We didn't have good facilities and new technologies. We relied only on chalk and blackboards."

- Professional learning and work ethics

As an experienced teacher, Yifan takes the responsivities in helping young teachers. She is no longer required to attend the collective class preparation or give public lectures. When she turned 50, she has stopped demonstrating her class. According to her, young teachers are more adaptive to new pedagogical approaches and use of technology in teaching. By the new pedagogical approach, Yiwen meant the collaborative group learning through which students can engage with teaching others to solve mathematical problems. This method is considered particularly useful for schools with large class sizes like the Willow School. "Otherwise, only a small number of students could present their ideas," commented Yifan. The change, according to Yifan, is to put students' learning at the centre of classroom; therefore, teachers needs to change their role from lecturer to adviser. She further supported her point by quoting someone else: "It is said that one learns the least effectively by simply listening, and most effectively by experiencing it." If students can understand maths by actually counting the sticks themselves, they can learn better. For young teachers, Yifan thought it is important to encourage the teacher to inspire students. "You cannot spoon feed the students with knowledge," she said. Yifan believed that the curriculum reform aims to transform the teacher-centred pedagogy to one that focuses on student learning.

Yifan said that she does not have a "grand theory" on what "professional development" or being a "profession" mean. "This is what I've chose to do, what I like doing and what I want

to do well," she answered. Having good relations with parents and children, Yifan said she is satisfied with her work. Since she became a teacher, Yifan said she requires herself to behave like a teacher in her daily life. "A teacher must serve as the role model," Yifan quoted an ancient Chinese proverb and she explains that she is "restricted" by the moral standards of being a teacher. "These also have effects on the way I deal with my family members and neighbours", she said to further support her narrative. "I know I cannot do anything unethical or give other a negative image." In this sense, keeping positive professional image as a teacher seems to have very crucial impact upon her personal life, especially when it comes to the moral aspect of being a teacher.

Although she recognises the importance of teacher training to support teachers' development and named a few people that have influenced her teaching, Yifan seems to have less interest in attending teacher-training sessions. She said it is because she is old; she tends to see such activities as helping only young teachers. She said: "For old teachers like us, making a change is rather a slow process." What is interesting is that this does not mean Yifan lacks self-esteem as a teacher. As she explained later in the interview, she is a person who maintains an earnest attitude to her work: "I treat each aspect of my work seriously."

- Job satisfaction and interpersonal relationships

The positive teacher- student relationship seemed to be a significant part of Yifan's job satisfaction. She was particularly happy about keeping regular interactions and meetings with her previous students. Being called "teacher" by the graduates made her develop a sense of warmth. When I asked if there are particular events she perceives as very influential to her professional lives, she talked about a student who won a national mathematical competition. "That made me feel very proud," said Yiwen. She further explained that a successful teacher is one that is loved her students and their parents; in this sense, Yifan told me she is a successful teacher. The socio-emotional component seems to be key to her identity here. To add to the credibility of her narrative, Yifan told me at the end of the interview that she has been very honest with me, although as a maths teacher, she is a not as good as a Chinese teacher at presenting herself.

Meanwhile, coping with disruptive students were also challenging for Yifan. In addition, new generation of parents are very demanding and tend to spoil their children. Choosing appropriate language in communicating with parents became particularly alarming for her. Yifan said she had never had such conflicts with parents. Being compassionate with other teachers, Yifan said teachers are often very vulnerable when it comes to the conflictual encounters between school and parents. She further supported her claim that increasing instances of parent–school conflicts have made school management and teachers' work more complex and challenging than ever before.

As a retired teacher, Yifan is the most experienced teacher among the four participants in the Willow School. She was motivated in her teaching, and able to learn from the current reform to inform maths teaching in classrooms. Yifan's professional identity is characterised particularly by her retirement, through which she tends to humble herself in her adaptation to technology and new pedagogical methods. Teaching, as "just a job", seemed to create more space for her to construct identities characterised by a strong work ethic.

5.4 Introducing Aspen

The Aspen is a primary school under direct county government control (a "shizhi" school), which means the school is subordinated directly to the Education Bureau. Established in 1933, Aspen has been a demonstration school ("*shifan*" school). This school is located in the centre of the old county and is very close to the tourism area. During the pick-up hours, the road to the school would become extremely congested. Due to the fact that it is located in the very centre of the tourist town, the school was surrounded by small shops and shopping malls. It was very difficult to find any free parking and waiting space nearby. According to the *Area Divided Enrolment and Exemption Admission*, Aspen also covered the largest school district areas population in the county and is the biggest primary school student population (about 4,000 in total). It had more than 60 classes and has also been evaluated as one of the high achieving schools in Nanqi.

The red Chinese-style school gate was about 15 meters wide with the school guard office by the side. Walking into the school, visitors could see a quiet courtyard area on the left-hand side. I was told that the courtyard was built for staff meetings and offices for top and middle-level managers in the school. Bamboos were planted in the yard. I thought anyone who walked into this area would feel relaxed seeing the sunshine dropped on the green leaves and hearing children's voices from afar. In the centre of the school was a large open area surrounded by the three teaching buildings. Teachers offices were located among these different buildings. Children and teachers walked through this open area for different classes or meetings. During the 20 minutes break time in the morning, this area would be used for the national broadcast gymnastics.

Space inside of the teaching buildings were small, especially when each of these classrooms were filled with up to 80 students. Students have their own desks that was facing the stage. The classrooms were equipped with a computer, a projector, a black board and an air conditioner. Teachers were encouraged to use ICT to facilitate students' learning. In the office, teachers' desks were laid in pairs. The school arranged same subject teachers to share the office. While doing my interview, I heard teachers discussing about their classroom experiences and problems with students' learning.

Table 12 Characteristics of the Aspen School

Location	Busy commercial and tourist area in the city centre
Neighbourhood	Refurbishing commercial area
School finance	Determined by local government
School staffing	Determined by local government Shortage of teachers
School facilities and equipment	Good facility but short of classrooms and school spaces
Number of students	About 4,000 students
Number of teachers	About 200 state teachers
School–parent relationship	Barriers and conflicts
Role of national curriculum	Remains dominant, but supplemented by extracurricular activities and the Chinese classics reading
Staff support/ supervision	Strong and high intensity in training for teaching skills, with a focus on young teachers
Focus of class reform	Promoting group learning, and encouraging students' engagements and focus on the learning outcome
Teacher job progression	Stability but a lack of progression
Leadership	Administrative leadership style

5.5The teacher cases

5.5.1 Teacher B1- Qizhen

Basic biographical information
Age: 40s
Gender: Female
Education: College Diploma
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 20 years

Qizhen grew up in a small village with her family. Her father was a rural teacher and had taught in the village school for over 40 years. When I asked what made her become a teacher, Qizhen recalled a scene in her childhood when her father she saw her father working in his office to work until midnight. Qizhen told me that her father's diligence had given her a profound impression. At that moment, the young girl was aspired to become a teacher herself. In China's previous planned economy when all major entities in China were under the government's ownership and management, college graduates were assigned a job through the job-placement system that was called the "Unified Labour Allocation"[26]. After graduating from the normal college, Qizhen was allocated to teach in a rural school in the east of Nanqi and stayed in the same school until 2004. She then transferred to Aspen school by passing the government-led teacher recruitment examination. Since then, Qizhen has been working in Willow for 12 years as a Chinese teacher. She also took the role of director of teaching and research in Chinese.

- ***Transforming language education in classroom***

Through her narrative, Qizhen elaborated her experiences and struggles in understanding the nature of Chinese language education in a primary school context. In the beginning of the curriculum reform, Qizhen had made consistent effort to diversify her classroom teaching methods. However, she found the class has lost discipline. "Students became very noisy", she described. After spending some time for reflection and adjustments, Qizhen came to the conclusion that her job should simply be language training. "There should not have been so many classroom activities. [...] students simply need to learn to apply language in their daily lives". Recognising its impact on students' learning, she said that her students moved from theory-led learning to practice- focused learning. In her own words, the student's learning becomes the "learning of theories of language" to the "learning the applications of language". In this process, Qizhen attempted to integrate students' learning and classroom teaching. By framing the teaching as "training," Qizhen redefined her job as to support the development of students' capacities in using language in their daily lives. What is interesting here is that Qizhen replaced the subject "I" with the

[26] 包分配

subject "we" in her narrative. This might indicate that Qizhen had developed a strong sense of membership in this process of learning how to teach. The change was made as "collective work" rather than "individual work." She categorised her work into three major stages (table 13) according to the focus that has guided her teaching approach, the problem in her approach and the change she made to improve the situation.

Table 13 Summary of stages of professional learning based on Qizhen's interview

Stage	**1. Diversification**	**2. New pedagogical ideas**	**3. Simplification**
Focus	The content and critical analysis of the texts.	Use of group collaboration in classes.	Flexibility with methods for training students' language application skills.
Reflections	Teaching dominated; Little opportunity for students' practice and active learning.	Methods dominated; Students' language learning and skills was not supported.	Teaching as language training.

- *"Close to teacher's divine and trust her principle"*

Qizhen believes that teachers' capacity to build rapport with students composes a critical aspect of her professionalism. At the age of 40, Qizhen told me she remains very active on the teaching stage. She performed and sang to her students and talked to students with vivid expressions. In this way, Qizhen believes that her teaching could leave a long-term influence on her students. She seems to take the role as a performer and considered on-stage skills were necessary for an effective teacher: "Teachers need to be strong in the stage, we must be able to drive the classroom teaching, know and apply many teaching methods, and help students improve their capacities." For Qizhen, it is important for teachers to build authority in the classroom teaching and daily work and that teachers' integrity is the foundation. As she described: "If you became too friendly, your feedback wouldn't hold power", thus her relationship with students is a kind that combines "kindness and seriousness." Qizhen pointed out the problems of "unreasonable parents" and reflected upon the broader structural limitations of policies based on her observations in Aspen:

> What shall we do to cope with them [unreasonable parents and students]? I think there is no such authority or reliable information or regulations in this respect. Whether the state needs to set up the law or regulation on the extent to which the class master manages the class, this, for the teachers, is a difficult issue.

During the break in the interview, Qizhen discussed with her colleague about a particular lesson based a story of a young boy, Wang Erxiao, who sacrificed his life to save other villagers during the Japanese invasion of China. Students' emotional reactions to the story were the focus of the discussion. Some students cried, and others laughed at Wang, which made the young teacher feel frustrated and angry. Qizhen, as the experienced teacher, pointed out the young teacher the main issue directly, she said: "You shouldn't have done that. The students didn't understand the context. They [some students] laughed because you didn't give enough scaffolding." After the discussion, she turned to me and said that learning Chinese is an emotional experience. She suggests that using technological tools was very helpful to enrich students' learning experiences and understanding of the story. Her reflection has added to this point as well. According to Qizhen, teachers need to not only embrace technology, but also know how to use them in the right order to realise their teaching goals. Meanwhile, Qizhen seemed to argue that teachers' acceptance and compassion to students and their individual differences and backgrounds are crucial to maintain teachers' integrity:

> Teachers need to build their authority from the integrity of their character. I think the integrity comes from the sense of fairness and justice in front of all the students. [...] Of course, everyone has various desires and emotions; a teacher might dislike one kid due to his or her appearance. But you must conquer this and treat each student fairly.

She further claimed that the efforts to become a compassionate teacher has brought her a strong sense of achievements and satisfaction through connecting with her students and changing the students' lives. She supported her claim by sharing a story of her student, who had won the title of "best class cadre" after receiving her praise and encouragement for his diligence and support to other classmates. Qizhen addressed that she never gives up on her students, which helped her to win students' trust and respect for many years. Qizhen believed her strong bond with students proves her integrity and won her the respect. Qizhen had also successfully organised the *Ancient Poet Recital Contest* and the graduation party for her students. She addressed that the after-classes activities could create time for teachers to build connections with students, so to make students engaged and willing to follow the teacher's guidance. As she quoted: "close to teacher's divine and trust her principle"[27].

- ***Teaching as work***

As an experienced teacher, Qizhen also serves as the director of educational research in school B. For her, supporting other teachers, especially young teachers, helped her develop close relationships with other teachers, which seemed to give her a positive sense of herself

[27] 亲其师，信其道。

as an "earnest and warm-hearted" teacher. Qizhen was motivated in her teaching, and able to adopt her teaching to current reform to inform her teaching. The character of "diligence" and moral principle of "integrity," through which she tends to consider teaching as a vocation of hard work as well as a process of building rapport and personal connections, rather than a self-advancing career, represent Qizhen's professional identity. During the interview, Qizhen questioned the word "career" and commented that the word "career" seems to indicate the desire for grand achievements that require someone to become "workaholic." For her, the term "work" is about her attitude. As she claimed:

> I think a teacher needs to spend most of her working time in classroom teaching, on communication with students. I think it's better to be less bothered by other things. This is how I feel. That means being a person of integrity, a good teacher, and helping students make progress and not letting me down.

Table 14 demonstrates internal the dialogical self in negotiating the discourse of "teaching as a career." The strategy of ***distancing*** is used here to describe the strategy to create the difference between one's own position and others' approach in perceptions and expectations (or discourse), without direct rejection or strong emotional tensions involved. By firstly commenting on others' positions, Qizhen came to focus on her roles and responsibilities as an educator. The strategy of identity distancing here might help her avoid conformity to others' attitudes and make her capable of solving specific problems at work. However, the amounts of administrative and supportive work she involved still seemed to be overloading and distracting. Qizhen sometimes considered the workload as almost unbearable and it makes her feel exhausted. "I don't have any personal time," said Qizhen.

Table 14 Dialogical process of Qizhen's distancing strategies in narrative

Teaching as a career		Teaching as work
They (as ***career pursuer***) must… - "put heart and soul into teaching"; - "be famous and successful"; - "be the Star Teachers and have their own teaching theory"; - "have very strong will and be very knowledgeable and form one's own thinking and be able to lead other teachers". **Discourse of efforts, fames, titles, expertise and leadership.**	"Sounds workaholic" (to "me") → "I need to be better" (to be like "them") ←	**I** think **I** (as ***educator***) … - "will keep doing it as I used to and to keep my diligence"; - "should focus on classroom teaching, on communication with students"; - "be a person of integrity and being a good teacher, helping students make progress and not letting one down". **Discourse of personal pace, interactions and relationships, ethics and supports.**

5.5.2 Teacher B2 - Xinxin

Basic biographical information
Age: 30s
Gender: Female
Education: Bachelor of primary education
Current position: Maths teacher
Years of teaching: 10 years

Xinxin loved arts when in schools and always wanted to become an art student. To secure a good job after graduation, Xinxin followed her parents' advice to attend a teacher college and majored in primary education. In the teacher college, Xinxin did not have much opportunities to teach. Rather, the courses were heavily based on learning of information and theories. After graduating from the teacher training college in 2006, Xinxin decided to prepare for the local teacher recruitment examination. At the same time, she worked as a contract teacher in the kindergarten attached to Aspen school. Four years later, Xinxin successfully passed the exam and became a state teacher in Aspen school.

- ***Tensions***

Xinxin was arranged to teach a general subject called *Morality and Society*. Six months before Xinxin's maternity leave, the school asked if she could substitute a maths teacher. Without enough time and training, Xinxin was unprepared to take the responsibilities. As she recalled, it was a relief when she left that position for her maternity leave six months' later. After she was back to the school, Xinxin started to teach maths to two grade-four classes. Each class has about 70 students. She told me she was still stressed because of disagreements with others, the crowded classes, and the constant pressure to improve students' exam outcomes.

> I want to help, but in the circumstance of such a large class, it is challenging to take care, everyone. Now, I can take care of two of the third of the students, and the left is probably marginalized or be sandwiched. I probably pay less attention to those who are just ordinary, and I won't pay any attention to those who are doing well. The poor students, even if you try to help, your efforts would probably be in vain.

The contract between her expectations for students and the real working conditions seemed to leave Xinxin with contradictory goals and conflictual feelings in teaching. On the one hand, Xinxin had to distinguish her students according to their academic performances; on the other hand, she felt shameful to consider herself failed to lead an inclusive class. The new 80s parents, according to Xinxin, is more critical with teachers, often question the teachers' qualifications and tend to hold higher power over teachers. As a novice teacher, Xinxin often finds herself unable to claim her authority. The personal

relationships as “friends” with parents seemed to pose threats to Xinxin as a teacher, as she thinks her professional status could be easily questioned and judged. Meanwhile, Xinxin seemed to struggle with understanding and handling of others’ opinions and feedback, even though Xinxin was well aware of her tendency to deny her real motives, ambitions, and achievements. To make her point, Xinxin quoted another teacher’s complement, which failed to turn her focus away from the reinforcement of others’ criticism:

> I don't know (how others think of me). One day, a teacher said I am very clever and that I am a fast learner. I cannot agree with her. Some teachers might think I’m flexible. Maybe I am more sensitive to others’ comments, and that makes me appear to be flexible. But I have low self-identity, because I know I’m not that good. It might be harmful as well. I have not heard about those (she laughed), there must be some, some negative evaluations.

In this context, Xinxin’s reflection did not seem to help her to become autonomous teacher. Noticing her right to become rebelling, she felt stronger inner conflict as she also wanted identification with others in the school.

> Recently it would be that I don’t follow other’s advice and insist on my thinking. I might be a bit stubborn. Maybe I’m sensitive, so I know that from other’s facial expressions (She laughed). Especially in a class, they will tell me this is good, but I would think I’m ok this way. I don’t’ follow them. I feel sorry though. They give me advice, but I don’t accept it. Here I think I still identify stronger with others. It’s conflictual.

This tendency is not only limited to her classroom teaching but various aspects of her professional lives in the school. In her own words, she lived “under other’s evaluations” and unable to develop her critical thinking skills. According to Xinxin, this might be a result of her cultural background and grown-up experiences in a collectivist environment. In the process of negotiating her growing professional autonomy and group identifications in her daily practices, Xinxin needed to make sense of her fear to confront others’ criticism and to reconsider her tendency in maintaining an ideal professional image.

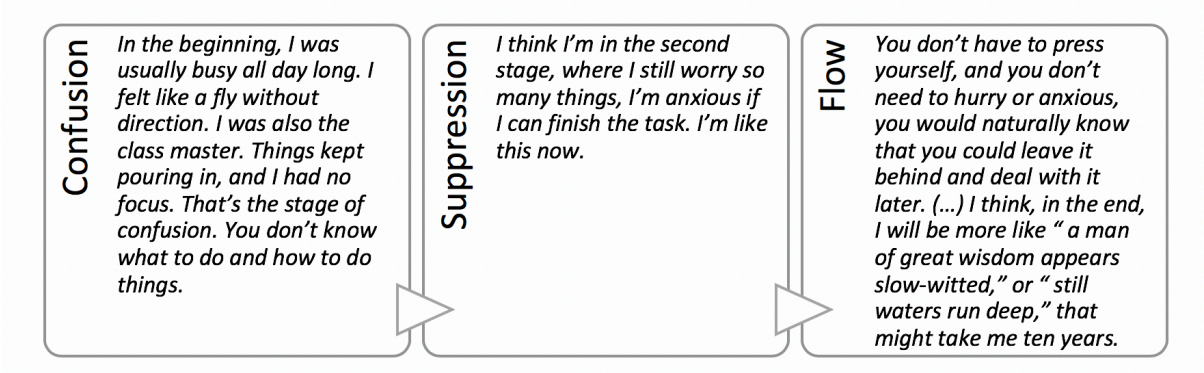
Although Xinxin said she feel happy about the rapport between her and her students, the tension she experiences is so overwhelming that while talking and she burned into tears. I was first shocked by her reactions and did not know what to do in such a situation. I handed a paper handkerchief when Xinxin shed tears and stopped the tape recorder for a short while. Thinking of myself as a friend, I was just quiet and getting prepared to be emotionally available to her. I kept silent and later on asked if she would like to terminate the interview. She said that she was okay to carry on the interview. I then moved on to fewer sensitive issues and asked her how she would describe the different stages of her teaching experiences. Later on, Xinxin told me later that it was a relief for her to tell the

stories and share with me these feeling. In this sense, I could perhaps claim that the context of a research interview also created a meaningful interaction through which Xinxin was able to express and make sense of how they feel and who they are, even though the sense of shock and empathy remain when I reviewed the transcript and the field note.

- ***Growth and development***

Xinxin's professional identity construction is crucially influenced by the way she understands and pursues her personal and professional development, as she tended to continually reflect upon her practices and developed the narrative of personal growth. Balancing a wide range of demands in teaching seemed to be the focus of the process of personal growth. According to Xinxin, these demands included higher self-esteem, professional skills in instrumental designing, supporting family education, reading books and taking care of her own wellbeing as a teacher. Xinxin also utilised her reflections as well as retelling stories to define primary school teachers' professional competency as to focus on pedagogical knowledge and instrumental skill to support young learners. After a few years of self-reflection, Xinxin said that she considered herself unfavourable of complex bureaucracies and language uses at workplace. She appreciated of the "simple" work of state teachers through which she can learn and focus on her classroom teaching. A developmental perception of CPD seemed to help Xinxin frame her experiences and expectations. Figure 14 summarised Xinxin's descriptions of the different stages.

Figure 14 Xinxin's description of the different development stages



As she could deepen her understanding of teaching and school lives, Xinxin could easily understand situations and gradually make decisions upon her reactions and responses and become more strategic in solving specific problems. She identifies a stage of suppression of innate attempts to take actions and only focus on the essential steps to take in the process of problem-solving. However, Xinxin still needed to bear the anxiety and worry, especially when she feels the challenge exceeds her skills. Unsolved problems, the over critical self-assessment, negative feedback and the sense of inferiority could cause her great distress and uneasiness. Xinxin hoped to move toward what she framed as the "stage of flow".

According to her, the professional skills to master instructional design[28] serves as the vital bridge between the two stages. Xinxin's description of the stage seems very general, and she stressed the idea of capacity to know what and how to do with "all kinds of things," by which she might indicate the necessity for her to extend her focus from classroom teaching to more general affairs. She used the proverb "still waters run deep" to describe the image of a teacher who is in a calm manner that conceals a wise and passionate nature.

Xinxin considers her participation in the school *Quality Teacher Competition* as the critical event in her professional life. She described the competition as more formal, so she needed to make more efforts. Xinxin also consider teacher competition as way to assess her progress. She set herself higher objectives to progress to province, national and international level stages. Narrating her experiences and sense of transformation seemed to bring out her hope in becoming high- achieving teacher and an "authentic person" through recognizing, challenging and improving herself in teaching and professional skills. Xinxin defined herself as a "lifelong learner" and considered teaching as a job in which she could develop her professional skills to achieve a sense of flowing in various situations. It is important to note here that professional skills and professional images still compose the crucial parts of TPI in Xinxin's case. Consistent practices, observations, deep understanding and active engagement to improve constitute the core elements that contribute to her sense of progress and achievement in teaching.

- ***Frustration with family education***

Although Xinxin tried to build rapport with her students and the parents to support students' learning, the situation was often more complex and devastating than she expects. Xinxin have given advice for parents through a range of school activities, such as parental meetings and public lectures on parenting, yet she doubts if her words or the activates could not make significant effect, given the limited time for each parent, the problems of parents' absence in their children's education as well as the limitations being put by their social backgrounds. She thought most of the meetings lack interactions. She said: "Only teachers talked, and the parents just listened." The lack of communication between parents and students could become a hurdle for students' character development. According to her, parents tend to be static concerning parenting styles that are either "too rough" or "too weak," others are reluctant to get involved in children's education.

> Of course, it is my honor to have the trust, but I also feel helpless. There are too many students. If everyone relies on me, whom shall I take care of first? Everyone? Of course, a teacher needs to be fair and to pay attention to every individual kid. But when I'm told these, I feel I have such a grand responsibility and burden.

[28] 教学设计

Her expectations the flexibility in parenting strategies became almost impracticable. Xinxin addressed the challenging issues in family education and hoped that the integration of the two could make a difference. Xinxin attempted to show her firm belief in the role of teachers' professional skills and willingness to acquire a professional qualification in the psychological consultant to enhance the teacher-parent partnership so to help students making more significant progress, as she claims:

> Suddenly I feel I want to be a consultant and give them some advice (she laughed). But I don't have much experience, nor do I have any qualifications. I think family education is not a simple problem. If this family education and school education can be integrated, then students can make more significant progress. Yes.

- ***Summary***

Xinxin also included four other aspects of her perceived professional lives as as a novice teacher: 1) her relationship and interactions with others; 2) her perceived progress in competency building that could also be recognized and awarded; 3) her willingness and endeavour to learn and engage with academic studies to address issues in students' learning and family education; and 4) the journeys teachers took in pursuit of moral quality, long-term impact on student and authenticity. Teachers' identity formation is an on-going, fluid process, while conflicts and dilemmas between teachers' personal and professional identities seemed to be a significant part of Xinxin's recent experiences. The sub-identity as a lifelong learner seemed to help balance the tension. As she argued, she needed to maintain a positive attitude toward others' critiques and accept one's imperfections, so to become a "living spring of knowledge" for students rather than "a cup of water." By employing the metaphor of transforming from "a cup of water" to the "living spring of knowledge" that can continuously provide creative insights and learning experiences for students, Xinxin seemed to indicate the necessity for her to keep learning as a teacher.

5.5.3 Teacher B3- Zhe

Basic biographical information
Age: 30s
Gender: Male
Education: Master on Chinese Literature
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 6 years

Zhe was born in the mid 1980s in Nanqi. He studied Chinese literature for his undergraduate and received a master's degree 8 years ago. Initially, Zhe wanted to become a civil servant due to family influences. Most of his family members worked in the government, who he believed had set up successful models for him. He told me he was also influenced by Confucian tradition that "He who excels in learning can be an official"[29]. After the graduation, Zhe signed up for the examination to become a college graduate village official[30]. While working as a college graduate village official, Zhe insisted to take the exam to become a provincial government official for many times but could not succeed. "I aimed too high. It was not realistic", his tone suddenly became lower. Zhe said he finally gave up taking the examinations and took the teacher examination in 2001 instead. Although teaching was not as the most ideal job, he thought being a teacher was stable, respected, fairly well-paid in less stressful work environment.

- ***Professional roles in different contexts***

Compared with his previous job, Zhe commented that teaching is more enjoyable. He mentioned a few times in his interview about teachers' role in the "inheritance of spiritual and ethical doctrines". In his understanding, teachers should take up the responsibilities to be the role models and spiritual mentor for students. "Knowledge should go after one's morality", he said. He quoted the phrase "instruct and influence students by one's words and deeds"[31] to describe the fundamental moral quality at work and gave further instructions.Zhe further described the teacher's quality is setting up role models as a part of teachers' love for children and career in education. "If you do not love children or education, you could never be a good teacher", he addressed. Zhe said that one way to know his long-lasting influences on students' lives and personal connections with students is by keeping contacts with graduates. "This is different from UK", he compared the perceived superficiality of social relationships in China with UK to address the different cultural contexts that influenced the value of teaching. He further elaborated that: "Friends leave when you are retired from your position[32]. But teacher will always be the teacher

[29] 学而优则仕
[30] 大学生村官
[31] 言传身教
[32] 人走茶凉

(regardless of the cultural contexts)". Being a teacher, in this sense, seemed to mean a lifelong title and sense of connection he possessed in relation with his students. To explain his point, Zhe recalled a scene when his student opened the window in a fast passing car and shouted: "Teacher!" to him. "He was so loud that the entire street could hear", said Zhe. That experience had made him feel respected, recognised and utterly touched. The phrase "Plum blossoms everywhere"[33] is widely quoted in China as a way to phrase a teacher's success in cultivating students and sending student to places all around the world, which according to Zhe, is something that gives him the strongest sense of satisfaction.

What puzzled Zhe the most is finding out the efficient way to improve students' academic performances. As a Chinese teacher, Zhe said he still faces barriers in analysing text composition and instructions to become an excellent teacher. "Good scores make everyone happy, but this is the difficult part", said Zhe. In the classroom, Zhe needs to cope with all kinds of questions that come from students and sometimes he feels incompetent to cope with. Zhe used the same metaphor of "living spring of knowledge" to describe the ideal scenario of being a successful teacher, that is the teacher need to be a generalist and lifelong learner, who is able to answer all the challenging questions in class, add on students' current understanding and keep learning to enrich one's thoughts.

> A successful teacher should have abundant of knowledge. Teachers are no longer limited to one bucket of water; we need to be a living lake or a river. We need to have broad knowledge, not only on one subject, but all kinds of subjects like science. Otherwise, it would be embarrassing if the teacher could not answer students' questions.
>
> We need more and it must be fluid and endless learning. We need to keep up with the times and the teaching need to be dynamic. We cannot rely on rigid classroom teaching.

When it comes to students' learning, Zhe believes that students' learning habit and learning attitudes, instead of the test scores should be the key to assess the success of primary education. He uses stratified teaching and encourages the high-achieving students to read more books instead of listening to his teaching.

> Teach in accordance of students' aptitude[34]. It would be a waste of time if I fill their learning with lots of instructions and stop students from reading broadly. 10 minutes' teaching is enough for the high-performers and we should not focus only on the scores.

[33] 桃李满天下
[34] 因材施教

- *Pressures and vulnerability*

Zhe seemed to face the dual pressure: heavy workload and lack of support. The higher parental expectations for students' performance in examinations on urban schools' teachers' work seemed to be particularly frustrating for him. According to Zhe, although Chinese parents desire high quality education for their children, the expectations for academic outcomes are less demanded among the well-educated parents, some of whom are cadres of party and government and institution staff. Zhe described this group of parents as of "highly sensitivity and expectation value" for education.

Zhe first described his work in the school as routinized and he faces the pressure in managing a wide range of tasks on teaching, administration and school-parents communication. He first described the feeling of "pressed for time" in doing professional work and collaboration due to the "trivial" works in coping with school inspections, school visiting and writing administrative reports. Carrying out the class preparation and making the test paper at home became a part of his working life in Aspen. He later pointed out that perhaps "teachers' heavy workload" is a common characteristic for all school teachers in China.

> I think this problem occurs in the entire field of education, not just in this school. To be honest, all teachers work very hard. It's not fair to criticize teachers for not making a great effort (to improve the educational outcomes). Our time in school is really pressed. Maybe the situation is better in the grassroots level (Ji Ceng). The overall situation is very similar. Teachers' working lives are very enriched, or somewhat "of high pressure" and tiresome.

Zhe was knowledgeable of the history of teacher policy and had demonstrated his understanding of the political changes that had influenced the social attitudes toward teachers in China. He first quoted the five-ethics from classic Chinese philosophy, namely the "heaven-earth-sovereign-parent-teacher" to address the overall positive views of teachers and their historical and sociocultural significance in social changes. He then briefly described the period of the Cultural Revolution when the "Gang of Four" called teachers and intellectuals the "Stinking Old Ninth"[35] and considered it as a mistaken understanding in a chaotic time. He noticed the positive change in China after Deng toke the national leadership that the government had released a series of Educational Laws to address teachers' rights and improve teachers' treatment. Misunderstandings of the teaching profession, he argued, still existed. Social media and unregulated news reports on the scandals of corporal punishment and bribe among teachers could project negative

[35] 臭老九

social images of the teaching profession. Here, he considered teachers as a "vulnerable group" for those teachers' voices are not heard:

> Many of my colleagues and friends consider teachers and the vulnerable group because no one can speak for us. Reasonable suggestions (on teacher policy) are not taken. For example, one of the NPC (National People's Congress) members suggested increasing teachers' seniority allowances. But the allowance was too low. [...] Such minor increases mean almost nothing to our living now.

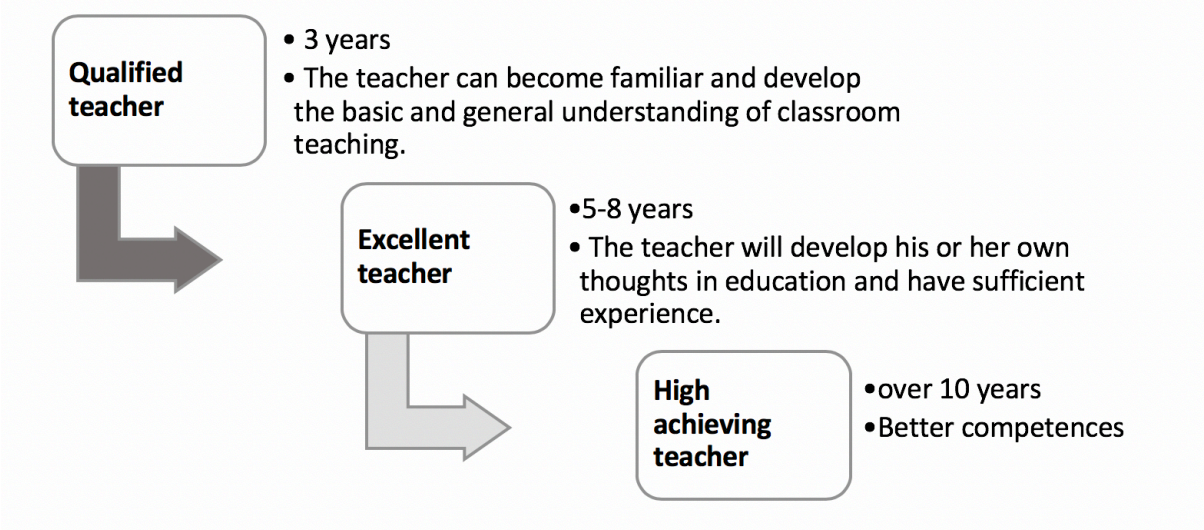
In addition to economic challenges, Zhe thinks that the lack of reasonable parental expectations and strong support for school education poses another threat to the integrity of teaching profession. He described the culture of low expectations by the "lost sense of lofty" in education that parents no longer pin their hopes on their children's education but other approaches to pleasures in life in an increasingly cosmopolitan society. "I can't imagine the quality of a person if he/she does not have a good family education" said Zhe. He further argued that even though parents was paying more on private tutoring, such investment was merely parents flocking to educational capitals in a competitive and performance-oriented environment on the cost of children's time and real interests. "Children's interests should be the starting point, not the other way around".

- ***Engaging in professional learning***

Zhe is engaged with a verity of professional development activities, including class observations, demonstration classes, teaching competitions, public lectures and other professional skill trainings. Zhe believed that he needed to be active and to embrace different learning opportunities to become an effective teacher. In addition, practicing their instructional skills in classrooms seemed to help him as well.

Zhe's engagements with other teachers add to his positive attitude toward his learning. He said because the school is key school, they have many experienced teachers who had achieved certain professional rewards, honours and certificates and that everyone is motivated at work. Zhe also tended to link his gender identity with professional goal to be more tolerant and inclusive. He is particularly close to teachers who shares the same office and belongs to the same subject group. In Aspen, the directors of teaching need to take the responsibility of mentoring young teachers. Zhe believes feedbacks and advice from the director as crucial for his progress in classroom teaching. In addition, Zhe consider the school leaders' feedbacks on his report writing as beneficial to him to improve his literacy level and writing skills. Zhe used the school-based teacher developmental stages to position himself at work. According to him, the school advocated a four-stage strategy for teachers' professional development, which could be summarized in the following figure:

Figure 15 Summary of Zhe's description of stages of professional development



Teachers' professional development is highly related with the national teacher appraisal system in Aspen. Zhe said he consider the backbone teachers and excellent as his role models. He is willing to be inspired and learn from their strong work ethics and professional achievements. "Their past is my future. My learning will require that process (of following other's examples)", Zhe said.

- *Summary*

In summary, Zhe is committed to become an effective teacher and places classroom teaching in the centre of his work. By observing others' classes, learning from others and practicing in teaching, he learned and gets to know more about teaching. Zhe summarized three key qualities of a good teacher: (1) A moral model; (2) a lifelong learner and (3) a passionate and diligent personality. Transferring from notice teacher towards the goal of backbone teacher, Zhe thinks of himself as simply a qualified teacher who could manage and complete the given daily tasks, reflect upon his experiences, and love his students. Although Zhe thinks the teaching profession as a "vulnerable group" due to the lack of teachers' voices and policy changes, the low payment and discouraging parents, he enjoys his job for his positive feeling of spending time with children. He is most surprised by those "bad kids", particularly when one of his students come to tell him how much efforts he is trying to make to catch up in studying. "I didn't give up that student. It doesn't matter how much he has learned; everything was worthwhile when I saw him making progresses".

5.5.4 Teacher B4 – Jianguo

Basic biographical information
Age: late 20s
Gender: Male
Education: Bachelor in Math education
Current position: teacher
Years of teaching: 6 years

Jianguo was in his late 20s. He became a teacher after he graduated from college and had been working in Aspen for 5 years. Jianguo grew up in a rural village, he said he did not receive a very good school education. He chose to become a state teacher for the job stability. By teaching, he said he could also contribute the development of education in China.

- **Being "ordinary"**

Jianguo described his life as "ordinary" as he felt he just need to follow whatever was told to him. He thought his teaching lacked the elements of children-friendly languages, which he believed is more easily practiced by female than male teachers. He had made efforts to learn from other teachers. At the early stage, Zhe could only observe others' classroom teaching without knowing how to best observe, understand and evaluate other's teaching. Gradually, he started to move his focus on the curriculum and the textbook. He explained that he started to learn how the textbook was structured and what were the editors' actual intentions. According to him, the major difference he noticed through teaching was to move from the "how to teach" to the "how to make students learn". He summarised that it was a process of exploration through this day-to-day class observation, class preparation and classroom practice. Jianguo refused to recall specific experiences he had in this "exploring journey". He simply replied: "I can't remember. I've been too busy for the past four years, so I don't have any specific examples."

- **Passivity**

Haoting was very brief in answering my interview questions in the following 20 minutes. I have developed a sense that he did not want to engage in these questions. Regardless, he still tried to maintain a positive image of himself through the talk. A few key things he mentioned included the importance of his relationship with the students; importance of school leadership in teacher management, and heavy workload and limited time as the major difficulty he faced as a teacher.

Summary

Despite differences in their backgrounds, family influences and professional experiences, and in roles and positions in the school, the four teachers shared commonalities in all three components of teachers' professional identity constructions. Regarding teachers' self-perceptions as professional teachers, all sample teachers addressed their commitment to students' holistic development as the core of their professional identities as teachers. To achieve their professional goals, the flexibility to adapt to students' needs seemed to be the core for all the sample teachers. At the same time, all teachers had to carry out their dual roles to maintain classroom discipline and keep students engaged with their teaching and classroom activities. With regard to teachers' professional development, all four teachers reflected upon challenges they face and changes they want to make to improve students' learning experiences in their classroom. They also addressed the significance of community- and school-based learning in their learning experiences at work. Seven teachers reflected upon the problematic image of teaching as a profession in media reports; teachers' decreasing social status and authorities seemed to be particularly stressful for all the sample SSTs.

Next chapter uses the cross-case analysis to facilitate the comparison of commonalities and differences in terms of different tensions that teachers experience in the Willow school and Aspen school. The purpose of this analysis is to synthesise evidence from multiple teacher cases within the state school setting. I will use metrics and tables to facilitate the comparison and explore patterns and themes that cut across different teacher cases. This process also helps to demonstrates the transparency in synthesising the findings.

Chapter 6: Comparing state school TPIs

In this section, I will compare and contrast themes emerging from the SSTs' narratives. Before that, I will first review and compare the school contexts for the construction of TPIs. Willow and Aspen schools were the state schools in the sample that were similar to many state primary schools in Shandong province in terms of class size, implementation of the national curriculum and school administration. Table 15 summarises the key characteristics of the two state primary schools in this research study. The school leaders and teachers of both schools thought that many of the problems the schools face stemmed from the shortage of teachers and space, as well as parents' high expectations for their children's educational outcomes and often negative attitudes toward teachers. At neither school did the school leaders think that parents were sufficiently actively involved in children's school and family lives. For instance, the parents would visit the schools about problems, rather than to provide help and support students' learning activities. Willow's school leader described this as "the crisis in school–parents' relationship", while Aspen's said that parents were often too emotional and unreasonable when it came to conflicts among students. In both of the schools, the school leaders and teachers emphasised the importance of effective teaching in supporting students' academic progress and stressed students' social and moral development as an essential part of their learning.

However, in other aspects, the administrative nature and hence school strategies deployed were somewhat different. One of the main differences between these two state primary schools was their relationship with the local government. Willow was a suburban school financially and administratively managed by a rural secondary school. Aspen, in contrast, was directly regulated by the local government. According to the school choice policy, Willow and Aspen were assigned different geographical areas from which to recruit groups of students, leaving Willow (in the suburban area) with challenges to face when there a significant increase in the number of rural migrants from the rural to the urban area against the background of urbanisation. At Willow, one of the strategies the school leaders had taken was to extend the buildings and organise extracurricular activities (i.e. Diabolo and an experiment with cucurbit flute), which in turn helped the school attract interest from the local government and broader communities.

Table 15 Key characteristics of the two state primary schools in this research study

	Willow School	*Aspen School*
Location	Busy residential area in suburban area	Old town centre
Neighbourhood	Expanding real estate and increasing residents from rural areas	Very close to the historical scenic spots[36], and located inside the rebuilt ancient city wall
School finance	Determined by school of higher administrative level and supplemented by profits from the kindergarten	Determined by the local government and supplemented by profits from the kindergarten
School staffing	*Bianzhi* determined by local government Shortage of teachers	*Bianzhi* determined by local government Shortage of teachers
School facility and equipment	Good facilities but short of classrooms and school space	Good facilities but short of classrooms and school space
Number of students	2,400 students (primary school); about 80 students per class	4,000 students (primary school); about 80 students per class
Number of teachers	About 100 state teachers	About 300 teachers
School–parent relationships	Barriers and conflicts	Barriers and conflicts
Choose of curriculum	Mainly the state curriculum, supplemented by one or two school-based extracurricular activities	Mainly the state curriculum, supplemented by one or two school-based extracurricular activities
School culture	Promoting group learning and encouraging students' physical and moral development	Promoting group learning and encouraging students' physical and moral development
Teacher job progression	Job stability; lack of career progression and mobility	Job stability; lack of career progression and mobility
Leadership	Instrumental and administrative leadership style	Instrumental and administrative leadership style

[36] The names are not disclosed for the purpose of protecting the school confidentiality.

Regarding participants' perceptions of themselves as professional teachers, all sample teachers addressed their commitment to students' academic and character development as the focuses of teachers' work. To achieve their professional goals, teachers felt that they needed to be flexible to adapt to students' needs. At the same time, carrying out their dual responsibilities to maintain classroom discipline and keep students engaged in classroom activities was very challenging. Concerning teachers' professional development, all the eight teachers reflected upon changes they want to make to improve students' learning experiences in their classroom. They also addressed the significance of community and school-based learning in their learning experiences at work. All these teachers commented on the negative social image of teachers in the media reports and the disruptive attitudes of parents for their children's education. Even though all these teachers have the status of state employees, they considered their job to have a low social status and often feel vulnerable and stressed because of the need to meet the social expectations for children's schooling in China. The comparative analysis of teachers' narratives also showed the differences in teachers' strategies in responding to tensions they experienced at work. The eight SSTs engaged with three kinds of narrative in negotiating their identity tensions: 1) a narrative of a lack of career choice; 2) the need to address challenges in students' learning; and 3) the need to maintain their professional authority. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

6.1 Narrative of a lack of career choice

Although all teachers considered they became SSTs for extrinsic reasons, such as family expectations, gender stereotypes and other circumstances over which they had little control, the data analysis revealed that teachers expressed a sense of conflict regarding their career choice. This sense of conflict in career choices is particularly intense for young teachers (Xiwen, Ruolan, Haoting, Xinxin), those in their 20s and 30s. This group of teachers also seemed to have lower-level job satisfaction due to their crowded work environment, heavy workload and lack of social and community support in the early stages of their teaching. The list below demonstrates the range of different challenges and barriers that these state teachers had faced during the interviews.

Extrinsic reasons: lack of options; family influences; teacher recruitment policies; gender stereotypes.

Unsatisfactory treatment: low pay; low social status.

Heavy workload: overwork in terms of correcting homework; large class size; administrative responsibilities; coping with class and school inspections.

Although all the participant teachers thought they faced these challenges, the comparative analysis also suggested that teachers considered job stability as the benefits of teaching in state schools; meanwhile, they could engage with the conflicts in career choice differently. More active teachers tried to tackle the tension by engaging with others, fixing relationships and changing their attitudes. They tended to believe in their capacity to improve the situation. Other teachers had the intention to withdraw from the conflictual situations.

The case of Willow school

In the Willow school, most of the teachers thought that becoming a state teacher meant they could gain a sense of job stability and higher social status with the *bianzhi* status. Meanwhile, the teacher recruitment structures seem to have exerted a significant influence on teachers' employability and hence the way these young teachers perceive themselves in this research context. According to Xiwen, she had difficulties adapting to her role and building her confidence as a primary school teacher at the beginning of her career. Xiwen said she could not accept herself becoming a primary school teacher. Her self-esteem and confidence were low as she felt inferior among her college classmates regarding job and social status. Haoting is a maths teacher in Willow. He obtained the higher level of teacher qualification to teach in junior high schools when he graduated, but none of the junior high schools was recruiting new teachers in that year. Becoming a primary school teacher was "horrible" for him in the beginning, which Haoting mainly attributed to the training he received in the teacher college. This finding has alarmed educational researchers in that these young teachers did not seem to have the choices and decisions that teachers in contemporary Western culture must make in choosing their jobs. In such cases, younger teachers might need to take a different approach to develop a strong sense of their professional identities as teachers.

A wide range of factors exerted influences on the way teachers negotiate these conflicts in making sense of their career choices. These teachers took two different major approaches to address the challenges they faced: the involved approach and the uninvolved approach. That is teachers who tended to take the involved approach were able to adopt multiple internal strategies in addressing the tension and challenges they faced at the beginning of a career that did not meet their initial expectations. For example, both Xiwen and Ruolan noticed the lack of understanding, mutual support and trust among stakeholders in Willow school. They both found parents were demanding and unreasonable. The negative experiences significantly threatened Xiwen and Ruolan's sense of self-efficacy. Both of the teachers claimed that they were able to adopt a range of strategies and became more resilient in adversity. These strategies included:

- Striving to demonstrate competence by taking teacher exams and becoming a SST.
- Actively engaging with colleagues, parents and students to promote learning and better understanding.
- Changing their attitudes and reflecting on the educational value of teaching in the primary school.
- Self-motivation to learn to improve the status quo.

The teachers' narratives demonstrated their capacity to exercise their professional agency to learn and adapt to unexpected circumstances and the willingness to be flexible and learn from others, which in turn encouraged them to reflect on the value, purpose and nature of teaching in the Willow school. Meanwhile, the other two teachers, Haoting and Yifan, tended to take a more accepting attitude towards the structural restrictions, such as family role and teacher policies, and were less involved in coming up with personal strategies to resolve the tensions. Haoting, for instance, developed a sense of alienation in his narrative of the conflicts between his ambition and the lack of opportunities for a better and more stable income. Although Yifan did not state any kind of personal feelings about her career choice, her narrative also focused on the social and political context in which she was "selected" rather than "chose" to be a primary school teacher.

The case of Aspen school

Similarly, to the teachers in Willow, job stability was the most commonly mentioned reason for the participant teachers in Aspen to choose the job. All the participant teachers referred to the lack of alternative job opportunities after they graduated from teacher training institutes and the benefits of job stability in teaching.

> Because this job is very stable, it is not like any other jobs, where you might be fired at any time. Besides, my experiences showed me that this job fits me pretty well. I don't have the talent for business, nor do I like politics. I want to be with friendly people. (Xinxin)

> It's complicated to find a proper job here. It's even harder for teacher trainees because we are not considered skilled workers. Becoming a teacher or a state employee is the best choice for us. (Zhe)

Both of the female teachers, Qizhen and Xinxin, considered teaching to be a job that fitted their introverted personalities. They recognised teachers as public service professionals who enjoy social respect and positive collegial relationships. Moreover, Qizhen and Zhe also have a sense of personal connection to their families as state teachers; they had other family members who had worked as school teachers and government officers. In this sense,

having family members who had similar careers might be helpful for teachers to maintain a sense of self-efficacy in their career paths.

When it comes to the everyday experiences of working, however, some teachers' narratives reflected a lack of self-efficacy with regards to their career choices. Xinxin, for instance, said that she considered herself as lacking a strong character and the courage to act on her own as she concluded that staying within a "simple environment" where she does not need to deal with "business or politics" would fit her personality. Xinxin also tended to link her lack of a sense of agency at work to her personality test result, which stated that she needed more extended time to process negative feelings. Such a conflicted sense became especially strong when she began to act on her own initiative. Xinxin seemed to feel extremely guilty about not following others' advice and guidance. She thought part of the reason was the link with her role as the oldest daughter in her family, someone who needed to show her capability and tolerance of others as an excellent role model.

> I need to say I'm the oldest and I'm eager to do well in everything. In other' eyes, I'm a good girl. I think it must be related to my performance at work. I follow the rules docilely and do whatever asked by the leader. I won't be secretly doing other kinds of things. I will do whatever I'm told. I'm a typical follower and I don't have my ideas.

On the one hand, Xinxin seemed to be desperate to become more autonomous in making her professional decisions and remain positive in collegial and parental communications in the school as a young teacher. On the other hand, she felt overloaded with the stress and sense of insecurity in starting to pursue her personal goals. In this sense, although Xinxin seemed to be involved in negotiating the tension between her pursuit and the fear of her own choice in a hierarchical social structure, she could not come up with a solution for such tensions, which might lead to further issues such as downplaying her professional achievements as mere luck, and profound frustration when students' academic outcomes do not meet her expectations.

Jianguo also claimed that the social environment and school leaders needed to be responsible for teachers' sense of professional identities. Unfortunately, Jianguo declined to answer my questions with regards to his own experiences and ideas about how teachers' might respond to adversity through their actions. In summary, these teachers' responses reflected slightly different patterns in the way teachers make sense of their career choices. Three kinds of approach could be identified in the samples: 1) satisfied and personally connected (Zhe and Qizhen); 2) negatively involved (Xinxin); and 3) uninvolved (Jianguo).

6.2 Addressing challenges to support students' learning

The data analysis also brought to light the teachers' perceptions of their beliefs and their practices in supporting students' learning and development. The comparative analysis revealed some of the common themes of teachers' reflections on students' learning needs:

- Students need an open and supportive family environment for their moral development.
- Students need to follow classroom discipline.
- Students need to be supported by a favourable classroom climate.
- Students need diversified pedagogical practices that can help and adapt to their unique and different learning demands.
- Students need to improve their academic performances.
- Students need supportive parents to oversee and provide constructive guidance.

The major concerns among the SSTs are: 1) the students' poor academic performance; 2) the lack of pedagogical ideas to diversify students' learning experiences; and 3) meeting students' different development needs. The oversized classrooms had also left teachers in a particularly disadvantaged position to bringing changes to students' learning. Moreover, teachers felt particularly conflicted when the accountability system is heavily reliant on assessing students' test scores.

The case of Willow school

In Willow, Haoting and Ruolan had experienced intense challenges in negotiating the tension between their beliefs and the realities of classroom teaching. Haoting and Ruolan tended to advocate their professional role as caregivers and the significance of cultivating students' moral and character development due to their personal preferences and previous experiences. By contrast, Haoting and Ruolan tended to take a more reluctant and helpless position when it came to the workload of implementing the curriculum reform.

> There is just too much work, both the quantity and the content. The national curriculum added too much pressure on teachers, students and parents. The students must do well in the exam, and there is no other choice. This is the situation in China; scores evaluate students. We can't do anything about it.

Xiwen's tensions, however, originated from more practical aspects of teaching, including her concerns about classroom discipline and the use of one pedagogical model advocated during the teaching reform. Nevertheless, Xiwen was able to reconcile these tensions by drawing on a wide range of alternative resources and methods, such as assigning roles and responsibilities for students, focusing on the textbook while encouraging students to read broadly and maintaining her own understanding of the strict accountability scheme. As

she said in the interview: “I think every teacher is different and does their best. It’s not about which methods they use, but how they bring changes to children’s lives.”

For Yifan, the most critical part is to focus on students’ learning and to adopt a child-centred approach in implementing the curriculum reform. A range of factors seemed to contribute to this phenomenon, including her status as an established teacher, one who had returned from retirement, her understanding of her role as an experienced teacher in Willow and her interest in teaching. Although she considered the crowded classes as a challenge for Willow, she focused more on the positive outcomes of the curriculum reform and its impact on students’ learning. As she summarised:

> I think it is good. We used to put teaching before learning. During the curriculum reform, students are at the centre and teachers merely give guidance. In this way, students can understand better and remember more accurately. There’s a saying that experiences are the most unforgettable. If students could participate in group activities and count the numbers themselves, they will remember more easily. Because their learning has started with practice.

Yifan supported that the use of learning groups as beneficial for students' learning in mathematics. She also did not consider issues such as subject knowledge and the pedagogical models as problematic. In contrast to everyone else, Yifan seemed to have the least tension concerning the tension between her beliefs and practices during the curriculum reform.

In summary, differences in teachers’ perceptions of the influencing factors and coping strategies led to marked professional identities in teachers’ narratives of students’ learning and development. Xiwen’s narrative, for instance, seemed to reflect the teacher’s sense of agency that is contingent on contexts. She was able to critically reflect and adjust herself to fit into the relationship to which she belongs and strive to meet her duties and educational visions for her students. Yifan could also focus on selecting useful methods based on previous experiences in implementing the school vision. For others, teachers might focus on adjusting internal attributes (i.e. emotions, ability and personality) to address the sense of self-esteem (Ruolan) or bearing with the dilemmas and considering the problems as impossible to solve (Haoting).

The case of the Aspen school

Teachers in the Aspen school also addressed the importance of students’ moral and character development in primary schools and worried about the lack of parental support for students’ growth. All the four participant teachers mentioned the erosion of teachers’ professional authority among young and educated parents of students in this school. These teachers claimed they could not make much difference to students’ learning and development without parents’ collaboration. These four teachers were still able to draw on

resources and address some of the significant challenges in achieving their professional goals.

To support students' moral and character development, teachers perceived themselves as role models who needed to be people of integrity in their daily behaviour and in the management of their classrooms. Three of the teachers particularly addressed the importance of treating students in an equal and respectful manner and giving equal opportunities for all the students; others mentioned teachers' dress codes and daily behaviour. Also, all the four teachers pointed out the importance of and their willingness to invest in developing their professional skills at work. By "developing professional skills", teachers seemed to address the methods and skills involved in effective classroom teaching, through which teachers take the role of the "guider" of students' learning and development.

Despite the common focuses on their work ethic and professional skills, teachers' subject knowledge and years of experiences seemed to have significant influences on teachers' sense of competency to support students' learning. For instance, Qizhen had taught Chinese for over 20 years. She considered herself an experienced teacher, someone who was willing to keep learning, adapting to the changes and helping young teachers. She focused on reflecting and developing an understanding of Chinese education as language training to better support students' learning in the classroom. In this process, she needed to transform her role from the instructor who used to "tell everything I know about the texts" to one who "helps students read and write and gives them enough time to learn on their own". She supported her claim by addressing the emotional aspect of language learning and the importance of scaffolding in teaching primary school students in her discussion with her colleagues. She later summarised that Chinese education should pay attention to students' emotional experiences, and that teachers could help by integrating different methods and tools in classroom teaching.

For the younger teachers, however, learning to teach could be a frustrating process and the teacher needed to cope with multiple demands from the students and the evaluative feedback from experienced teachers. As a maths teacher, Xinxin often felt frustrated by the students' lack of interest and passion for learning maths. As she claimed:

> Unlike Chinese, maths is very rational. I need to make maths learning fun and attractive for my students. [...] Students would complain when given extra maths classes. I hope to make my classes more interesting. However, it's so difficult. [...] I don't feel good about myself or any of my classes. "Oh my god, it is finally the end", that's like how I felt after class. It's torture for me and my students.

In her narrative, Xinxin's seemed to be more concerned about her work performances, rather than reflecting on students' learning needs and being critical of structural

limitations. In this sense, it is more difficult for Xinxin to lay claim to her professional authority in the face of others' criticism and to come up with resolutions for the challenges she hoped to address.

To briefly summarise this section, the participant teachers from Willow school came up with a wide range of strategies in negotiating the tensions to meet their professional purposes in supporting students' learnings, including:

- teachers' self-assessment;
- knowing the teaching goals;
- connecting subject knowledge with students' overall learning needs;
- understanding the curriculum and students' learning;
- thinking of alternative solutions and resources for current challenges;
- employing self-care techniques;
- motivation to learn from others;
- appreciation of collegial rapport;
- years of experiences in teaching; and
- a sense of vocation.

6.3 Maintaining professional authority

Another central theme developed through the comparative analysis of teachers' identity narrative is the need to maintain consistent professional authority in the face of structural and interpersonal conflicts inside and outside the classroom. In the literature of education, it is generally assumed that there are two basic kinds of authorities: epistemic authority and deontic authority. Epistemic authority often refers to people who are a reliable source of information in a certain area and deontic authority means one's right to determine others' future actions.

Evidence gained by comparing the state teachers' narratives showed that teachers felt they were ill-prepared to exercise both epistemic and deontic authority in the classroom and in their interactions with other stakeholders in general. These might lead to moral dilemmas for the teachers at work and disrupted narratives in the state schools. Multiple contextual and personal factors seemed to pose a threat to teachers' sense of professional authority in the two state schools. These problems could be further categorised into aspects of multiple levels. As is shown in table 16, the analysis uncovered the threat to teachers' professional authority in four aspects: 1) administrative; 2) community; 3) school; and 4) practice. The general lack of consistent teacher authority might force teachers to resort to different strategies or manipulative means to control life in state schools.

Table 16 Perceived anti-authority positions and challenges to teachers' professional authority

Administrative aspect	• Lack of career progression and low pay. • Criticisms from media and a lack of trust from policy makers in the making and implementation of teacher policies. • Lack of regulations and explicit rules to clarify teachers' authority and responsibilities.
Community aspect	• Disadvantaged students' family backgrounds. • Lack of parental support and problems in family education for students' learning. • Strong pressure from parents to ensure students' academic performance.
School aspect	• Inconsistency in school management and leadership. • Changes in school decisions and policies.
Practice aspect	• Hostile behaviour and impolite languages from students' parents. • Challenges in constructing positive interactions with disruptive students. • Lack of professional knowledge and skills to implement the curriculum reform and meet parents' and policy maker's expectations.

The case of the Willow school

In the Willow school, teachers' narratives showed a wider range of influencing factors related to teachers' professional authority across the four different aspects. The experienced teachers often felt discouraged by the slow career progression and low pay; some teachers also reflected on the lack of trust and collaborations from the policy makers and the media, which considered teaching increasingly as a "marginalised profession".

To be more specific, Haoting's sense of professional identity was due to the lack of support from the current school leaders in the subject matters and the intense demand of curriculum reform. He reflected that his negative experience of professional development in Willow might be attributed mainly to the lack of career progression for experienced teachers and the inconsistency in school policies and changes of leadership. Both Xiwen and Ruolan mentioned the "gap" between theory and practice in the school contexts and developed different approaches to elaborating this issue. Xiwen took a more active stance by reflecting the underlining difficulties in adapting to students' diverse learning needs. She argued that teachers' flexibility in adapting the reform to students' specific situations could be helpful; in this, learning from other colleagues was the key.

Ruolan also took a resistant position to the idea of reform and positioned herself as a practitioner who understood the school contexts and the application of theories in their

specific local environment. Yifan's identity as a retired teacher seemed to be predominant. She suggested that young teachers needed to be more actively engaged with professional learning than experienced teachers, while she also demonstrated a humble attitude by saying that young teachers were often better than herself. In this sense, Yifan tended to find a middle ground in positioning herself in relation to young teachers.

Another threat uncovered by teachers was teachers' practices, in particular in teacher–student interactions. Some teachers reflected that despite their good intentions, the achievement of sustained interactions with students and parents was rare, especially when it came to students' academic progresses. The curriculum reform had brought changes in teachers' roles in the classroom. Most of the teachers considered themselves in the process of transferring from the role of authoritative expert with subject knowledge to that of supporting mentor and role model for students. Some of the state teachers also reflected that such a change required them to update their professional expertise from the subject knowledge to more general knowledge and skills in classroom management, engagement with students and communication with parents, in which they received no training in teacher colleges.

Regardless of their personal experiences, all these four teachers seemed to agree that teachers were losing their professional authority in front of the young parents and they often felt there was a lack of respect for their profession. The following list summarises the range of strategies the Willow teachers employed to maintain their professional authority:

> Lower expectations for career progression and the strong sense of responsibility as professionals. (Yifan, Xiwen, Ruolan)
>
> Seeking and engaging with teachers' learning opportunities and the possibilities for constant improvement and progress in teaching. (Xiwen, Yifan)
>
> High professional standards and critical self-assessment. (Xiwen)
>
> Resisting the negative professional images by complaining about the lack of support and accountability system. (Ruolan and Haoting)

The case of the Aspen school

The four teachers in the Aspen seemed to face similar challenges in maintaining their professional identities. As Qizhen summarises:

> Chinese society has witnessed dramatic changes in the new era. People hold different attitudes towards authorities now. Some people do not trust teachers. Neither do they believe in the value of the teaching profession, nor do they accept teachers' absolute authorities.

Qizhen raised the issue of lacking social trust in the teaching profession as the main threat to teachers' authorities. She further called for more effective educational laws and regulations to provide more explicit guidance for teachers and parents to understand their roles and responsibilities. Other strategies she tried to address included building relational authority through her rapport with students. She tried to address this point by describing an occasion when she received flowers from her students:

> When I went back to the classroom in the afternoon, I saw many flowers that were pinned on the door. Those flowers were from my students who had just graduated. I had more or less criticised them for some reasons: those whom I chased after when they made mistakes, those who didn't do well in studying and those who always make mistakes. They had deep connections with you. When they grow up, they will realise that you are doing the right thing when you chase after them and be their accompany when they fell. That is how you build your authority as a teacher. That is to be fair and treat students equally.

In this sense, Qizhen advocated an egalitarian principle as the moral guidance in constructing her professional identity as a successful teacher. According to her narrative, gaining trust from her students through fair treatment and by organising engaging learning and extracurricular activities could be very helpful. And she suggested that teachers' capacities to deliver effective classroom teaching and organise extracurricular activities should serve as the main methods for rebuilding their professional authority. Zhe had similar ideas about the disruption of teachers' professional authority. He attributed this problem to the diversification of demand and interest in school education. As he argued, such a social trend tended to devalue education to a mere service commodity promoting peer competition. He supported his claims by discussing the growing household expenses devoted to private tutoring. As he claimed:

> I think the idea of private tutoring is rather misleading. Many children do not want to have private tutoring. This seems to be parents scrambling for resources. It's not for the cultivation of students' interests.

Zhe also tended to add on to his argument reflections on the potential benefits of private tutoring for students' holistic development: "I think it's [private tutoring] positive in general, whether for students' overall or personal development." He added that extracurricular activities such as music and arts can support students' character development. In this sense, Zhe seemed to have the moral dilemma to reassume his position as an educator advocating for both an egalitarian value and more resources to support students' learning and development. In this sense, although Zhe thought of private tutoring as a phenomenon that showed parents' irrational participation in the competition for educational resources, he maintained an ambiguous attitude towards such investment

due to the perceived potential benefits for individual students' long-term development. In his later reflections, Zhe tended to reassume his sense of professional identity by claiming the moral and cultural authorities of teachers.

> Because the teacher helps to preserve and pass on the spirituality and morality. Being a human is more important than learning the knowledge. A righteous person is a successful person. Teaching skills to contribute to the country would be even better. Even a skilled person can be dangerous without a sense of ethics. So, our focus should be more on the moral development and spreading the right messages.

His claims support the idea that a teacher's authority derives from the cultivation of young people's morality and sense of cultural inheritance. Yet, as a young teacher, Zhe still felt inadequate regarding his subject and practical knowledge to help students' make academic progress. In general, Zhe tended to show his commitment to his work by "spreading the positive energy", and by maintaining his professional integrity by treating students more equally and helping disadvantaged students to make progress. Against the background of increasing complexity in education, both Zhe and Qizhen's narratives reflected that the value of egalitarianism served as a source of teachers' sense of professional authority. Favouring equal treatment for students regardless of their academic performances or family background remained a distinguishing character of teachers' identity narratives. To summarise, these teachers from the Aspen school tended to address the problems related to teachers' professional authority by adopting the following strategies:

- Lower expectations for career progression and a strong sense of responsibility as professionals. (Qizhen, Xinxin, Zhe)
- Seeking and engaging with opportunities and possibilities for constant improvement and progress in teaching. (Qizhen, Xinxin, Zhe)
- Maintaining high professional standards and critical self-assessment. (Qizhen)
- Claiming teachers' cultural and moral authority. (Zhe)

6.4 Summary

In summary, the participant teachers' narratives reflected highly conflicted professional self-images in the Willow school. There was a consensus on the benefits of current curriculum reform, which aimed to transform the traditional classroom teaching to one that is more engaging for students. At the same time, the teachers were aware of the adverse social and educational trends that challenges teachers' authority in classrooms as well as their relationships with parents. These teachers also talked about the impact of the media in terms of creating a negative professional image of teachers among the general public.

There were more universal than different themes across the two school cases. Generally speaking, teachers were exposed to highly intensive professional training and worked in a comparative stable system yet one with static promotion. Both of the school leaders mentioned that they found it challenging to help promote teachers in the system and most of the focus on teachers' professional development was given to training young teachers in classroom teaching. Such a strategy was also informed by the theoretical framework employed for teachers' professional development stages. Older teachers demonstrated a strong sense of vocation and took a leading role in helping young teachers, yet young teachers were more frustrated and conflicted than the older teachers.

All the eight SSTs demonstrated their commitment to students' learning. In the interview, all the teachers had addressed the problems of family education and its influences on their sense of professional authority. Positive teacher–student interaction is a significant contributing factor to those teachers' sense of achievement and their satisfaction at work. Teachers were engaged with policy and social issues in education in negotiating the challenges they faced in their everyday lives. The sense of a threat to their professional authority was a distinguishing theme in these SSTs' identity narratives, one which might exert both positive and negative influences on teachers' development of identities. Some teachers were able to express their political opinions. Others showed the sign of vulnerability. Teachers' narratives also reflected the influence of political and cultural factors on TPIs (see chapter 9).

Chapter 7: The Ash International School and the Redwood Charity School (private schools)

7.1 Introducing the Ash International School (AIS)

The Ash International School (AIS) is a state-funded and privately managed K12 school. It is located in the High-Technology Industrial Development Zone in Nanqi and occupies an area of 140,000 square metres. It was about 30 minutes' drive from county Nanqi and another 20 minutes' drive to the city centre. Located at the intersection of the counties and at upper administrative level, AIS is surrounded by wide, newly built road and scattered residential areas, high buildings and large mansions. It was not easy to find the kind of small shops or banks I was used to seeing in other schools.

7.1.1 The origin of AIS

Following the "people-managed, state-sponsored" model, the local government fully funded the AIS. An independent educational cooperation from close by province, Huawen Education[37], managed the school. In 2001, the leadership team successfully obtained the licence to run an international class in a key state school as a start. The school only had 17 high school students from 2001 to 2002. As the first international class in Nanqi, AIS slowly built its reputation and brand for international education to attract parents who hoped to prepare their children to study overseas.

In 2012, the city government of Nanqi decided to expand its cooperation with Huawen Education in the High-Technology Industrial Development Zone. Setting up a high-quality K-12 international school became a part of Nanqi's global vision. It is believed that a good school is essential to attract foreign and domestic talents and promote this area for economic development. The collaboration took the form of a cross-regional school partnership overseen by the local management committee. Huawen Education was responsible for implementing the international curriculum and issues such as student enrolment, teacher recruitment and the management of foreign teachers, etc.

7.1.2 Diversifying the curriculum

The media portrays AIS as a strong sign of internationalisation in Nanqi and a new experiment in cross-regional school partnership (Jia and Xia, 2010). In the interview, Jiang (member of the vice principal team) said that the AIS' goal for its primary school was to cultivate students' independent personalities and behavioural habits. The official website introduced the primary school of AIS as follows:

> Under the guidance of Huawen Education's 6C concept, the primary school is committed to cultivating the international citizenship of physical and mental

[37] This is a pseudonym

> health, rich in Chinese Civilisation background, full of all-round ability and with elegant temperaments. Here is the fertile soil every student can benefit from; what's more, here is the sailing start for every student to pursue the dream.

The 6C philosophies are *Confident*, *Caring*, *Committed*, Creative, *Cooperative* and *Communicative*, which is put forward by the principal. To achieve the goal, the school paid a great amount of attention to the diversification of the curriculum and the enrichment of students' experiences. Within each level of education, AIS provides different kinds of course varying in terms of tuition fees. Regarding primary education, there are three types of classes: the experimental class; the international class; and the international girl's class. The following table (Table 17) demonstrates the characteristics of the curriculum, the class masters and the learning goals.

Table 17 Characteristics of different classes in AIS (primary education)

	Experimental class	International class	International girls' class
Curriculum	- National curriculum - School-based English - Optional courses - Social practice - Chinese classics chanting	- National curriculum - International curriculum - School-based English - Special lessons (piano and calligraphy)	- National curriculum - International curriculum - School-based English - Special lessons (piano, *Zheng*, dancing, physique, vocal music, calligraphy, pottery, chess, etiquette, cooking, etc.)
Class masters	One class master	Two seating in class masters (one Chinese teacher and one foreign teacher)	Two class masters (one Chinese teacher and one foreign teacher)
Learning goals	Focusing on developing one's speciality and cultural identity Cultivation of modern citizenships	Integrating Chinese and Western education to cultivate globally competitive talents with outstanding English and comprehensive capacities	Focus on the quality of "versatile and elegant characteristics of future outstanding women models"

In addition to the curriculum, Ash school holds three to four extracurricular events every month during term time. The reality, however, was more complicated and unpredictable. He told me that AIS faced tremendous challenges in adapting to the local educational context of Nanqi. As he commented:

> Since international education does not have a long history in this city, there was a lack of correspondence between the educational vision and parents' expectations.

He said that the parents, who are also the "customers" that pay for their children's school education, tend to expect more and tend to be too reliant on the school to prepare their

children to attain good academic outcomes. According to Jiang and the participant teachers, some students' parents still maintain a result-oriented mindset that focus only on academic progress and often overlook the value of students' experiences of cultural difference and diversity. Despite the challenges, Jiang argued that the second-child policy would bring more opportunities for private schools. The key for private schools to bring change, as he argued, is parents' humble expectations and clearer planning for their children's education.

7.1.3 Structural restrictions on the development of private education

Jiang also stated that the lack of economic development hinders the funding resources for the development of private schools. Jiang took the example of foreign teachers and argued that one of the greatest expenses for an international school is the employment of foreign teachers. In his view, it is increasingly difficult to employ and pay for qualified foreign teachers to implement the international curriculum and to provide an international environment for learning to maintain the school's attractiveness for students and parents.

At the same time, he pointed to the danger of a system that increasingly takes education as market behaviour. For him, the market environment is not sufficiently developed yet to guarantee the quality of private education. Jiang took the recent Close-off Policies for Coal-mining Industries in Shandong as an example. According to the news, the policy had resulted in thousands of laid-off workers, who could quickly receive licences to set up kindergartens and private tutoring centres. The expansion of short-term, profit-driven businesses and the low quality of these private educational institutes, according to Jiang, would exert a significant negative impact on education quality. In other words, educational choices could be risky when neither the competitive supply sides (schools and institutes) nor the utilitarian demand sides (parents and students) are equipped with sufficient knowledge of what constitutes a good education to make a good choice for the children.

7.1.4 Teachers' roles and professional development

Regarding teachers, Jiang stated that teachers need to "make the finishing point by painting the Dragon's eyes"[38] in classroom teaching. This story is a famous Chinese idiom and its story is often used to phrase an artist's exquisite skills to bring his paining alive. What he wanted to indicate here seemed to be the teachers' role to bring enlightenment to students rather than spoon-feeding them. The use of group work and discussion are encouraged to engage students in their learning. To train new teachers, AIS employs the system of apprenticeship, in which an experienced teacher guides the new teacher in familiarising teaching and the schoolwork in general. The school also organises activities such as a *Teaching Competition* and *Classroom Demonstration* to encourage and reward

[38] 画龙点睛

effective teachers. According to Jiang, a three-year plan for professional development is an essential requirement for teachers. The project includes: 1) the first year of course delivering; 2) the second year on course design; and 3) the third year on teaching style[39]. The development needs a professional community where teachers can support each other.

In the early years of development, AIS recruited and allocated teachers through the local government to give teachers *bianzhi* status. Jiang said that this model has been successful in attracting some of the best qualified and most experienced teachers. Since 2015, the government decided to cut the number of *bianzhi* quotas; therefore, AIS needs to hire more contract teachers. Jiang said this could be a positive change, for those teachers with *bianzhi* often "lack a sense of crisis". Based on his own experience, Jiang claimed that teaching in private schools is often "only suitable for certain personalities". How to strengthen teachers' identification with the school organisation is a priority for Ash to attract and support new teachers. Jiang said that school improvement is the key to developing such a sense of identification and ownership: teachers are expected to benefit from the development of the school in terms of their social status and income.

[39] 教学风格

Table 18 Key characteristics of the ash international school

Location	A High-Technology Industrial Development Zone between the county and city.
Neighbourhood	Wide, newly built road and scattered residential areas, high office buildings and large blocks for industrial purposes.
School finance	Determined by the government and supplemented by profits from tuition fees.
School staffing	Initially recruited through local government as state teachers and moving to school contract-based employment with better payment.
School facilities and equipment	Large campus with good facilities.
Number of students	About 3,000 students (K-12) and about 100 classes.
Number of teachers	About 300 Chinese teachers and 40 foreign teachers.
School–parent relationship	Mixture of collaboration and high demand.
Role of national curriculum	Remains dominate; supplemented by international curriculum and a wide range of school-based curriculum and extracurricular activities. Varies according to different types of class.
Staff support/ supervision	Systematic training for teacher induction; strong focus on professional collaboration.
Focus of class reform	Promoting life skills such as communication and leadership skills; encouraging students to express and participate in a wide range of school activities; setting high standard for academic progress.
Teacher job progression	Stability and opportunities for professional progression with *bianzhi*.
Leadership	Instructional and administrative leadership style.

7.2 Four teacher cases

7.2.1 Teacher C1- Zhulin

Basic biographical information

Age: Mid-20s

Gender: Female

Education: Bachelor of English (Normal College)

Current position: English teacher, director of educational research, foreign teacher coordinator

Years of teaching: 10 years

Zhulin has been an English teacher in AIS for eight years. She graduated from a normal college, after which she worked as a substitute teacher in a state school in Nanqi for one year. Zhulin persisted in studying for the teacher examinations for two years. After passing the exam, the Education Bureau allocated her to AIS with the state *bianzhi* status. Zhulin has also worked in various administrative roles, including as director of educational research and coordinator with foreign teachers at her school. Zhulin sent her son to AIS because of both the better environment and the support she felt he would receive. Although her families complain about the long hours involved in her work in AIS, she was happy to hear that her friends had complimented her on her personal growth: "I hope I can be a successful teacher for the parents and the school, that I can be capable of handling various tasks."

- ***Focusing on students***

Zhulin commented on her belief that teachers must focus on helping cultivate students' desire for knowledge and, crucially, their interest in learning. According to Zhulin, learning must benefit students' critical thinking skills: "The teacher could even pause a bit in teaching to slow down the teaching. But most importantly, we must focus on students' interests." Based on her observation of the classes, Zhulin pointed out the dominant role of the international curriculum in influencing these students' performance and development. For her, students from the international class were more critical and flexible in their thinking. In this process, she believed that the pedagogical approach of using English as a medium of instruction played a crucial rule in contributing to students' successful learning.

With a firm belief to influences her students, Zhulin encouraged students to participate in various extracurricular activities. She also expects her students to develop good learning habits. At the same time, Zhulin's experience told that the pedagogy in AIS might not be effective for every student. Over last few years, she had spent a significant amount of time and energy on encouraging one student to improve his academic performance. Finding

herself unable to change Cheng's poor academic performance, Zhulin reflected that this might be due to the student's lack of parental attention and support:

> I feel if this kid could [...] I mean if the family could [...] After all, he is from a single-parent family. I wish his family could be more supportive. If the family and the school could work together, I think my effort could be more productive. The kid is not a slow or anything. He is a very gifted child. It's just his [work] habit is not well developed.

- ***School improvement and the sense of satisfaction at work***

Nevertheless, Zhulin felt satisfied to work in her hometown and live by her family. Zhulin thought teaching in AIS a good career choice for two main reasons: 1) more learning and promotion opportunities; and 2) a global vision that seeks to build an institution that provides elitist education. She claimed that both teachers and students are provided with sufficient resources for the pursuit of their goals. In the past eight years, Zhulin had witnessed the growth of AIS and felt encouraged by its development, which made she see the future of AIS:

> I have seen the expansion of AIS in merely few years. Therefore, I think our direction is correct; our vision is right and the development of AIS has enhanced my confidence in our future and what I have done for the school.

- ***Collaborating with parents***

Zhulin stated that maintaining an equal relationship with the parents is vital to becoming a good teacher. Most of the time, she contacts parents through online chat software. Sometimes, she calls parents and invites them to have a face-to-face meeting, particularly when it comes to issues with foreign teachers who teach lower grades. "Family education is the root," Zhulin used this metaphor to address the fundamental role of a positive family environment for supporting students' learning. However, she noted that different parents in AIS tended to have different attitudes towards their children's education. Her roles in school life might also create possibilities for communication with parents, hence maintaining the rapport with her students. She is also the organiser of students' extra curriculum activities and supported foreign teachers in the international class. She told me that she is well aware of the significance of school–family collaboration and its influence on students. According to Zhulin, the collaboration also helped her to better understand students' behaviour in the school.

- ***Becoming a professional teacher***

Zhulin perceived the need to constantly negotiate multiple identities to meet the increasingly complex educational demands for schools as one of the most challenging

aspects of teachers' work. As she described it, teachers not only need to "transfer the knowledge", they also need to create a subtle process of influences on students of various aspects. This change of identities was accompanied by more demand for teachers with multiple skills, exceeding the scale of her formal teacher education. These skills include preparing and organising a series of students' stage shows and performances, the computing skills to fill in forms and operate software, and the communication skills to build rapport with parents. As an English teacher, she also needs to organise performances, which requires her to be artistic and creative. According to Zhulin, she has developed these skills through her work in the school.

Zhulin considered the lesson preparation group[40] and integration of technology in teaching as great tools to support her work in AIS. She further explained that teachers would decide the content for teaching in a lesson preparation group and move to a further discussion of the goals and critical knowledge points, after which they would take turns to design the courseware. Teachers would receive the courseware one day before the class and then they could adapt it to their classes before delivering the course. Zhulin expressed her support for this systematic and collaborative process of class preparation. She commented that this was beneficial in three aspects: 1) it maintains a similar pace of teaching with other teachers; 2) it allows for the exploring of advantages and weaknesses in other teachers' designs; and 3) it saves time in searching for resources and materials. She also felt the lesson preparation group was an excellent opportunity for new teachers to learn from others and to be inducted into the way teachers work in AIS.

Zhulin summarised three qualities that a successful teacher should have: the necessary professional skills; love for students; and the teacher's personal charisma. This does not mean Zhulin did not face professional and personality restraints. "But I also feel we have a set of roles to play as teachers, such as the clothes we wear and the way we speak and behave. You have to behave in a certain way and not cross the boundaries," Zhulin said without explaining in detail what kind of talk and behaviour were encouraged in her school. "It's very hard to describe", she said, although she later mentioned that she sees herself as an introverted personality, which she felt fits more of the expectations of a teacher.

Zhulin wanted to be perceived a "generalist" by parents and students. By a "generalist", Zhulin seemed to indicate the competency to employ multiple skills in teaching, communicating and problem-solving in AIS. In this sense, Zhulin hoped that others would see her as a competent teacher for parents and school leaders in AIS. "I'm working towards my goal,". She seemed to have a humble attitude towards others, especially the more experienced and expert teachers in AIS. Zhulin described the way more experienced

[40] 备课组

teachers had become important role models for her own development. She used to work with Teacher Xue, who had won the titles of provincial special-grade expert teacher and provincial expert teacher. In her own words: “To become a successful teacher, one must have experienced and toughened in various ways. One needs to reach a certain age to achieve that state.”

In this portrait, I came to know a teacher whose professional identity was a result of a complex combination of her changing personality, practical experience, competences, and the collaborative relationship with parents and other teachers. Zhulin’s portrait shed light on the influences of her own educational values, her relationships with others in the school community, as well as the professional development experiences in the development of her professional identity as a private school teacher. The narrative had helped to present the dynamic nature of her perceptions of herself as a teacher.

7.2.2 Teacher C2- Beihe

Basic biographical information

Age: Mid-30s

Gender: Female

Education: Bachelor of Art in Chinese literature (Normal College)

Current position: Chinese teacher

Years of teaching: 5 years

Introducing Baihe

Baihe decided to become a teacher when she was 17 years old; her father, who had been a teacher for over 30 years, influenced such decision. Before joining AIS, Baihe had worked in another private school in Yishui for 6 years. Back then, Baihe thought the school management was corrupt, and there was a lack of professional training for teachers. As a private school teacher, she did not find a sense of security and belonging. After the school board decided to close the school due to financial problems, and Baihe chose to move back to Nanqi, which was also her hometown. Although she experienced uncertainties in her earlier years of teaching, Baihe thought teaching had become an excellent job for her, as she said: "Unlike banking or the telecommunications industry, I can spend my days with children. Teaching brings me happiness. It is the happiest occupation in the world."

- ***Realising personalised learning***

There were 31 students in Baihe's class and she needed to take a significant amount of time to manage student lives in school. "In private schools, you have to pay attention to individual students, while in state schools, because of a large number of students, teachers tend to focus more on the commonalities," she said. In addition to teaching students according to their different levels, Baihe believes that teachers not only need to be professional in terms of classroom teaching, but they also need to be a "scholar of flourishing thoughts", so as to influence students in various aspects of life. Baihe perceived her educational background in the normal college to have been beneficial to her work in AIS. In particular, she appreciated the teaching of critical skills such as performance skills, public speaking and the spirit of teamwork. As Baihe stated:

> When I was in college, I was the class leader in arts. I learned a lot including singing, dancing, volleyball, public speech and piano [...] I can hardly remember any of these, but these had improved my overall attainment. Without these, I could barely give any advice for my students (for school performances) now.

Baihe suggested that offline-learning opportunities, such as school visits and class observations, are the most helpful methods for teacher learning. Having visited one school in Singapore and the Dulangkou School in Shandong, Baihe identified the general characteristics of each school. She argued that students in the Singaporean school were more relaxed than students in AIS. In contrast, Baihe was less convinced by the Dulangkou model, which for her seemed to be more of "just a form than the deeper educational philosophy that 'touched my heart'". "What do you mean by that?" I asked. Baihe drew on her detailed observation of an art teacher to demonstrate her point: "I wanted to cut a few pieces all together, so I stapled them, which left small holes in it," Baihe explained. The art teacher's attention to detail and concern for accuracy was very touching for her. "This is a slow process of growth".

She told me about Linlin, a student who just transferred to AIS. Linlin used to be disruptive and rude to his classmates and teachers. With her support, Linlin could accept criticism and express himself with confidence. Baihe thinks this is an example of her success as a class master in paying close attention to individual students in her class. Seeing students' progress in their development is what makes Baihe most satisfied, as she stated: "It's hard to quantify this feeling. It is invisible. But in my heart, I feel a strong sense of achievement."

The idea of achieving excellence and perfection seemed to be an important aspect of the school culture that drives Baihe in her work. As a member of the middle management team, she also thought of the school principal as a role model for her in the leadership role. She stated that on top of Chinese teaching she was someone who could exert a positive influence on children. Teacher as a role model means she felt a teacher need to behave in a way that regarding their lifestyle, their etiquettes and the way the student conducts his or herself, to pay attention to every aspect of her conduct to improve her general competency. The phrase "competence"[41] was first introduced to Chinese educational policy discourse in the 2014 MoE Suggestions to Deepen Curriculum and Pedagogical Reform and Verify the Fundamental Goal of Strengthening Morality Education. It was also used to replace the concept of "quality" to incorporate values, attitudes and capacities, employing multiple skills and knowledge to meet specific needs in one's academic and personal lives. What Baihe indicated here, however, seemed to focus more on the alignment of teachers' behaviour in both personal and professional aspects, a coherent identity that integrated the teacher's personal "lifestyle" with social etiquette and relationships. In this sense, Baihe's sense of social status is closely related to her identification with a particular style of life as a teacher. To connect with what Baihe had described before, she did not focus on the subject and pedagogical knowledge of Chinese; instead, the "lifestyle" might include her

[41] 素养

dressing, classroom practice, activities do to with her personal relationships, decorating style and child-care practices, etc. This tendency might be closely related to the Chinese culture, which addresses the behaving part of "cultivating one's moral character"[42] for a man (or woman) of noble character[43],that moral cultivation relies heavily on putting principles into practice.

- ***Roles and respects***

In the international class, Baihe had taken the role of teaching assistant to help students interpret and collaborate with students' parents. Baihe said she appreciated foreign teachers' flexible approach to teaching: "They have lots of new ideas and knows lots of handcraft skills." However, Baihe needed to take care of discipline. Also, Baihe spends more than half of her working hours in school activities. In this process, Baihe felt she needed to negotiate her identity as an educator and a teacher:

> If I have a choice, I hope I could focus on teaching. But as an educator, we need to exert subtle influences and "cultivate the students" through [a] series of activities. Teaching is for students' learning, which is also crucial in schools. Someone must do the job.

Although Baihe felt teachers are respected in her school, her experience informed her that, in the digital age, people could form opinions on any profession through online platforms and social media. The negative social images of who teachers are could also affect teacher and how people treat them. Like other teachers, Baihe claimed that the traditional authorities given to teachers are under threat by public opinion. She expressed her concerns about changes in parents' attitudes: "Parents will respect you if you are a good teacher; in the opposite, they won't pay you any respect if you can't get your work done." Baihe expressed that she felt teachers' social status has been enhanced because of the school's improvement. Despite occupational conflicts between parents and schools, Baihe thought parents of students from AIS paid more respect to teachers than parents in other schools due to the school reputation.

- ***A sense of happiness***

Teacher–student relationships are crucial to Baihe's sense of joy and job satisfaction in Ash. Baihe talked about a teaching diary she posted on the class blog about a playful conversation she had with her students. Through the communication, she felt intimately connected with her students. She said in addition to her daughter's love, she could also receive her students' love for her. Tellingly, she noted proudly, "Sometimes, they would call me mother." She also enjoyed her relationship with colleagues. According to Baihe,

[42] 修身
[43] 君子

not only would other teachers provide emotional support when she was ill, but they also help each other in organising school activities. “We are very different from the state schools. Teachers are very honest with each other, and we are often very direct.” She later explained that this is because PSTs need more collaboration in carrying out their work and rarely have time for politics in schools.

Due to the rapid pace of work in Ash, Baihe found it challenging to balance her work and life. In her spare time, she likes to go for walks, surf the Internet, watch TV and take a spa. “When I’m at home, I’m as lazy as a pig; when I work, I will burn out like a dog. This is the very private part of teachers’ life. When I’m home, I don’t want to move at all.” Like many other teachers, Baihe does not have much time to spend with her family and her daughter. Baihe told me that she and her husband have been planning to have a second child. When I tentatively asked if that would create even more of a burden on her, she answers two children would make them happier, especially since China has an ageing society. In the end, she does not want to lose her family because of her career:

> I think I must have both a family and a job. I’m happy if I can just get my work done. I don’t want to spend too much of my energy on it because social positions do not determine our happiness.

In this portrait, I talked with Baihe through aspects of her personal and professional lives and attempted to gain a glimpse of her professional identities. Baihe had unique experiences as a teacher trainee in college, through her many years of teaching experiences in private schools, as well as her current leadership roles in AIS. Her interview indicated that Baihe is a mother in pursuit of her happiness in both her personal and professional lives. The major challenge she faces is to balance her work and family life.

7.2.3 Teacher C3- Cong

Basic biographical information

Age: Early 40s

Gender: Female

Education: College Diploma in Primary Education (Normal College)

Current position: Maths teacher, class master and pastoral teacher

Years of teaching: 19 years (6 years in AIS)

Cong used to teach in a rural school in Nanqi. She had been the principal in that school for over ten years before she transferred AIS in 2010. In her time of teaching in the rural school, Cong often felt stressed, mainly due to school inspections and lack of collegial support. She felt isolated in serving her leadership role and gradually lost her hope to make difference. As she expressed it: "You can't change anything; the only thing you could do is to bear it." Cong recalled that she was desperate for recognition of her work and professional development opportunities. Cong was also a mother. As time goes by, Cong realised she needed to find a good school for her son. In 2008, Cong finally decided to resign from her leadership role in the rural school and focus on taking another teacher examination to join AIS. Being able to keep her *bianzhi* status added an advantage for Cong, allowing her to retain her previous achievements in the state system and as a participant in a range of state teacher appraisal activities. In two years, she had won two more professional awards and been recognised as a senior teacher in AIS.

- ***Transferring between schools***

The beginning of Cong's career in AIS was challenging. Parents demands became one of the major differences she found between AIS and the rural school. She noticed parents' strong request for more school support as they paid high tuition fees. While AIS was gradually building its reputation and became well-known in Nanqi, the school chose to be selective with the students and their parents they want. "Parents could choose to leave, and we could also choose to let them leave," Cong framed this selection process as equal between the school and parents. In her own word, it was "mutual selection"[44]. This selective process had been bringing in students with stronger academic backgrounds and supportive parents. According to Cong, this gave her more confidence in her work to support students' development.

Comparing the school culture of AIS and the rural school she used to work at, Cong considered herself as a part of the "culture corrosion". She thinks the AIS school environment changed her attitudes towards her students and her life in a positive way. She appreciated the campus environment as well as the diverse range of courses provided for

[44] 双向选择

students. Regarding social engagement, Cong found herself inspired by some of her students' parents because they paid more attention to their children's education and quality of life. She also became more open and flexible with others and her students' families. The most enjoyable part of her job is the communication with her students: "Because children can give you the strong sense of happiness. They hug you and kiss you. If they are away from the school, they will miss you."

Cong stated that students in the international classes could benefit from the bustling atmosphere and flexible thinking in foreign teachers' classes: "They gave them the confidence. They [the foreign teachers] advocate imagination and humour." Although AIS tries to avoid the comparison, Cong thinks the international class the first choice for parents. "The best students are always from the international classes," Cong added. She enjoys her time with students: "They are highly intelligent in their emotions; they make teachers laugh." Cong's eyes were full of passion and hope as she told me these.

She also thinks it is vital to cultivate students' transferable skills and train their minds in learning, which she saw as an essential aspect of effective teaching. Cong stated that the extent to which she could help her students to define the nature of the questions and put their knowledge into practice and explore defines her success as a professional teacher. Cong said she was in the right place to carry out her professional role. Unlike many other schools, AIS does not require teachers to write out a teaching plan every day and she was allowed to be more flexible with classroom management as well. Pastoral care is another part of Cong's job at the AIS. "I didn't want to do it in the beginning," Cong said, "but later on I realised that my pastoral care could very much link with and support my teaching." Although Cong is still under pressure to compete for better pay and higher professional titles, she said one could not be arrogant about one's achievement. She argued that good teachers make decisions according to the contexts and for different students. Rather than *being a "professional,"* Cong said that "*becoming professional*" is a better pursuit. Having worked for last 20 years as a teacher, Cong was much less worried about others' opinions. She said it is more important for her to care for her students and colleagues rather than thinking about others' opinions. "The most important part is to improve and enrich oneself in this process," Cong summarised.

- ***Professional skills and teacher's relationship with the curriculum***

Cong believed that the levels of one's educational background do not necessarily define one's effectiveness in teaching. Instead, a good teacher must have the talent and the capacity to know and to be reflective about students and the textbooks. With a strong commitment to students' learning, Cong focuses on the applicability of learning strategies she taught to her students. As she said: "I think the learning strategy is universal in maths. I

hope my students can use the same strategies in primary schools, in middle schools as well as high schools." To achieve this goal, Cong believed the core is in the teachers' capacity to understand the curriculum and the textbook and know how to lead students to explore and find the fundamental methods to solve every maths problems. In AIS, it is also vital for teachers to need to finish covering the contents in 35 minutes. "The school discourages extra tutoring for students," she said.

- ***Teacher performance appraisal and social status***

As a senior teacher, Cong seemed to be more open with talking about teacher performance appraisal in the interview. According to Cong, teachers' wages are tied up with the professional title in the teacher appraisal system. "I don't think it should matter that much," she murmured, "but if you don't do it, then you could be paid much less for the same job you do." She noticed that the performance appraisal system had become too selective and strict to support the young teachers. As she described, many teachers do not know how to handle the difficulties. Unlike other participant teachers, Cong talked about her hope that teachers' professionalisation in China could be as comprehensive as that in Germany, where gaining a teacher qualification takes more than five years of professional training. "The fundamental issues are teachers' low income," she said, "I heard that in Japan, the government set high wages for teachers. Hence, they have higher social status." In addition to the payment, Cong thinks it is crucial for the government to reform the teacher education system. In her mind, setting a higher standard for teacher qualification and provide better income could be the solution to attract educational talents in China.

- ***Gender identity***

Cong followed this question by talking about the lack of male teachers in primary education. She said she is upset about the imbalance of gender in the teaching profession. She thinks male teachers are more open-minded than female teachers, although she considers herself as having certain "male characteristics" – she tends to look at the "big picture" while female teachers focus more on details. In this sense, Cong seemed to reinforce the gender stereotypes in her narrative and construct a gender identity that is superior and more powerful by positioning herself outside of the "normal situations".

- ***Summary***

As an experienced teacher, Cong had constructed a complex and dynamic story to make sense of her experiences during the interview. Various factors, including her role as a mother, a former school principal and her pursuit of a work environment in which she could learn and focus on teaching and her professional development, as well as her

constant struggle with the teacher appraisal system had been influential in her carrier choices and aspirations.

7.2.4 Teacher C4- Yu

Basic biographical information
Age: Late 20s
Gender: Female
Education: Bachelor of Art in Primary Education (Normal College)
Current position: Maths teacher
Years of teaching: 4 years (1 year in AIS)

Like many other primary school teachers in this research study, a combination of gender stereotypes and family member influences had influenced Yu's career choice. Yu's father is a teacher, and he suggested she should choose a normal college for her higher education. She thought being a teacher is convenient in that it allows her to take care of her own family and work with lively primary school students.

Yu became a primary school teacher in a rural school in 2011, and she worked in Qi. The rural school was in a very remote village from her house in the urban area. Commuting between home and the school was demanding. In the school, she encountered a massive gap between her teacher training and real classroom teaching. Yu felt her teaching methods were not well accepted when the school culture was not welcoming for creativities. According to Yu, there was a large group of old teachers in the schools, who "had different perspectives towards teaching."

Without much motivation to teach among other staff in the rural school, Yu felt everyone was just "muddling along". Nevertheless, Yu herself said she worked hard and won a series of teaching prizes. While she was pinning her hope on this opportunity to be transferred to an urban school, a sudden change in teacher policy extinguished her hope. According to the local teacher policy in 2011, the Education Bureau transfers excellent rural teachers to schools in the upper administrative level. However, the new plan in 2014 claimed that rural teachers were no longer allowed to move to urban schools without meeting higher requirement. Seeing that her efforts were in vain, Yu was heartbroken. A few months later, Yu's friend had informed her of the teacher recruitment in AIS. Since her previous professional achievements had equipped her to meet AIS' requirements, she was able to keep her *bianzhi* and status as a state teacher while teaching in AIS. "People march upward, (water flows downward). My father encouraged me to have a try," these said, Yu chose to "march upward". When I interviewed her, Yu was six months pregnant, and she was learning to be a mother. Although she felt anxious about motherhood, she told me she was grateful to her students, who still brought to her much joy: "My parents are very supportive of me, and my life is on the right path. I have everything I need, and I'm delighted."

- *Adapting to the new work environment*

When she began to teach in AIS, Yu was overwhelmed by the high requirements and heavy workload. The amount of time and efforts she needed to communicate and engage with her colleagues and her students' parents was overwhelming: "It was very challenging because students are different and the parents' backgrounds differ, too." As a young teacher, Yu felt unprepared and lacked confidence in addressing these issues. According to the school policy, teachers who transferred from the state systems were considered as experienced teacher and would not be assigned a mentor. Yu remembered the difficult times she had and the feeling of isolation and lack of support in the induction period: "Everyone seemed to be very ambitious [...]. However, I'm from a small village. It's simply impossible for me to be at the same level with others." Yu has received lots of support and encouragement from her family. She started to gain positive feedback from students' parents and was able to develop her confidence in front of different challenges: "I also told myself to be more decisive." As she described it:

> I often panic when I came across challenges because I consider myself to too young and inexperienced. No one cares about your age. As long as you show your capacity, you can then take more responsibilities. No one can help you step by step; you need to learn from doing. Maybe because of the attitude change, I'm much braver.

Yu said that she had become more open to others and felt safe to share her thoughts, questions and frustrations with colleagues and families. For Yu, the professional culture remains very friendly in AIS; this is also why she is determined to improve as a teacher and learn to enjoy the job.

- Teaching in the gap of theory and reality

As a maths teacher, Yu thinks her priority in teaching is to help students discover and solve mathematical problems. In the first of her first three years in teaching, Yu attended a few teacher-training conferences on the constructivist theories of learning. However, despite her appreciation of the theories, Yu thinks the real situation is challenging:

> This approach is beneficial to students, but here we still under pressure for examinations, so we tend to give more lecture times. It is challenging to implement such an approach. Students and parents do not have much spare time to spend on such a research project in group-based learning. [...] Plus, I'm a new teacher; I don't know how to integrate the pieces of knowledge together. I will need to learn more and have more experience before I can summarise the pieces of information into a holistic body of knowledge.

Yu perceived that what defines a professional teacher needs to be reconciled with the reality of the teachers' subject knowledge as well as the educational system in China, because teachers do not have enough time to pursue research projects with students, especially as they are also under pressure to help students do well in the examinations. This seemed to add to the burden for new teachers like herself. Nevertheless, Yu considers herself as a friendly teacher in the classroom. As she said: "I don't like following a fixed framework. I like my classroom to be relaxing. In this way, children will like to listen to you." She further mentioned that she likes to follow students' discussions and join their conversations without being led away. "Every teacher has his or her characteristics. In their eyes, I probably laugh a lot, which also helped to make students feel happy and active in class."

- ***Subject knowledge and flexibility in teaching.***

Yu thinks she needs to be more familiar with the textbooks and more flexible with her teaching order in her class. She remains largely reliant on teaching references, existing frameworks and others' suggestions. Yu hopes one day she can be like one of the school leaders, who she admires for his capacity to be flexible and adaptive to students. In addition to teaching, Yu thinks students' holistic development and parents' collaborations are key to teachers' success.

Yu considers herself as a new teacher in AIS, therefore not having concrete plans for long term career development. She believed in taking her responsibility for this job and her students: "I will try my best to be a good teacher and make the down-to-earth effort. If there are opportunities, I would love to learn more and join teaching competitions." Yu believes that teachers enjoy a high social status and society still has great respect for them. She reflected that the situation for rural school teachers has improved, although she thinks they used to be paid less. In response to my questions about the social scepticism on the authority of teachers, she said: "It is normal that some people will make mistakes, but it's important not to overgeneralise over a few cases and apply it to everyone."

Yu is a teacher driven to succeed and live a satisfactory life as a professional teacher. This orientation stemmed from her family, who encourage her to first become a capable and confident individual. She is a maths teacher who is oriented towards her professional community and committed to a set of professional values she sees as aligned with her personalities and preferences. Yu is highly aware of her own development in the early stages of her professional life. She chooses to be more engaged with professional activities under the vision of lifelong learning.

7.3 Introducing the Redwood Charity School (RCS)

RCS is located in the High-speed Rail Development Zone in the Southeastern area of Nanqi and is about 8.5 miles away from the city center. This area used to be a small village before the HRDZ was built. In 2001, the Jinghu (Beijing to Shanghai) High-speed Rail was opened to traffic. While building the supporting facilities, the local government initiated the planning and construction process to transform the village into a "new city" that serves as the window for visitors and investors to Nanqi for development of cultural communication and high technology industry. This area occupied an area of 13 square miles with the planning of 0.23 square miles distributed to set up educational facilities.

Redwood is a charity school that accommodates the educational needs of "sub-orphans" and impoverished children in Shandong province. Beginning in the 1990s, China has witnessed a growth of charitable organisations in education. Charity schools are particularly associated with the education of minority children, including children in poverty, children of migrant workers, and children with special needs and disabilities. There are two types of charity schools: the state charity school and private charity school. According to the State Council of China, impoverished children encapsulate the following: Children living in poverty who lack access to nutrition, education and medical care, etc.; children with disabilities and who have difficulties in recovering, receiving medical care and social integration; and children who are threatened or injured by abuse, abandon accidental injury or illegal infringement due to the lack of guardianship (2016). The concept of "sub-orphans" is used to distinguish a particular group of children, whose one parent had died or gone to prison and the second parent had relinquished his or her custody. Most of the sub-orphans would have grown up with their grandparents without being fostered, thus they would remain outside the national social security system and lack parental cares and sufficient financial support when they grow up.

Redwood is entirely financed by a real estate development company and operates as an "enterprise run school" (*Qi Ye Ban Xiao*). In 2005 and 2008 respectively, the same real estate company made donations to the General Assembly of Charity in Shandong to establish two charity schools. Each of the schools has about 40 to 50 teachers and 400 students. In 2015, RCS, the third charity school, was set up in Nanqi. According to the official introduction, RCS adopted the "6+3+2" model that both of the previous two schools had employed. Students receive 11 years of education including six years primary, three years lower secondary education and two years vocational training. In 2015, RCS has about 800 students, 23 classes and 40 teachers who work on a contract basis.

After receiving the permission to visit the school through personal connection, I took a taxi alone and began my fieldwork in Redwood. It was around 2 p.m. when I arrived and the

road to the school was empty. The front of the school gate was wide and deserted, facing which was a large construction area. All the school buildings followed the style of ancient Chinese architectures with gray colored brick walls and the Xiexhan Roof[45]. The classes had already started when I arrived. By the right side of the school, I saw a few small restaurants and shops on the road that leads toward the village. These small shops made the school look even more ornamental.

The school occupies about fifty thousand square meters. By the side of path to the main administration building were some small trees. A few displays stands with picture posters were also hanging inside. By the right and left side of path stood the large-scale indoor sports center and the dining hall. Despite the size of the campus, I rarely saw any cars or bikes inside. In front of the entry path was a large open area surrounded by three major spaces with mid-rise buildings: The administration building (the front), the dormitory space (the left) and the teaching buildings (the right). According to the principal, RCS has over 100 classrooms that can accommodate 3,000 to 3,500 students. The school corridors were furnished with white ceramic tiles, making the buildings look simple and clean. Compared to the two state schools I had visited; RCS was certainly more spacious. Behind the three teaching buildings which were still under construction. Sitting in the stone chairs, I faced a large outdoor sport area with an outdoor swimming pool, a sports ground with red plastic runway, two basketball courts and a few tennis courts. After classes, this space became the major area for students to play. Looking through the trees behind the area, small residential buildings of the village were still visible.

[45] Xieshan Roof is a type of roof in Chinese architecture with four slopes and two triangular vertical planes added on the lateral slopes. In terms of social position, this kind of roof is only next to the Hipped Roof (Wudian Roof) that's only used by royal family and Confucius.

Table 19 Characteristics of the Redwood School

Location	The high-speed rail development zone
Neighbourhood	Away from the city centre and a "new city" built in a village.
School finance	Funded by a real estate company and managed by its own educational officer.
School staffing	Determined by the company Mainly young teachers with high turnover rate
School facilities and equipment	Good facilities but short of classrooms and school spaces
Number of students	About 800 students
Number of teachers	About 40 contract teachers
School–parent relationship	Low level of school-parent engagement
Role of national curriculum	Remains dominant, while supplemented by extracurricular activities.
Staff support/ supervision	Strong and high intensity in training for *Dulangkou* model.
Focus of class reform	Promoting group learning, and encouraging students' engagements and focus on the learning outcome
Teacher job progression	Mainly rely on school rating system and is lack of job security.
Leadership	Instructional and administrative leadership style

7.4 Four teacher cases

7.4.1 Teacher D1- Linjia

Basic biographical information of Linjia

Age: late 20s

Gender: Female

Education: Bachelor of Art in Calligraphy (Normal College)

Current position: Math teacher

Years of teaching: 2 years

Linjia's hometown is a nearby county, while she had spent four years for her undergraduate degree in the Nanqi Normal University. Unlike many other teachers, Linjia studied calligraphy for her undergraduate degree. After that, she went back to her hometown and briefly worked for a small company, while her husband worked as a substitute teacher in a local state school. The unstable employment status did not seem to be satisfactory for this young couple. Linjia found that the pressure in a business environment was unsuitable to her personality, so she decided to teach in a private tutoring institute. At the same time, Linjia's husband left the state school to join the teaching staff of another campus of RCS. After that, Linjia became a full-time teacher in the same school. The following year, Linjia and her husband were transferred to the campus in Nanqi. Linjia told me that since she spent four years in college in Nanqi, she and her husband were both confident and excited about "coming back" in the beginning.

- ***Meeting students' multiple needs in learning and growing***

Linjia told me that RCS was the best-equipped school she had ever worked at. According to her, each class in RCS had about 35 students, with 4 to 5 teachers in charge of different aspects of the students' learning. Linjia was actively engaged with other administrative roles such as the Secretary of the Organisation of Youth League and the class master.

As a teacher in RCS, Linjia needs to meet multiple needs of her students. First of all, Linjia gave the priority to knowing her students and their individual circumstances. She claimed that this is because students in RCS had often lived in poverty and grown up without sufficient parental care and supports; due to this she felt many of the students had developed inappropriate behaviours and negative thinking.

> I have to be very careful with what I say to my students. Because once I make the mistake, I could hurt their feelings. Especially in this school, most of the students lost their fathers; hence the students and teachers are sensitive to the word "father". Although their mothers had remarried and somehow lost the closeness,

> they still come to visit the children. Therefore, I need to know the circumstances of every student.

Although it is said that a longer stay in the school can help making the word "parents" less sensitive to the students, Linjia often find her students remain traumatized by their early childhood experiences. She claimed that many of the students showed the symptoms of social anxiety. According to Linjia, simple social activities like giving out leaflets could easily upset students. Based on her observation, the teacher – student relationships in RCS are very different from other schools. She claims that students in RCS needed their teachers' attention and care much more than normal children.

Linjia was also expected to perform her role in communicating and providing pastoral care for her students. Nevertheless, she worried that her stern attitude toward students' problematic behaviours had become a barrier in building the close contact with children that she believed they need. Linjia criticised herself as a strong disciplinary teacher, who "rarely shows compassion towards students". She often feels frustrated by her tendency to be authoritative with students. Linjia reflected that her bad temper and impatience might be influenced by the culture of her own community, where "everyone was loud and direct":

> I have a direct personality [...] I'm loud and harsh. This is just what I grow up with in my hometown. Even our jokes can sound like a fight. Sometimes my tone can be firm when I was just scaring them, although I had never hit my students.

On the contrary, Linjia thinks being gentle and compassionate to students serves as a key measure of a successful teacher. Therefore, she often feels inadequate in incorporating the appropriate temperament she felt desirable to build close relationship with her students.

- ***Maintaining strong belief in education***

Linjia further explained that she had developed a strong belief on the long-term benefit of education. By the "long-term benefits", Linjia suggested that it's important for school education to help students secure proper jobs and therefore to live a more secure and so potentially a happier life. However, the labour market seems much less promising for her students. Linjia believes that one's employability in China is strongly dependent on one's academic degree. Although Linjia understands that most graduates of RCS will choose vocational education, she seemed uncertain and expressed much concern about her students' future employment prospect. In China, the technician training schools (TTS) are often considered as an option for those who are academically unprepared. Graduates from TTS often get paid less and are perceived as inferior in terms of their social status. Linjia's concerns for the students' future in the increasingly segmented society seemed to reinforce the internal conflicts she experiences in implementing the pedagogical reform. She further related the status quo with her own position in the labour market and the extent to which

her own experiences and background have had influenced her to reach higher academic potential.

> If you don't study hard, what could you do in the future? Particularly for this group of kids, I'm scared. I fear that they might embark on a wrong path; I fear that they might not have a future. What can they do?
>
> In China, even if you are the most skilled, you won't be able to find a job without a proper degree.

Linjia's strong belief in education seemed to be built upon the value of hard work and academic success in increasing the chances of obtaining a good job in one's future life. She wore a troubled look when she described her everyday experience in dealing with the expectation for her students. In addition, Linjia claims that students' confidence to express themselves and engage with others in schools and classrooms is the key to students' future. To motivate the students, Linjia believed that it would be helpful to set up standards and use positive and instrumental feedbacks to help students achieve better performances. Linjia believed that the school and classroom activities in the pedagogical reform encourages students to practice more public speaking and pushes them to engage with each other in learning and thinking:

> The reform is effective in some respects, such as public speaking and independent thinking. The classroom is different now. [...] Because teachers put more values on students' autonomy and presentation skills.

Reflecting on her own learning experience in college and social life afterwards, Linjia said she had benefited from learning how to communicate with others and understand situations to avoid attacks and frauds. In this aspect, Linjia's father and her friends had encouraged her and seemed to have important impacts on her understanding of learning. Although she was not a top student in term of her college academic performances, Linjia was confident that she had positive relationships with both her classmates and her teachers. Linjia seemed to have a similar expectation for her students. She believed it is important to put prior focus on students' personal development, especially fostering their self-confidence and communication skills.

To sum up, Linjia pointed three linked components of good education she strives for her students in RCS, namely 1) sufficient care and emotional and moral support; 2) promoting motivation and persistence in learning for future employability and 3) the importance of students' self-confidence and communication skills. To try to achieve these goals, Linjia felt she faced tremendous challenges and was restricted by her personality, her subject knowledge background as well as the context of the external social environment (i.e. high youth unemployment and the requirement of the recent pedagogical reform). The following section presents Linjia's perceptions of the problems she faced in implementing

the curriculum reform in her class and her reflection upon teachers' professional roles in the process. She further claimed that the curriculum reform does not necessarily benefit all students. For primary school students, she felt the change leads to unstructured learning experiences and might risk enlarging the academic gap among students. Without sufficient understandings, Linjia also found herself becoming controlling and felt frustrated in the classroom. This tension had furthered her reflection on her role as a teacher:

> How to say … I think the idea of what makes one a successful teacher has been changed. For example, we are used to the traditional teacher, who is often a learned person. The teacher was like walking dictionaries that can answer any question students ask, while the current model seemed to encourage teachers' capacity to cope with students' different situations in the unhurried manner. In terms of the flexibility in classroom, we need to be even more patient. This is especially the case for teachers.

According to Linjia, the teacher's role has been changed from being the authority of knowledge in classroom to be a patient and flexible companion for students. To become a good teacher, she believes she needs to become more patient with students in order to help improve students' wellbeing and confidence. Another aspect of change to teachers' working lives as a result of the curriculum reform, was the prolonged working hours. In RCS, teachers cannot finish their work until 9pm during the weekdays and were only offered a minor addition to normal wage.

- ***Learning to be a professional teacher***

Collaborating with other teachers is a part of Linjia's work in RCS. An important part of teachers' development activity that Linjia identifies is the collective class planning, where teachers are required to share their teaching plan and give demonstration classes in front of others before teaching in class in the second day. Linjia noticed that planning the course together with other teachers was crucial for her to add on her understanding of the content of curriculum; nevertheless, she only had one peer teacher to work with in the course of specific grade and specific subject, which seemed to weaken the effectiveness of the teacher collaboration. In addition, Linjia often feels the tension between her perceptions of her own performance and high expectations, especially when her teaching practices need to constantly be exposed on the stage. In a way, Linjia considered the strict requirements in the performance-based teacher training had actually restricted her flexibilities with different students, which often lead her students to feel unease in her classroom. "The principal told me that students feared me. They were only well behaved in the classroom because they are afraid of me, not because they respect me", she said this in a strangely calm voice as if she was talking about someone else.

Linjia believes that her knowledge on the subject matter is the main barrier she faces in becoming an effective teacher. According to her, much of the subject learning happened in informal contexts such as teacher collaboration and class observations, yet this training seems insufficient to solve more fundamental problem she faced in developing a comprehensive understanding of the textbook in the subject of math. Many times, Linjia said she had to rely on remembering her own school math learning when she prepares for the class. In her pursuit to become a professional teacher, some formal training opportunities on the subject knowledge might be of great benefit, especially when she faces the challenge of understanding the new national curriculum.

In addition to the subject matter knowledge, Linjia also seemed to feel unconfident to compare herself with teachers who could display his or her communication skills at work. In her school visit to the model school, Linjia found that "other teachers" were very fluent and confident in forming and presenting their thoughts on stage. "Our school did not do enough in this aspect". To make it more specific, she told me that she could talk to me in a research context, yet it would be too challenging for her to give a quotation or compose a poem on stage. "The fundamental issue is that we didn't read enough books", she said, "teachers in Du Langkou could write two essays every term". "Would it be too much work for you to write two essays each term?" I asked this question to show my understanding and to prompt for her further reflection upon the issue. "Surely we are different from teachers in other schools", she then turned her focus on the seemingly more pressing issue in her professional life: the long working hours and lack of personal time:

> For example, in that school, both teachers and students would have breaks during the weekend. But we are different. We are a boarding school and students have evening studying hours. Normally we have to stay in classroom till late in the evening.

One of the important influences on her professional growth is the school leadership. She described the school principal as having inspired her for acting on her words. In addition, Linjia's marriage also exerted an important influence on her commitment at work in RCS. She sees the benefit to work with her husband in the same school to help the children, despite the fact that the pay in RCS was not sufficient for a couple to purchase their own house and hence settle down in Nanqi.

- ***Teaching as an honourable job***

Linjia feels satisfied with the opportunities to work for the benefit of disadvantaged "orphan" students and believes in the potential of her students to success. She said, "Looking back at what I have achieved, I feel very proud relaying my experiences to others". She believes that students in private schools receive a more personal and effective education than those in state schools. Although she had not thought of the question of

"what it means to be a professional teacher", Linjia identified three aspects in the interview, that are: 1) a professional teacher needs to be a high-performer in every aspect of his or her professional life; 2) a professional teacher needs to be skilful in teaching; 3) a professional teacher must be a part of a professional body with assigned organizational roles.

Instead, Linjia told me that the school began to implement a teacher appraisal system through which the school board will assign teachers with stars according to the evaluation of their daily performances and based on classroom observations. Linjia first showed her understanding of implementing the system that it could motivate teachers and avoid what she conceived as a common mindset of just "earning a bread"[46] at work. Regardless of the satisfactions and in her charity work, the higher rate of pay (compared to rural state schools) and school initiatives to motivate teachers in RCS, Linjia still believes that state school teachers have more long-term benefits and security, such as the guaranteed salary and a state pension. She longed for a sense of security and membership inside the state system, which seemed to be the drive for her and her husband's decision and efforts to transfer to another school in the near future.

[46] 混饭吃

7.4.2 Teacher D2- Meng

Basic biographical information of Meng
Age: early 30s
Gender: Male
Education: Bachelor of Art in History (Normal College)
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 3 years

Meng is a male Chinese teacher in his early 30s. He majored in history at a Normal College who later had a winding career path. After failing his applications for a postgraduate programme in history, he became a substitute teacher in a rural school. Being paid very little and working on a short-term contract, Meng also felt marginalised in the school community. Two years after, Meng left the rural school and began to work at a small company. He returned to teaching after a year. "I still liked teaching", Meng explained. Although Meng never taught Chinese before, he applied himself by examining close reading of textbooks and teacher references materials (including online resources); asking experienced teachers for advice; and discussing the subject with friends and colleagues. Having taught for one year, Meng became familiar with the process of teaching Chinese. In his own words, "teaching became an ordinary work I could do with ease". Meng told me that he received much guidance from his colleagues when he felt frustrated at work. Meng found the collegial relationships in RCS very beneficial. According to him, teachers in RCS shared similar educational backgrounds and kindness, as he claimed:

> Now my relationships with colleagues are simpler than before. Unlike others, people in schools are not as complicated. Most of time, we do not have many conflicts. We choose to help each other, expecting nothing in return.

In this sense, multiple factors had contributed to Meng's decision to teach in a private school at the early stage of his career. These factors include Meng's past experiences, the social network for accessing teacher recruitment information, his educational background, as well as his personal preferences. Meng also enjoyed additional benefits such as teacher accommodation, school dining hall and sufficient personal time for reading and resting.

- Changing work attitudes

According to Meng, despite the absence of *bianzhi* status, teachers in RCS are actually more driven at work compared to teachers in the state school system. He added his own observation that the bottom line for state schools was "not to be absent and not to make mistakes", yet teachers in private schools are often more competent that those successfully transferred to state schools could soon become "backbone teachers" in the state teacher appraisal system. Meng also pointed out the team work and hopes for advancement are characteristics shared among teachers in RCS. By "advancement", Meng seemed to suggest teachers' active engagement in changing the classroom teaching, providing care for

students, improving students' academic performance and constructing a collective learning community:

> For example, teachers will think about the kind of class they want to create. Then they will consider how best to care for their kids (the students) and how to help them achieve higher in tests, how to make students [in the] class come to support each other. In these aspects, our teachers have been very focused.

Based on his observations and experiences of "shifting work attitude from passive to active" in RCS, Meng came up with two main influencing factors: the legitimate membership, and the influences of a competitive system. Firstly, Meng gained a legitimate status as a member of the school. He compared this with his past experiences as a substitute teacher:

> I didn't focus on my work as a substitute teacher. On the one hand, that job was only temporary; of course, I could not give all my efforts. On the other hand, I had no rights to participate, even when I wanted to correct and change things. Honestly, I was not in their system. As a helper, I do not think anyone would listen to me.

Working in RCS brought a "passive-to-active" shift in his work attitude. According to Meng, his transfer of status from a "helper" to a legitimate member had inspired him to become more accountable to his work and for his students. To a certain extent, the effect might also be from peer effects in the RCS school culture, as indicated in the following quote:

> Think about it. If everyone were driven and effective, yet I was the only one who procrastinates, how uncomfortable would that be?

Meng thinks the major difference that distinguishes private school teachers from state teachers is the possession of *bianzhi* status. Although Meng admits the benefits of having the state ***bianzhi*** status, that is teachers' higher social status and the sense of stability, he also thinks that it tends to cultivate sluggishness among state teachers and an aversion to change. Yet, Meng still aims to attain the status of *bianzhi* for the job security and perceived social status.

- ***Redefining learning and teaching***

When it comes to the question of what constitutes a good teacher, Meng believes one's knowledge base, sense of responsibility and lifelong learning are the keys. In addition, Meng defines effective communication as another aspect of successful teaching, due to the fact that many students in RCS have special needs. In the beginning of his career in this school, Meng felt frustrated by students' disobedience. Yet the change began to take place when Meng had slowly altered his understanding of these children and the meaning of

childhood. He explained that by telling a story about the genuine friendship between two disruptive students, Jie and Shan.

One day, Meng found both Jie and Shan were absent when the class was preparing for the school leave. He became irritated and ran to the student accommodation to fetch them. When he opened the door, Meng was shocked by what he saw. The two boys was bending their head, sewing an old and worn-out bag. Jie tore down the zipper from his old uniform and was trying to replace it with the broken one in Shan's old luggage bag. The genuine friendship between Jie and Shan had ever since changed Meng's attitude toward his students. "You can't see students in a single perspective," says Meng, "you need to see them from different angles." Meng told me that he become much more mature than before and he took this process as a learning experience:

> This is a learning process. One might have heard about others' ideas for hundreds and thousands of times, in the end, only when one actually experienced could one truly understand the principles.

Meng began to pay more attention to his students' life and wellbeing, he found that students responded to his change by trusting and opening up to him. He is very pleased that his students now liked to ask questions and seek his support. Gradually, he had become more reflective and had adapted his approach to suit the unique characteristics of students' background in RCS. As he further described: "Regardless of age, every child is an individual being. Irrespective of the roles and situations, we should be equal, and you should communicate with them on the same footing". Meng feels proud of changing his students' lives. Students' personal as well as professional progress seemed to give Meng the strongest sense of achievement at work. Meng further commented that the fundamental problem in sub-orphan students is the lack of sense of identity and belonging, therefore it is difficult to have equal and open communications.

- ***Rethinking the curriculum reform***

Since last May, RCS began to implement the curriculum reform, which occupies most of Meng's working as well as personal time. He said he could only get 5 hours' sleep every day. To successfully implement the curriculum reform, the school board had advocated the policy of collective class preparation, which requires teachers to present and critically discuss their teaching plans in the evening. During the day, teachers are expected to observe each other's classroom teaching, mostly without chairs. "My leg was sore after standing against the wall for an entire day," Meng complained. The curriculum reform has also changed his lifestyle in RCS.

All of the participant teachers mentioned the lack of sleep and long hours of work since the curriculum reform introduced to RCS in the year 2015. I've been told that teachers need to

stay in their office until midnight to jointly prepare the classes with each other. The school requires teachers to be in their classroom at 6.30 am during the workdays, hence teachers need to get up very early to prepare for the day. The strict and tight schedule in schoolwork had become both psychologically and physically challenging.

> We are very busy. The beginning was a mess. We just keep going and going. There's no spare time. There is this one time when I didn't drink one sip of water for an entire day.
>
> We are not allowed to sit when we observe other teachers' classes. We have to stand there and take notes. I remember I had to stand for an entire day and my legs became sore.

To reflect upon the implementation of curriculum reform, Meng agrees that the student-centered pedagogy in collaborative learning is beneficial to students' learning, yet he was also concerned of the overloading for students to meet the assessment standard. Meanwhile, he thought students could become restless and hyperactive which in turn caused more conflicts in classrooms, and this may not lead to a stable development of students' abilities in the long term.

Meng thinks that the strong public belief in education's power to change one's destiny and future life makes teaching a stressful and "high-risk occupation"[47] in China. As he claimed that teaching in China is often seen as demanding as medical treatment in the hospital. However, in the era of policy changes, Meng argues that teachers are often passively represented. The reputation of the teaching profession, according to Meng is suffering from the changing social trend in seeking quick success and instant benefits. "It is important for us to have a firm conscience and show our responsibilities", said Meng. Meng has witnessed the children living in poverty in RCS and he felt angry and anxious about the increasing gap in people's income in China. As he mentioned, "China's economic growth has cultivated a group of capitalists who wring every ounce of sweat and blood out of ordinary people". In contrast, Meng admires the development of philanthropy and sound charity laws that he felt were found in some other "foreign countries."

[47] 高危职业

7.4.3 Teacher D3 -Wei

Basic biographical information of Wei
Age: late 20s
Gender: Male
Education: Bachelor of Art in Physical Education (Normal College)
Current position: PE teacher
Years of teaching: 1 year

Wei was trained as a physical education (PE) teacher, who minored in Chinese literature in a Normal College. As a football player, he is always passionate about PE and teaching football. In college, Wei admired his coach, Guo, who was an outstanding football player and has many years of coaching experiences. Coming from the Northeastern China, Guo had exerted significant influence on Wei as a migrant teacher. He told Wei that he used to be bullied, yet this didn't make him a man of hatred and violence. In contrast, Guo became a very good teacher and had successfully coached players from all around China. From Guo and his own experiences in playing football, Wei acquired a firm attitude toward life. He explained that in college, he learned "a mindset, a consumption view, a lifestyle, social relation, and an attitude toward adversity." Wei used three key words to represent his understanding of his purpose and personal identity: ambition, courage and high spirit. "If you don't have the spirit, it's like a body without bones. You could never stand". For Wei, life is like a football game. "You can't live without these three things."

- ***Negotiating personal passion and job security***

To begin with, Wei enjoyed the spare time in RCS, which he could use to plan for his own coaching program. During the weekend, Wei and his friends would train students outside of school. He told me that ideally, he would like to open a football centre and run it during the vacations. The school reform came into place suddenly in the autumn of 2015, and after this Wei became much more occupied with schoolwork. His teaching and football-coaching career no longer seemed to be compatible. During term times, he had to ask for leave to play, which did not seem to be sustainable for him to work in RCS. Wei had considered leaving RCS because of the growing workload; however, the career of a private coach could be riskier for him to manage. Wei has been hesitating and the situation became even worse for him. "Maybe I would never realize my dream", Meng said.

- ***Personal learning in time of change.***

He is the class master for one of the biggest class in the school (N=39) in grade two, so he had to spend most of his working hours taking care of students' wellbeing, such as "taking them for hairdressing one day, and taking them for showering the other day". The school reform had changed the focus of Wei's work. As he describes, the nature of his work had

changed from merely care work to educational work: "We not only need to make sure they eat well, but to be educated, to have aspirations and to be happy". As the vision of the school reform became clearer, Wei began to embrace the change and compare the current focus of his work to that of the past. "My life is tiring, but no longer bitter", says Wei, "I'm growing everyday". Wei draws on multiple cultural and political concepts to demonstrate his sense of agency in professional learning, which is interestingly also connected with his commitment in working at RCS:

> I need to change myself. At least I should not reject the change. I told myself that I could always teach in all kinds of different ways [...] As long as I'm good enough, like a martial arts expert, I don't need to fear any structural change. I don't have to fight with swords or pike; a stick is good enough for me to win the battle. Why is this? Because I'm strong enough. "One must be strong to forge iron".

The idea of oneself as a martial art expert might be developed from both the dramatic change at work and his educational background in PE. Nevertheless, Wei used a powerful metaphor in his narrative of his school life to reveal how he aims to interact with the pedagogical changes. Instead of defining himself by what he does or belongs to, Wei tended to focus on the extent to which he could be resilient and learn from challenging circumstances in the future:

> Why would I be worried about any pedagogical models if I can improve my own capacity (to learn)? I knew from the beginning that I could override all pedagogical models. The problem I have is that I can't achieve that now. So, I choose to stay here to learn it, so I can master this approach and be able to apply it. Once could do this, I then don't have to stay here anymore. If I'm good enough, I can work anywhere and still be a successful teacher. If I failed this small test, I probably won't be successful anyway. I want to challenge myself and if can achieve my target, it would be a win-win situation.

In this case, teachers' professional identity became highly flexible, which is also intertwined with a strong sense of personal growth. Wei suggested that a teacher who conquered his fear of public speech inspired his learning about new pedagogy. A change that others had made could also inspire Wei to constantly make changes himself.

- ***Autonomy and roles***

As a young teacher, Wei is also asked to do some administrative works, such as making PowerPoint files for school events and organising teacher meetings. Due to the constant change of teachers for this class, Wei might also need to teach Chinese from next term. As his position is not yet decided, Wei needs to go about several tasks at a time.

“I hate being told what to do”, Wei said. He seemed to demonstrate his direct and autonomous personality. He also refuses to be expected to be perfect and prefer being one that “could demonstrate your special ability and characteristics” as a teacher. “Out of 3000 students of Confucius, only 72 could stand out”, said Wei, “not mentioning that I am just a ordinary man”. Wei further noticed that the curriculum reform requests not only led to change in teachers’ roles but also in the mindset. For him, keeping an open mind and retaining his autonomy in using the models is the key to lead to a satisfactory work life as well as an authentic life as a teacher. Ultimately, he is longing for freedom in his life: “We are like kites. If we want to fly higher, we need that link. For example, if I’m married, I will need my love and responsibility for my kid; for me, my determination, my vision and my confidences are the link. Without this, I might fly for a few days, but I will fall down few days later”.

In general, Wei thinks that being a teacher means better social welfare benefits, higher income as well more personal time with families in the long term. He wants to follow his plan to run his own football club. According to Wei, the best and most secure path would be to become a state teacher, as he believes it would give him more possibilities “to do my own thing”.

7.4.4 Teacher D4 - Ting

Basic biographical information of Ting
Age: late 20s
Gender: Female
Education: Bachelor of Art in Fine Art (Normal College)
Current position: Chinese teacher
Years of teaching: 1 year

Ting is a first year Fine Art and Chinese teacher in RCS. Ting was born in county Sishui in Shandong and migrated to a far-western province with her parents. She grew up in Gansu until the age of primary school. She received her first year of primary education in Gansu province before returning to Shandong due to family reasons. Coming from a background of a migrate child, she defined herself as less academically capable than other students in her class. She told me her classmates often laughed at her for her rather rustic dressing. Even her teacher did not show sympathies and support to her. "My teacher didn't even want to look at me", Ting looked very disappointed. Her traumatizing experiences in primary school led her to become socially anxious. We met in front of the teaching building in my second day of fieldwork in RCS. When I met her, she looked like a confident and caring person.

- ***Exerting positive influences on students***

As a past victim of school bullying as a student herself, she said she wants to make a difference to the life chances of vulnerable students such as those catered for by RCS in her career as a teacher. She thinks that keeping a positive attitude to deal with students' disruptive and bullying behaviours in school is an important way of shaping students' character development:

> "We need ten years for good teaching and a hundred years for good nurturing"[48], right? Education is a long-term process. What we do at one time might influence students for a while, but to shape a character needs constant influence. Of course, everyone has different characteristics, but if I keep my positive attitude, I can support their personal growth in the long term.

The notion of personal influence emerged as an essential component of teachers' professional identity in RCS. Like other participant teachers, Ting hopes to exert a constant and positive influence on their students' character development and future employability. This seems to be a fundamental principle that guides one to become a good teacher in RCS:

> Students in this school are very different from others. I want them to have a healthy mindset rather than thinking of themselves as victims of the society. From

[48] 十年树木，百年树人

> this perspective, I can be a good teacher if every student in my class became strong and calm enough to deal with difficulties and instabilities in their life. I will define that as my success. Rather than improving their academic performances, I think they need to be tough first. Otherwise, it will be tough for them to survive in the society

In her view, to successfully exert personal influences requires the capacities to build a good rapport with students, which seems to be challenging for other participant teachers from RCS.

- ***Influence of others***

Ting told me that before she met her best friends at high school and the college, Ting had been a very introverted person. The change in her life took place after she transferred to a school in her hometown, where she found security and happiness. In her own words: "Because there was no insolence, no isolation, so I could be really happy". She enjoyed her college life with some of her best and most extrovert friends. After graduating from college in county N, Ting found a teaching position in a private tutoring institute (PTI). In the PTI, Ting worked overtime and was ill-paid. She also thought that her relationship with her students and their families were often jeopardised by the commercial nature of her work. Most importantly, Ting realized that she simply could not afford her living expenses in Nanqi by working as a private tutor.

In 2015, Ting decided to accept her friend's advice to work in RCS. The free teacher accommodation in RCS alleviated Ting's financial pressure for living. She now has a busy life in RCS. As a Class Master of one class in grade four, Ting is very conscious of the fact that many of her students' particular family backgrounds would hold them from flourishing academically. In teaching, Ting used to focus on the organization of the content; while after the curriculum reform, she noticed that she needs to "cultivate students' active learning, self-management and deep understanding". "I must be very passionate when I teach. That's what defines successful classroom teaching", Ting said. The application of new teaching techniques including asking student's practice and demonstrate their work in classes was very helpful for Ting to achieve her goal. She also thinks it is important for students to collaborate in their groups, which in turn could help to develop their own learning community. Like Linjia, Ting was also concerned about the issue of discipline. According to her, the combination of the "vividness" and "discipline" in class became the everyday challenge.

- ***"Nurturing" is crucial***

In addition to her role to organise and facilitate the effective classroom teaching and learning, Ting defines her priority as making sure that all her students could become healthy and confident. Hence Ting has to spend lots of her energy in pastoral care and life

coaching. During the interview, she mentioned about the feeling of closeness she shared with her students. Ting told me that one day, when she went to school dining hall to have lunch, a student sitting near the South Gate burst into tears. Ting walked to her to calm her down. “Tell me what happened, maybe I could help?” Ting asked. The student raised her head and looked at Ting’s face and said: “I want to see my grandparents; I’m scared I won’t see them again”. Ting wondered what had happened, so she kept asking for more information. It turned out that the student learned from her uncle that her grandma is in the hospital. The student became extremely anxious and worried about losing her grandma. Since then, Ting would often find and talk to this student. “This kind of things happens here every day”, Ting told me. Once before, Ting had a self-harming student in another class. When he receives criticisms from teachers, he would often hit himself. “Why would you do this? Why can’t you be kind to yourself?” Ting asked him and talked with him for a long time. Afterwards she will allow the student to find a quiet place to let off his feelings. This seemed to work for Ting and this student. “Whenever he feels down, he will find a place to be alone”. According to Ting, the student’s condition seemed to be improved. There are many other students who are under severe pressure to become academically capable and competitive. She said many of them have very low-self-esteem. Ting would show her sympathy to these students when they feel low. She often tells her student that it is important to study, but more importantly, they need to be happy. “In this school, it’s not just about teaching, it’s about sharing most of your love with your students”, Ting said.

Ting thinks that she plays three key roles in RCS: the teacher, the family member and the life coach. She mentioned the Chinese proverb “Jiao Shu Yu Ren[49]” defines the teachers’ roles as to “teach the texts and nurture the person”. What Ting understands is that “teach the texts” is important, but “nurture the person” is crucial. She believes that the formation of her students’ personalities is rooted in their daily encounters and experiences. “I hope I could somehow influence them by showing them how I deal with problems and difficulties in life”, Ting said. She hopes her students will find happiness in learning and have a strong mindset and develop their critical thinking skills to face future challenges. “I need them to become tough, that defines my success”. Although her parents still encourage her to become a state teacher, she thinks, “Every job is the same, no matter where it is”.

[49] 教书育人

Summary

Findings in this section show distinct characteristics of the interaction between teachers' identity and professional learning. It is important to note here that this research does not focus on teachers' learning on a particular event context; instead, by paying attention to individual teachers' personal experiences in general, I hoped to gain a holistic view of how teachers make sense of their learning experiences at multiple levels, be that physical, emotional, cognitive or spiritual.

All the participant teachers in the AIS were female teachers and they had *bianzhi* status, yet they had diverse professional and personal experiences of teaching. During the data collection process, teachers were actively engaged with the questions. Two teachers (Cong and Yu) had worked in rural schools for 15 years and three years, respectively, before quitting their job and transferring to AIS; Zhulin and Baihe only had short-term experiences in state schools. The four teachers shared most similarities in their personal experiences of being a professional teacher (see Table 21). They were: 1) committed to students' learning and holistic development; 2) developing a sense of satisfaction and happiness in teaching; 3) facing challenges in taking additional responsibilities in the school context and engaging students in extracurricular activities; and 4) acknowledging the importance and influences of students' parents for their work. In terms of their professional development, all four teachers' narratives demonstrated a sense of actualisation of personal potential, or a sense of personal development, and the core of professional knowledge and skills to achieve their ambitions (see Table 22). Teachers did not seem to share the same perception of how the teaching profession is perceived in policies and society in general. Teachers' perceptions seemed to vary according to the extent that their carrier choices and personal lives had been influenced by changes to and restrictions on teacher policies. Throughout the analysis, I also noticed the stronger influence of school leadership and school vision in influencing TPIs, as compared to teachers' in the first school case (the Willow School). A more comprehensive comparative analysis will be presented in Chapter 8 in the final thesis.

The section of 7.4 helps to understand the employment pursued by participant teachers from a private charity school in China. These four teachers choices to teach in RCS seem to be the outcome of a combination of multiple factors, including employment opportunities, family reasons, gender-roles, persona social connections etc.. After graduating from normal schools, the teachers did not think they had had many employment choices. Two teachers (Linjia and Meng) had worked in private enterprises, while the others had worked as private tutors/trainers (Wei and Ting) in tutoring centers. As introduced before, bianzhi plays a core role in the public management system. Having a position that is defined by bianzhi also means one occupies the tenure and have a number of other benefits. In addition, it is closely associated with prestige and social status. Although all four teachers

showed a strong sense of work ethics that seems to distinguish them from state teachers in the study, they still think having ***bianzhi*** is a vital element of a stable income and a better life. Teachers from RCS frequently described ***bianzhi*** as an "iron rice bowl" which is a term invented in the era of planned economy period to indicate the employment relations between workers and the state and as an economic control means. Participants from RCS did not choose to work in the private educational sector; instead, their job in this private charity school serves as a transferring step to practice teaching and prepare themselves to work in state schools.

In terms of the content of professional learning, teachers added on to the professional knowledge by pointing out their improved emotion management levels and stronger sense of resilience and purposes in teaching as they developed. An interesting finding from the analysis is that the two female teachers tend to make sense of their self-efficacy in managing students' behaviours by their gender identities. For example, Linjia commented on the barriers she faced due to the biological difference between male and female teachers. Her observation that most of the teacher who bellows at students are female teachers made her think that the work of managing classes is more suitable for male teachers. According to her, male teachers are normally relaxed and tolerant.

The analysis also generated some common characteristics of RCS teachers' perceptions of their professional identities and experiences of professional development in the school context. All the four RCS teachers had strengthened their commitment to students' learning and holistic development as the goal of their teaching. To do so, teachers need to build close relationships with students and provide sufficient pastoral cares for their students with special needs. All four teachers emphasized an ethic of care in their work, and some had considered themselves taking the role of parents to their students. Yet, three teachers (Linjia, Meng and Ting) had shared their concerns about the students' future employability and mental health, which also seemed to be a potential threat to teachers' stable sense of professional identities.

In terms of teachers' professional development, the labour-intensive and time-consuming process of implementing the curriculum reform appeared to affect RCS teachers' morale and long-term well-being adversely at work. In addition to this, the four teachers also seemed to find the individual-focused pedagogy advocated by the reform a challenge to their practices to maintain the overall academic progress among students. Others find it difficult to main the classroom discipline when they were organizing learning activities.

As the part of the cross-case comparative analysis, the following discussion summarizes two forms of care that can be defined in RCS teachers' narratives:

1. ***Pure altruistic care***: care as the selfless act that is provided unconditionally to others in need. Pure altruism indicates the strong devotion from the care giver to the care receiver,

which often involves the care self-sacrifice and even self-denial. Although it can give the teacher a strong sense of achievement for what they are doing, it can be problematic for its potential to undermine teachers' sense of autonomy and self-esteem:

If they don't study hard, what could they do in the future? Particularly for this group of students, I'm scared. I fear that they might embark on a wrong path; I fear that they might not have a future. What can be done for them?" (Linjia)

2. ***Reciprocal care:*** Reciprocity can be understood as behaviour in which two people or groups of people give each other help and advantages. Much is known about the ways in which children need to be cared for, while little is discussed about how care can be mutually beneficial for and among both teachers and students. In the four teachers' narratives, teachers mentioned about the positive emotional experiences they have when students are active in seeking their help and showing their affection, some of the teachers even find it is empowering and educational for themselves:

> Some students could understand me. He/she knows that my job is to help. Sometimes they do things that touched my heart. They even made me cry once. They are excellent kids. (Linjia)
>
> I get angry when I am teaching this group of students, while most of the time I am happy for the affections from my students [...] Last time when I forgot my umbrella, a student said to me: "Teacher, please take this umbrella, I can share one with my classmate." They are terrific kids. It is impossible to avoid anger because they are just kids. But we have more affection. (Ting)
>
> That kid is naughty, but he takes care of his classmates. He never allows other people to bully his classmates. He likes to do the cleaning for the class. Regardless of how massive the work is, he will be the first one to get it done. From this, I can see he has many good qualities. I really need to see my students from multiple aspects. (Meng)

Although teachers in RCS have not been involved in the early formation of their students' lives, they nevertheless feel they can play important roles in these children' development. Relationships within which only the teachers are regarded as having something to offer might not be ideal for their professional growth. Reciprocal relationships within which both students and teachers are considered as capable of caring for others seem to bring dignities and hopes in teachers' work in RCS. This is a finding that is in line with recent feminist writing on relational autonomy that recognizes that autonomy develops out of relationships (Mackenzie and Stoljar, 2000). Keeping close connections through reciprocal relationships with their students have the potential to enable teachers to build and maintain resilience and sense of being in control of their school lives. Therefore, we might suggest that as well as providing instructional pieces of training in classroom teaching,

schools and teacher education programs could support the development of reciprocally caring environments for learning and teachers' capacity for self-care as well as instructions for establishing supportive relationships with their students. It is important to note there that although it may be particularly useful for teachers to build long-term care relationships that are mutually beneficial, such environments might be difficult to maintain given the specific students' backgrounds. Nevertheless, these dynamics of the caring relationship between teacher and students might need to be addressed particularly in a system based on teachers' performances and peer competitions.

Chapter 8: Comparing private school TPIs

Studies have illustrated that the process and organisation of schools tend to reflect the socio-economic backgrounds of the communities and families they serve. That is to say, the agency of teachers and school leaders is not the only contributing factors influencing the activities and social relations in the schools. For the most part, teachers and school leaders experience the local context and school organisations that might restrict or enable their work and the ways in which they can exercise their agency. A better understanding of the local contextual complexity could therefore help us to understand the process of TPI formation. This section aims to compare and contrast themes emerging from the PSTs' narratives with a particular focus on the influence of school contexts. As presented in detail in the previous chapters, the two private schools extend and complement each other inside the current categories of private education in China, as they represent both a socially advantaged school (the international school) and a socially disadvantaged school (the charity school).

Table 17 illustrates the contexts of teachers' experiences and summarises the differences and similarities between the two private schools. Ash was an international fee-charging school that was managed by a private educational corporation. It was located in the high-technology industrial development zone between the county and city. Founded and permitted by the government, the Ash school was allowed to hire foreign teachers and promote an international curriculum. It was a selective school and considered attractive for well-off parents. The school leader described how the wealthy professional parents at Ash constituted a different demographic from that found at many primary schools. Having the parents' support was helpful financially and socially for Ash. At the same time, the parents were ambitious for their children and could sometimes be very demanding of the school for their children's academic progress.

In contrast, the Redwood is a disadvantaged private school that was founded and fully funded by a private real estate company to accommodate the sub-orphan students' learning needs. The school's teachers were recruited by the school directly and were working on contract basis. Table 20 summarised the comparative characteristics of AIS and RCS.

Table 20 Summary of the comparative characteristics of AIS and RCS

	Ash International School	*Redwood Charity School*
Location	A high-technology industrial development zone between the county and city	A high-speed rail development zone that is away from the city centre.
Neighbourhood	Wide, newly built road and scattered residential areas, high office building and large blocks for industrial purposes	A rural village that is in transformation to a "new city" to serve as the new window for visitors and investors.
School finance	Determined by the government and supplemented by profit from tuition fees. Decrease in government funding and increase in private funding.	Determined by the private real estate company.
School staffing	Initially recruited through local government as bianzhi teachers and moving to contract-based employment	Contract-based employment
School facility and equipment	Large campus with very good facilities	Large campus with new and functioning facilities.
Number of students	3,000 students (K-12) about 30 students per class.	800 rural orphan students (K-12) about 30 students per class
Number of teachers	300 Chinese teachers 40 foreign teachers	40 contract-based teachers
School-parent relationships	Mixture of high engagement and low engagement	Low engagement
Choose of curriculum	National curriculum supplemented by international curriculum and a wider range of school-based curriculum and extracurricular activities. Parents can choose between class types.	Shifting from an independent school-based curriculum that meet students' psychological needs to a mainstream model that focus on implementing national curriculum.
School culture	Promoting life skills, encouraging students to express and participate in a wide range of school activities; setting high standards for academic progress.	Promoting group learning and improving academic outcomes.
Teacher job progression	Same as state teachers with bianzhi.	Lack of job security; career progression depends on internal appraisal system.
Leadership	Instrumental and administrative leadership style.	Instrumental and administrative leadership style.

8.1 Narratives of students' learning and development

All the eight PSTs demonstrated their commitment to supporting students' academic and moral development. All teachers addressed the significance of students' learning needs in defining their professional values, which seemed to reflect a fundamental element of their professionalism. Nevertheless, different teachers seemed to take a range of positions in their narratives of students' needs, which seemed to be related to their professional attitudes, job involvement and professional images. Below is the list of students' needs which these teachers addressed in their narratives:

- Students need care and love.
- Students need to learn flexibly and actively.
- Students need to become responsible for their behaviour.
- Students need to develop their planning, social and vocational skills for future education and employment.
- Students need to have positive social relations and guidance on moral and emotional development.
- The sub-orphan students need a role model who leads and guides them to make changes to their learning and lives.
- Students need to live in an open and safe environment, one where they can be respected and feel that they are being treated fairly and hopeful.
- The sub-orphan students need better opportunities for their career development and long-term well-being.
- Students' need guidance, support and positive influences from family.

Positive teacher–student interactions seemed to be one of the significant contributing factors to the eight PSTs' sense of achievement and satisfaction at work. These teachers' perceptions and engagement strategies, however, seemed to differ according to school contexts in meeting students' learning and development needs, which is closely connected to teachers' professional roles and identities. This section organises the findings according to the various themes and summarises the commonalities and differences in the TPIs between the two groups of PSTs under each theme. I will summarise the implications for the current understanding of these private school TPIs at the end of this section.

The case of RCS

The four teachers from RCS considered schooling as the key to helping students cultivate a strong mind and a healthy lifestyle for happier and more satisfying lives in the future. To achieve the development vision for the sub-orphan students, all the participant teachers from RCS addressed their roles in cultivating students' moral development for their future success. Ting (D4) and Wei (D3) claimed that teachers needed to take the role of family members, role models as well as life

coaches to inspire students. As Ting stated: "I need to do my work wholeheartedly. When my students see what I do, they will follow." Wei and Linjia (D1) also share their observation of students' great potential for good friendships and understanding with each other, which gives them a great deal of confidence in their students' potential for success in guiding students to enhance their motivation and pursue academic progress.

Nevertheless, all the participant teachers from RCS faced challenges in their everyday interactions with students and classroom management. Due to the sub-orphan students' poor mental health given their low-income family backgrounds and lack of social support, these teachers have to cope with a wide range of disruptive behaviour and emotional demands and identity crises in their teaching. The RCS teachers' work seemed to be heavily involved in correcting students' disruptive behaviour, helping with students' low self-esteem and building teacher–student relationships with mutual trust. Communicating with students became extremely challenging in RCS, so that teachers often needed to be more engaged with students at a very personal level. The absence of parents and a low level of engagement of other family members in the schoolchildren' s education also meant that teachers felt that they need to take over substitute roles as close family members.

In this context, all the RCS teachers' narratives demonstrated a strong sense of empathy through the secure connection between their personal experiences in schools and colleges and their visions for students' moral development in RCS. Wei, for instance, told the story of his college coach, who inspired him to develop his ambition and personal integrity in the face of life challenges; Ting considered her devastating experiences of school bullying as a student herself as a driving force for her to make a difference for her students; and Linjia acknowledged both her failure in academic performances and success in engaging with others in college as examples (both negative and positive) to motivate her students in both their academic studies and socialisation. In this sense, teachers consider themselves as empathic agents sharing similar experiences, therefore having a sense of mission to shape disadvantaged students' moral compass. Ting's statement is a vivid example of this:

> This [the bullying] had happened to me before, so I must stop this from happening again to my students [...] They must be strong-minded; they must know they are no worse than others.

Like other teachers from RCS, Ting intended to demonstrate her standing in guiding her students to move on from their personal sorrow and self-pity without parental support and given social stereotype as the sub-orphans. Such an endeavour is closely connected with teachers' sense of professional identities as educators, often with a strong sense of the acceptance of uncertainty as a unique feature and opportunities of teachers' work. Wei's comparison between an educator and a mechanic is an example of such acceptance of the risks and imperfections that being a professional teacher involves:

> Human beings are subject to changing moods and have mixed feelings. A machine might never develop a sense of identity. However, we, as educators, could affect students with our thoughts and spirit. It is easy. However, I always can minimise the negative impacts.

The case of AIS

All participant teachers from AIS took teaching as their first job and had generally longer teaching experiences than those from RCS. Teachers' previous experiences differ regarding the kind of schools they had worked at before AIS. Baihe and Zhulin had worked in private schools; Yu and Cong had transferred from state schools.

Despite the differences in these teachers' career paths, teachers seemed to have developed similar focuses for their narratives of students' learning. They highlighted the importance of students' interests, curiosity and learning habits, as well as building individual character and moral qualities. Teachers often considered the attention and guidance given to individual students as the merit of private schools, hence as distinctive characteristics of their professional identities, as Baihe described:

> The difference between a state school and a private school is that here we focus on details and address students' individual character development, their feelings and living habits, etc. We care for students' development, while state schools (do not) because they have too many students. They focus on the shared characteristics rather than individual situations. At least concerning the subject of Chinese, I think private schools show higher quality in stratified teaching and considerations for students' personal development.

The international school teachers' narratives seemed to be less engaged with their personal learning experiences when it came to students' learning and development. Instead, these teachers addressed the influence of the school's global visions, school leadership and parents' lifestyles in shaping their personal lives and sense of professionalism. In this sense, being a teacher is no longer limited to seeing oneself as a professional practitioner in the context of formal schoolwork but as being represented as members of a community where they are engaged to be positively influenced by other stakeholders (i.e. school leaders, parents and students). The role change was particularly significant for Yu and Cong, who used to teach in rural state schools. They considered that teaching in AIS has helped them "upgrade" their professional knowledge as well as the quality of their own lives. Such an adaptive attitude is also reflected in teachers' agreement about the superiority of the international curriculum and the roles of foreign teachers in bringing about better academic outcomes and improving students' cognitive and communication skills (see next section). This can be identified in Cong's claim:

> I will certainly recommend the international class for parents. Although foreign teachers do not give students as much content knowledge as in the preparatory courses, students can become more confident and creative.

As members of the sub-group of native "Chinese teachers" in the international school context, participants in this research also tended to perceive themselves as being stricter with classroom discipline. As the teachers described, Chinese teachers tend to be more direct in pointing out students' mistakes and giving criticism when necessary (Zhulin, Baihe, and Cong).

> Because of the cultural and language barriers, it takes longer for foreign teachers to become familiar with Chinese students. So, in this aspect, Chinese teachers are better.

Nevertheless, these teachers also tended to take the adaptive approach to understand their roles in the school and showed less tension with regards to the school's strategies for students' learning and development.

> Now we belong to the culture of an educational cooperation, I had expanded my vision and changed my attitudes. As a result of this, I developed a better understanding of parenting and children. (Cong, maths teacher, 20 years)

8.2 Narratives of the curriculum

The case of RCS

The implementation of the school curriculum is a crucial influence on teachers' experiences in the two private schools. The charity school was going through a period of significant organisational transformation, from the school-based curriculum for orphan students to implementing the Dulangkou model with a strong focus on the national curriculum. Teachers were invited to attend talks, pay school visits and carry out classroom observation to learn techniques to improve classroom effectiveness and students' academic outcomes. During the interview, teachers identified a series of benefits and challenges of the curriculum reform as presented in table 21:

Table 21 Teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the curriculum

Benefits	Challenges
• Group collaboration activities that help students to learn from peers. • Tools that support teachers' assessment of students' academic progress. • Engagement of students to develop communication and presentation skills.	• The inadequacy of the objectives and activities to meet students' cognitive development needs. • The managerial approach of curriculum implementation and heavy workload. • The lack of evaluation in measuring the effectiveness of the curriculum change. • Lack of teachers' professional autonomy.

On the one hand, teachers hold mixed perceptions of the curriculum change. The implementation process is also tightly connected with the teacher appraisal system, under which teachers are assessed based on their capacity and performance in implementing the curriculum reform. According to the interviewees, the school will select outstanding teachers and award a position in the new school with *bianzhi* status. Teachers seemed to take different views of the external motivation in their narrative. For instance, Linjia's narrative demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to the career path in the school, yet others seemed to distance themselves from the school policy and to prioritise teaching in the mainstream state schools in their career perspectives.

> I want to try my best to go to the new school. (Linjia, maths teacher, 2 years)

Despite the external motivation, teachers often feel pressured and showed a certain level of resistance to implement the curriculum reform.

> The reform requires a student to be an independent learner who is capable of doing his or her research or preview before classes, yet most students are not capable of doing so. I also don't think students need to do written demonstration every day or at every level. (Meng, Chinese teacher, 3 years)

All four teachers had pointed out the adverse impact of their heavier workload and showed a lower level of satisfaction concerning the significant drop in free time during the curriculum reform. Such a change, according to the teachers, could also cause unnecessary stress for students. Meanwhile, teachers (Linjia, Meng, and Wei) expressed their sense of inadequacy and confusion

concerning peer pressure, professional training backgrounds, subject knowledge and communication skills.

> Teachers in this school push themselves hard at work [...] If everyone is doing their best, I would feel bad not to do so. (Meng, Chinese teacher, 3 years)

> I had graduated from college for so long. I'm not very confident in my subject knowledge for teaching the higher grade, though I was pretty good at maths in college. Plus, the textbooks are different from the one I used in schools. (Linjia, maths teacher, 2 years)

> I always have some distance from my students because I'm very strict. I want to correct students' behavioural problems before they become more significant issues. My students are scared of me in the beginning. I am also very loud and tend to speak in a direct way. (Linjia, maths teacher, 2 years)

The case of AIS

When it comes to teachers' perceptions of the school curriculum, Ash school teachers' narratives show a lower level of variation. Teachers seemed to develop strong preferences for the international curriculum based on their evaluations of students' cognitive development. In this sense, teachers showed a higher level of agreement with the school curriculum and a sense of superiority when comparing themselves with teachers in other schools. According to the analysis, students' social and emotional development composes a crucial part of teachers' evaluation of the school curriculum. Besides, to exert positive influences on students' personality and school lives in a holistic and experience-based way, teachers felt that they needed to perform a wide range of professional roles and undertake a broader set of responsibilities.

> If I can choose, I'd like to focus on teaching. However, for children, experiences in extracurricular activities are essential. Someone has to do it. (Baihe, Chinese teacher, 7 years)

These teachers are not only classroom practitioners, but organisers of educational activities that engage students in multiple ways. Ash school teachers claimed that the importance of extra-curriculum activities added to their workloads and learning gaps as they adapted to the school culture and work environment. Such a change is particularly significant for Yu and Cong, the two teachers with previous teaching experience in rural state schools.

> In the previous school, teaching maths was the only thing I focused on. My job was to teach in the classes. My relationship with students was straightforward, and I did not need to do much extra. In here, however, I need to take care of a range of tasks. Without anyone to teach me, I must adapt to the environment. Suddenly, I have more colleagues, and

> communication with students' parents also became a demanding task [...]. In addition to the regular teaching, I need to collaborate with others in school activities: making lecture slides, organising events, rehearsing with others. I used to be just a maths teacher who teaches equations and solves maths problems, [...] now I need to seize both teaching tasks and school work. (Yu, maths teacher, 2 years)

Yu's statement reflected her experiences in a school that diversifies teachers' work tasks and professional skills. As a young teacher, Yu needed to be willing to learn from others and slowly build her confidence at work. Her family support, as well as positive feedback from students' parents, had helped Yu develop a strong sense of identity as a learner at school. Baihe, who is an experienced teacher, also commented on her preference for observing other teachers and pursuing continuous practice at work as the method of professional learning.

> Other teachers' developed approach to carrying out specific tasks touches a string in my heart [...]. I learned these small details from working with them. Being a teacher is a gradual process of growing by doing.

Cong also claimed that her school identity developed through five years of experiences in Ash. In her own words:

> I grew a firm sense of identification with the pace of work and school culture. I think I'm slowly immersed in this culture. It [the school culture] is compelling.
>
> The parents influenced me by showing me their expectations and investment in their children's education. Those outstanding parents mainly had an impact on me.

To summarise the characteristics of TPIs concerning the school curriculum changes, teachers in the RCS seemed to experience a higher level of tension in the context of the curriculum change. When teachers perceive the curriculum reform decision as being made in a coercive way, teachers felt that they had to follow the guidelines of teaching. The strong focus on instrumental techniques might, however, undermine teachers' sense of well-being and integrity. Teachers in RCS rely heavily on their personal experiences and inherent resilience to make sense of the curriculum change and the value of their work in the school. In contrast, AIS teachers tended to take pride in their work environment in the international school. To better understand the underlying factors, we need to ask whether AIS teachers have more organisational and domestic resources in constructing their professional identities, including a developed professional community, school culture, effective leadership, feedback from parents and positive teacher–student relationships.

8.3 Narrative of job involvement and professional image

PSTs' narratives of their job involvement and professional images comprise another important aspect of teachers' identity narrative. A wide range of social, cultural and personal factors

contributed to teachers' professional attitudes with regards to students' need in primary schools. Some teachers drew on their own educational experiences (e.g. Ting, Linjia), interactions with students (e.g. Meng) or previous work experiences (e.g. Cong) in informing their attitudes towards students' needs. They also drew cultural resources to support their claims. Teachers also recalled professional attitude changes, as influenced by their work experiences in general (i.e. Cong), critical events in professional lives (Meng, Yu), school community (Yu, Cong) and role models (Wei). Through the comparative analysis, I identified four apparent types of job involvement:

- Professional learning as a pathway to integrity (internal), career progress (external) and services (relational). (Cong, Wei, Yu, Linjia, Ting)
- Seeking and engaging with opportunities for constant improvement and progress in teaching. (Meng, Yu)
- Low expectations and a strong sense of responsibility to meet expectations for the school and students. (Ting, Meng, Yu)
- High professional standards and critical self-evaluation. (Baihe)

Despite the similarities and overlaps in teachers' perceptions about their students' needs and their job involvement among the selected two groups of teachers, a key observation from the comparative analysis is the school differences in teachers' professional images. A professional image can be defined as the teachers' evaluations and opinions of the value and outlook of their occupation, including judgements on the teachers' prestige in society, the worth of the profession to society, the personal and behavioural characteristics of its members, as well as their occupational opportunities, and the achievement of the attributes of professionalisation.

The case of RCS

Teachers' perceptions on the personal and behaviour characteristics of a good teacher seemed to vary according to how teachers react to the expectations for work performances, professional roles and responsibilities. For instance, Linjia seemed to be more influenced by the external environment of school curriculum reform in defining teachers' problem-solving skills as the key to success. As she said:

> I used to believe that knowledgeable teachers are successful teachers. While according to the school reform model, I think those who can solve multiple problems in students' lives are successful teachers. (Linjia, maths, female, 2 years)

She used the phrase "according to the requirements of school reform model, I need to …" as a way to explain the change in her understanding of teachers' professional roles and behaviours. Without the critical reflections on her own experiences and values, the teacher may fail to connect her perceptions and benefits with the changing environment, and hence remain silent about the tensions she might experience at work. When discussing her perception of performance-based

appraisal and pay, Linjia addressed its legitimacy by suggesting that “everyone will be more motivated”. On the contrary, Ting links her experiences of school bullying as a primary school student with her belief in social justice in education as a teacher. The consistency of her personal experiences with her professional values might also help Ting develop a stable professional identity in her daily practice.

> I might not look tired now, but once I walked into the classroom, I must get excited to inspire my students and be inspired by them. Otherwise, the class could exert adverse influences on students. For me, only the inspiring teachers can lead to really effective learning. (Ting, art, female, 1 year)

> I’m a teacher; I’m also a family member and life coach for my students because I need to advise them when they are in trouble. "Have a warm heart and smile," I say this to them every day. (Ting, art, female, 1 year)

Teachers also tended to hold negative views with regards to the attributes of professionalisation to their professional images, which might differ primarily due to the limitations of the school context. Teachers could draw their interests and disciplinary affiliation from their teacher education background. However, due to the high rate of teacher turnover in RCS, teachers have to remain flexible and face challenges when teaching unfamiliar subjects, which requires teachers to develop new skills and identities when they are assigned to teach different subjects. For example, although Meng is well aware of the significance of professional knowledge to his success as a teacher, his initial experience in transferring from history teaching to Chinese teaching was somewhat disappointing:

> I think one must receive basic training in classroom teaching to be a successful teacher. The teacher must be knowledgeable about his or her subject and the capacity to deliver that knowledge to his or her students. I majored in History in college, but I was arranged to teach Chinese. (Wei, PE and Chinese, male, 3 years)

The fast work pace leaves teachers very limited time for learning and improvement, which seemed to perpetuate teachers’ low self-esteem. Linjia, for instance, considered RCS teachers as less capable of writing for educational journals and seemed unhopeful about belonging to a group of effective and creative teachers. Meanwhile, teachers’ perceptions of their social prestige were mostly negative. Some teachers claimed state status as a determinant factor of their public image as legitimate teachers; the other teachers, by contrast, tended to label state teachers as unmotivated. Nevertheless, both sides tended to categorise teachers and their social status according to their employment relationship with the state. Therefore, as teachers without state employer status, the private school participant teachers’ professional images seemed to be negative, although

participant teachers could identify a strong sense of satisfaction and achievement when it came to the altruistic nature of their work.

The case of AIS

Teachers from the international school are found to be more positive with regards to their professional images in that they actively engage with issues of professional image in their daily work and the influences on their work and identity development. Teachers in AIS included a wide range of social and cultural factors in their professional lives and considered that certain social stereotypes about what teachers should be like would limit their sense of individuality in the workplace as well as in their personal daily lives.

> I feel there are stereotypes to how teachers should behave. Such social restrictions include fixed dressing codes and moderate social manners. I'm not allowed to be different. (Zhulin, English, female, 8 years)

Zhulin took a holistic view of TPI in that she believed a successful teacher needed to have certain personal charisma in every aspect of her professional lives, including daily communication, resilience and flexibility. In her own words, "this must come from inside of you". At the same time, Zhulin pointed out that teachers also often needed to negotiate the limitations imposed by social stereotypes and professional culture in practice. Cong shared the same concerns in her personal life that others could often easily understand her behaviours and appearance as a teacher. "It's frustrating", she said. In contrast, teachers seemed to hold a higher professional status and tend to be more positive towards the impact of school vision and culture.

> We hold higher expectations for education and have advanced educational ideas. [...] The school principal will share the broader view of international education from foreign countries. I find that very inspiring. (Zhulin, English, female, 8 years)
>
> I think I developed a strong identification with the school culture. I see the change in myself, and that's very powerful. (Cong, maths, female, 20 years)

As teachers in the charity school, AIS teachers' professional images involves high-performance expectations and certain levels of tensions with regards to teacher appraisal and pay and career pathways.

> I would not say I like the atmosphere of competition [...]. However, I have to do this for better pay and a better life. [...] Perhaps the school could avoid significant gaps and make achievable targets for teachers, so we could see realising goals as possible. (Cong, maths, female, 20 years)
>
> I hope to focus on teaching and have prospects of promotion. The school wanted me to take on more management roles, but I rejected this. (Baihe, Chinese, female, 7 years)

It is important to note here that Cong and Baihe are experienced teachers. Therefore, they could have more voice over the school management issues. In particular, Cong had worked as a school principal and seemed to be the most proactive member of the school. Not only did she support this research study by introducing teachers to me, but she also showed her strong interests in participating in this research. All the teachers talked about the challenges they faced at work yet claimed they had made substantial investments in their continuous professional development at work. For instance, although Yu considered herself as a young teacher who had faced many challenges from the personal to the professional level, she felt she was resilient and had become particularly keen on improving her capacity in teaching and in carrying out her responsibilities for her students. As she said: "I would love to learn more to improve my practices and participate in more teaching contests in the future."

So far, I have shown the difference in professional images among participant teachers in the two private schools. Teachers in the international school retained a more positive attitude towards their professional images than those in the charity school. What contributes to such difference is only partially due to teachers' employment relationship with the state (*bianzhi*). The findings reveal the influences of other factors, such as teachers' gender, school policies and teacher turnover, as well as teachers' workload and opportunities for professional development and career progress.

8.4 Narratives of spirituality and tangible satisfaction

By reflecting upon the specific experiences of individual teachers, it is suggested that the non-religious but implicitly spiritual aspects are developed and connected to teachers' narrative identities during their work in different schools. In the Western cultural context, the word "spirituality" implies that individuals or group of people can experience a transcendent dimension of our existence that is beyond the self. Such feelings might be being a part of something larger and more whole than oneself. Unlike the "vertical" Christian meaning of spirituality as the connection with God, the participant teachers' workplace spirituality in the Chinese context seemed to be more "horizontal", that is, strongly involved with community service, connections, compassion and a sense of achievement in their day-to-day work. Teachers used the expression of doing things from the "heart"[50] to describe the need to raise awareness of the desire within oneself in transitioning one's experiences.

The case of RCS

For some teachers in the charity school, the process of teaching sub-orphan students and the reconstruction and reformulation of the story of who she or he is highlighted more profound transcendent features of life related to teachers' identities. Teachers' work contains a vibrant non-religious but implicit spiritual dimension connected to the teachers' specific identity as a member

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of the community. This implies that for some teachers, such as Ting and Meng, the transition will create an implicit spiritual concern related to identity reconstruction in addition to the challenges of pursuing a promotion, learning the subject knowledge and teaching methods, and constructing a new meaningful working life. In the case of Ting, for instance, the spiritual aspect is rooted in "loving the students", which is likewise anchored in some of the critical events taking place during her work in constructing her identities.

> I think [that sense of commitment] has not much to do with teacher training. I guess if one can't do it from the bottom of their heart, they would still keep themselves away from the mess. So, teachers must follow their hearts. Only in this way could the students follow your teaching. (Ting)

This implicit spiritual feature of teaching has occurred throughout Ting's narrative identity. Her childhood memory of the absence of care and support seemed to impact Ting's sense of identity in education profoundly. She lost her confidence and even a more profound meaning to life. Her close relationship with the three loving and extrovert college friends transcended her experiences, which further influenced her professional identity as a teacher in the school.

> Confucius said: "One should not impose on others what one does not desire oneself." This is simple. I had had a bad experience, and I should stop the fault from continuing. I don't want my students to experience the same. Otherwise, it will cause psychic trauma, which is harder to heal than physical injuries.

The Confucian cultural mentality of "benevolent love"[51] seemed to be important in Ting's reflections. In Confucianism, benevolent love (a double noun phrase) is the core value for people if they are to participate in human activities and if society is to be more harmonious. Ting's explanation mirrors the same cultural mentality when it comes to her position considering her love and care for students. Meng and Wei also pointed out that the sense of conscience leads to career decisions:

> I'm most likely to stay in this school [rather than transferring to another school]. I think I'm getting familiar with the school and the students. This is what my heart tells me, so I will follow my heart. (Meng)

> My conscience tells me to become a better teacher. I want to improve myself. So, I will not allow myself to be deprived of my virtue and become an accessory in the process. Otherwise, I'd rather leave the job without hesitation. (Wei)

In this sense, a teacher's work experiences transcended their selves beyond the conventional relational boundaries of daily lives. In comparison, the spiritual aspects of teachers' identity

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narratives that they created in this research study were related to the deeper awareness of a sense of purpose and integrity relating to identity constructions, in addition to the challenges of heavier workloads, difficult career progression and the lack of job stability.

The case of AIS

For teachers in the international school, the process of career progress and professional lives are characterised by the tendency to pursue goodness in their practices and well-being. For Cong, previously a school principal in a local rural school, her decision to leave the rural school and the process reconstruction of whom she was highlighted her pursuit of a better environment for career progression and her child's education through her work and professional learning. When it comes to the perspectives for her current job, Cong tended to focus on what she called the "inner feeling" instead of others' opinions. As she later claimed:

> I have worked for nearly 20 years. I need to respect myself. I want to be more practical to help students' learning and development. Though the school managers keep encouraging me to achieve higher professional titles, I will just let nature take its course. I'm not particularly worried about it anymore.

Cong considered the changes to be unpredictable and closely related to her life courses and life attitude:

> I didn't expect such a change [in my attitude]. Perhaps it comes with my age. I was able to meet people of high titles and honours during these years. The titles and honours no longer impress me. I like and appreciate my colleagues who might lack such glories yet still do excellent jobs.

In contrast with the pursuit of excellence that motivated Cong to transfer to the international school, what she attempted to address here is a sense of contentment of the "ordinary teachers" and the focus on "improving and enriching her experiences" in her everyday work. She then supported her viewpoints by pointing out the complexity of teachers' work and her position with regards to the standards of teacher professionalism:

> Professionalism is forever a goal. I can never make a statement on levels of professionalism because everything needs to be contextualised. In education, we need different methods and standards to help different children with different learning abilities every day and everywhere. Therefore, it's more important to consider professionalism as just a goal.

Pointing out the necessity of contextualisation in education, Cong seemed to be cautious in terms of using external criteria to judge a teacher's success. Such critical reflection could be built from her years of experience in teaching and school administration. The shift of her focus from meeting the external criteria for maintaining the sense of contentment that comes with practice,

professional learning and supporting other teachers might also enhance her long-term well-being in her professional life. Cong reflected that such change had led her to became more tolerant and respected in the school, as well as in her family life. The young maths teacher Zhulin also left her job for a better work environment and career progress. Although she felt alienated at the beginning of her career in AIS due to her reluctance to ask for professional support, she gradually developed a sense of self-efficacy from feedbacks and practice. When it comes to her career goals, she hesitated to go with a clear plan, yet claimed that she would carry out her responsibilities and make "down-to-earth efforts" at work:

> I don't think I will make considerable contributions to the school. All I want to do is to create "down-to-earth efforts" at work. If there are opportunities, I would like to improve my competency. I need to be better. I need to attend more competitions.

An interesting finding here is that although there is a significant gap between Cong and Yu's years of experiences in teaching, their narratives on work-related spirituality reflected very similar focuses on personal development in their everyday interactions and practices in the school. Baihe and Zhulin's narratives also indicated the sense of social embodiment in daily lives, mostly through their observation of other teachers and the tangible satisfaction gained from their interactions with students.

All the female participants claimed that they appreciated the intimacy they have with students. The male teachers' narratives, however, contained fewer stories about informal interactions with students. In the international school, teachers seemed to have a higher level of satisfaction with regards to their interactions with the students. All the four teachers described their relationship with students in the informal learning contexts as satisfactory and rewarding. The following quotation illustrates the emotional bonds developed:

> I asked her if she misses home, she said: "Sometimes I miss my mum, sometimes I miss you." Knowing that I'm essential for her makes me feel happy. (Baihe, female Chinese teacher, AIS)

> I think I feel most happy though connecting with my students. Children of this age are delightful. They can bring a great deal of happiness to me. They hug me and kiss me. Sometimes, when they don't come to school, they will miss me. (Zhu, female maths teacher, AIS)

The structure of school lives could also exert influences on teachers' perceptions of their relationships with pupils. Both the private schools are boarding schools. Therefore, teachers spend more time taking care of students' school lives. Some teachers claimed that they know the children better than their parents do, which gives them a sense of guardianship towards the students. It is worth noting that the teachers did not avoid talking about their struggles and conflicts when the

wider range of considerations of students' behaviours and character development, parents' expectations as well as professional images were involved in teachers' experiences of their daily working lives. As Baihe pointed out:

> Sometimes students have developed harmful habits at home. In the school, we teachers need to correct them. If the family does not change, our education would be the equation of 5+2=0. The two days of family life negates the efforts we made in the five school days. We can't make any difference. It is frustrating.

In the charity school, teachers said they needed to be aware of each student's special background and to avoid talking about parental love, which might cause harms for students who lacked such support. Teachers considered that building a rapport with students was the first basis for effective teaching in the school. For a group of teachers who did not receive training in special education, the process of rapport-building was often frustrating and disappointing. Two teachers had described their feeling of isolation and inability to communicate with students when they first started to teach in RCS (Linjia and Meng). Although teachers face tremendous challenge in coping with the orphan students' unique learning and emotional needs in RCS, they remained favourable towards their relationships with pupils. Teachers described their emotional closeness with the students as rewarding. Narrating their interactions with students seemed to help teachers reflect upon their professional values and the positive changes they had made to reconstruct their relationship with the pupils. Such change often brings teachers a stronger sense of achievement and satisfaction. Linjia, for instance, tends to blame herself for being a "direct person with a quick temper" and an "authoritative teacher" in the classroom. Although she has not found a way to transform her relationship with her students, Linjia seemed to be less anxious to remember times when students showed understanding and respect to her in some informal learning contexts:

> Fortunately, some students could understand me and know that I do care about them. Sometimes they would surprise me with small things, and I'm easily touched by what they do. (Linjia, female, maths teacher, two years)

For teachers in both the charity school and the international school, they considered their commitment and attention to individual students, together with their close relationship with students, as the distinguishing features of their identities as PSTs.

In summary, to understand teachers' spiritualities in different social and cultural contexts, the acknowledgement of different types of spirituality is necessary. The non-religious but implicit spiritual dimension in PSTs' identity narratives implies an openness to different cultural traditions and philosophies in promoting teachers' well-being and sense of satisfaction at work. This aspect of teacher identities may support teachers' ongoing adaptations in a changing work environment.

It is advisable that teachers' professional development adopt methods from mindfulness and narrative psychology to provide alternative voices in teachers' identity narrative process.

8.4 Summary

The analysis in this section included four components of the eight PSTs' narratives that constituted their professional identities: 1) students' learning and development; 2) perspectives on the curriculum; 3) job involvement and professional image; and 4) sense of spirituality and satisfaction. Teachers in the charity school tended to demonstrate a strong sense of agency in making changes and making efforts to support students' current learning and development, while the advanced international school teachers tended to have a stronger sense of membership and belongingness to a professional community. Teachers' narratives also showed different levels of integration of personal and professional goals and considerations. With the vast differences in school curriculum, the two groups of teachers had different focuses and levels of tension with regard to the curriculum. The charity school teachers seemed to take an evaluative position in addressing issues in the context of a coercive school-based curriculum reform; in contrast, participant teachers from the international schools showed a lower level of tension and focus on professional learning and personal development. With both groups of teachers' positive perceptions of their professional involvement, the charity school teachers had a more negative professional image as PSTs. Cultural and moral norms also seemed to have strong influences on the charity school teachers' narratives of spirituality at work.

Table 22 ***Comparative characteristics of TPIs (private school teachers)***

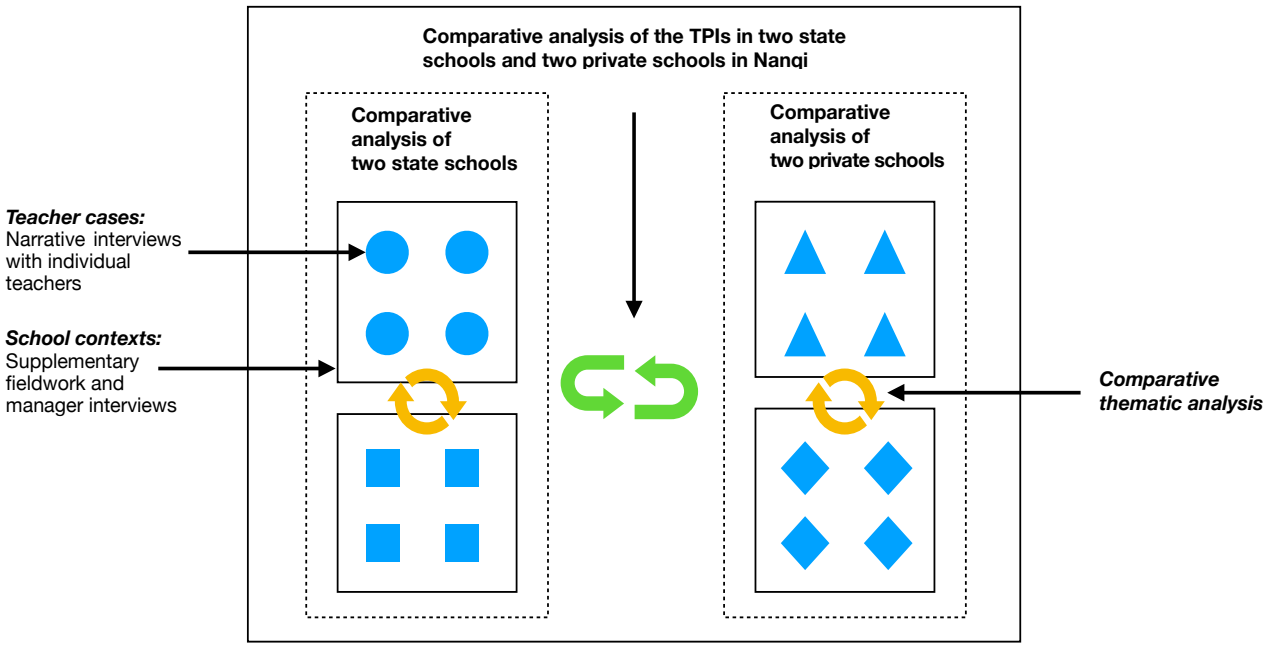
	The charity school teachers	The inte'l school teachers
Students' learning and development	Teachers' agency in change making.	Teachers' sense of membership in a professional community.
	Higher integration of personal histories and professional purpose.	Lower integration of personal histories and professional purpose.
Curriculum	Focus on its positive and adverse impact on students and professional lives.	Focus on learning and personal improvement.
	Higher tension.	Lower tension.
Job involvement and professional image	Positive job involvement and negative professional image.	Positive job involvement and positive professional image.
Spirituality and satisfactions	Cultural and moral norms.	Personal development and social embodiment.
	Importance of teacher-student relationships	Importance of teacher-student relationships

All the eight case studies of PSTs demonstrated their commitment to support students' academic and moral development and focus on students' learning and development needs. In the interviews, all the teachers addressed the significance of students' engagement in the classroom and positive parental involvement in children's education. Positive teacher–student interactions seemed to be one of the most significant contributing factors to those teachers' sense of achievement and satisfaction at work, although teachers' perceptions and engagement strategies with students' learning differed according to the different situations and educational needs of their students. All the participant teachers felt (or had felt) burdened by the heavy workloads in teaching and pastoral care for students in private schools. At the same time, seven teachers claimed that their professional practices had strengthened as a result of the more competitive performance management policies in private schools. In this sense, teachers seemed to have constructed self-representations as PSTs. Teachers' narratives also reflected the positive influence of spirituality and embodiment in their daily interactions in constructing their sense of professional identity. In summary, teachers shared the following common characteristics of professional identities: 1) focusing on students' learning needs; 2) positive job involvement; 3) coping with a heavy workload; 4) self-representation as PSTs; 5) teacher–student relationships for a stronger sense of satisfactions; and 6) embracing spirituality at work.

Chapter 9: Comparative analysis: exploring the significance of contexts

The process of comparative analysis employed in this thesis was presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, I will extend the comparative elements of this research study by comparing themes across the cases of the eight SST and eight PST narratives in order to identify the common and contrasting characteristics of TPIs in the four different state and private schools. I will first summarise the comparative characteristics of teachers' professional identities in the private and state schools based on the previous four chapters (Chapters 5–8). I will then present the main orientations of TPIs based on the two-dimensional matrix developed from the cross-case analysis. This section identifies four main orientations in TPI narratives: 1) flexibility; 2) regulation; 3) service; and 4) authority. The intersection of the four orientations is interpreted in terms of four types of identity strategy: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement; and 4) control. At the end of this chapter, I will reconnect the conceptual findings with individual teacher cases. This will help to illuminate and better understand the patterns in teachers' narratives identified in this research study.

Figure 16 Cross-case comparison of the role of contexts in the construction of TPIs



9.1 Summarising the findings of previous chapters

From Chapter 5 and Chapter 7, I presented individual teachers' cases and organised the writing according to the school contexts. Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 presented the common themes found in the initial comparative analysis of the characteristics of TPIs in each sector (the state and the private). Table 22 summarises both the common and contrasting characteristics as presented in the previous chapters. As it is shown in the table, the languages in and the structures of SSTs' narratives tended to be more homogeneous than those of the PSTs. In other words, although school contexts constituted an important factor in teachers' perceptions of themselves, the influences of school differences were less obvious in teachers' narratives. Against this background, teachers' individual differences were reflected in the way individual teachers appear to negotiate their experiences of tensions and difficulties, and their unique work and personal contexts (i.e. different levels of self-efficacy, coping strategies, levels of resistance, etc.). In comparison, the group differences across the two private schools were more evident in teachers' narratives. Not only did the eight PSTs address the distinctive impacts of the students' background on teaching and their teaching experiences, they were also found to be involved in connecting their personal experiences with students' learning, professional communities and educational values at different levels (i.e. sense of agency versus sense of membership; Chinese cultural value versus internationalisation in education; high level of tension versus low levels of tension, etc.).

Nevertheless, the 16 participant teachers were found to share some common characteristics regardless of the differences in private and state sectors. The participant teachers expressed shared values such as commitment to students' learning, positive teacher–student relationships, teachers' social status and job stability, engagement with parents, professional integrity, etc. RQ1 was to explore individual teacher's strategies in engaging with the work environment in negotiating collective professional values. The next section will present the main findings, leading to further discussion of a typology of TPIs.

Table 23 ***Comparative characteristics of the state school and private school teachers' professional identities.***

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">PSTs
Students' learning and development
Curriculum implementation
Job involvement and professional image
Spirituality and tangible satisfactions</td><td colspan="2">SSTs
Lack of career choice
Self-efficacy in supporting students' learning
Struggles and resistances in maintaining professional authority</td></tr>
<tr><td>Redwood</td><td>Ash</td><td>Willow</td><td>Aspen</td></tr>
<tr><td>Teachers' agency
Integration of personal experiences and professional purposes
High tensions and positive influence of both advice and curriculum reform
Positive job involvement
Negative professional image
Cultural and moral norms in informing spiritual experiences
Teacher–student relationships</td><td>Sense of membership
Lack of integration of personal and professional identities
Lower tension and focus on professional development
Positive job involvement and professional image
Personal development and social embodiment
Teacher–student relationships</td><td>Job stability and higher social status
Both high and low integration of personal and professional identities
Low yet developing self-efficacy in a time of change and adaptation
Different coping strategies
Different level of resistance to challenges and tensions in teaching
Teacher–student relationships
Helplessness and frustration in losing professional authority</td><td>Job stability and higher social status
Both high and low integration of personal and professional identities
Both high and low sense of self-efficacy in a time of change and adaptation
Different coping strategies
Different levels of resistance to challenges and tensions in teaching
Teacher–student relationships
Helplessness and frustration at losing professional authority</td></tr>
</table>

9.2 The four orientations of TPI narratives

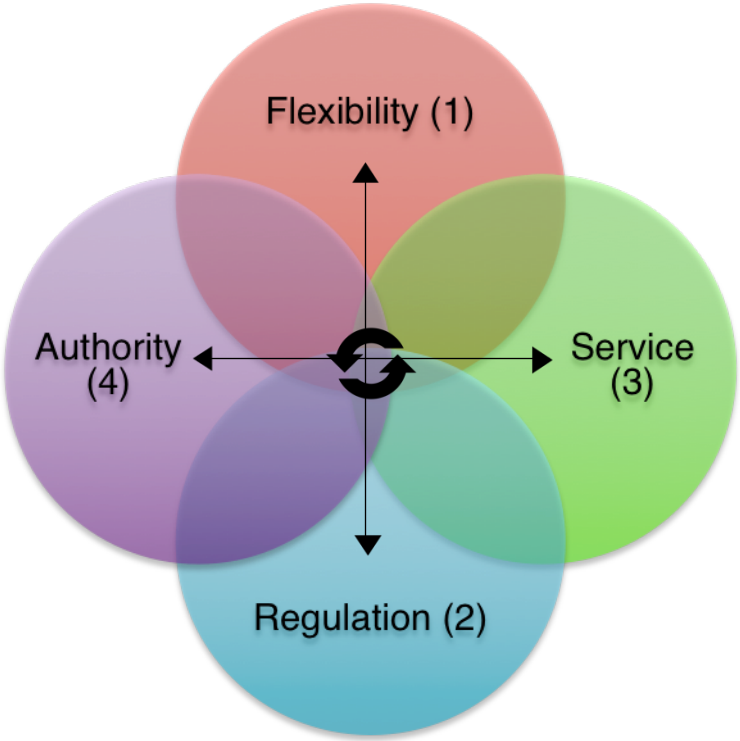
Based on the cross-case analysis, I suggest a two-dimensional matrix that demonstrates features in common with previous studies, but is distinct from earlier efforts in the following ways:

- It provides concrete comparative features rather than a linear developmental stage.
- It allows for the characterisation of TPIs relative to a comparative criterion rather than placing them within specific types. It characterises TPIs based on empirical evidence from multiple types of school context.

The matrix presents TPIs in terms of four overlapping circles across four quadrants (see Figure 17). In this matrix, the constructed professional identities are characterised along these dimensions:

- How does the teacher construct their professional identities? Does the teacher integrate their professional values and belongings with their personal experiences and preference or/and institutional and organisational values?
- How does the teacher position himself/herself in relation to others to negotiate the tensions around multiple structural changes and restrictions?

Figure 17 ***The orientations of teachers' professional identity narratives***



9.2.1 The vertical axis: How does the teacher define their professional identities?

The vertical axis represents how the teachers define their professional identities. At the top of this axis, teachers tend to retain flexibility and integrate multiple professional and personal roles in their narratives. This characteristic seems to involve a high level of tolerance to uncertainties and well-developed competencies to understand and adapt to change. Examples of such characteristics include the unity of multiple sub-identities and a high level of teachers' trust towards and collaborations with other members in the school contexts (Section 9.3 gives more detailed examples and descriptions). At the bottom of this scale, teachers tend to retain stable perceptions of sets of given social and cultural roles and responsibilities. Teachers' identities with such characteristics often involve strict tolerance and specifications. Teachers at this end of the axis also tended to feel strongly influenced by changes in their social status, career progression and institutional values. To summarise the two poles of the axis:

(1) ***Flexibility*** as an orientation in professional identity narratives reflected the teacher's awareness and capacity to switch between multiple roles in different situations. Therefore, teachers often developed a higher tolerance of the complexities, changes and conflicts in the workplace and show a stronger sense of trust and understanding to others in the workplaces.

(2) ***Regulation*** as an orientation in professional identity narratives reflected the teacher's tendency to prioritise a set of social and professional roles, responsibilities and achievements in their professional narratives.

9.2.2 The horizontal axis: How does the teacher position himself or herself in relation to others?

The horizontal axis seeks to represent teachers' positionings in relation to others in their identity narratives. On the left side of this axis, teachers tended to focus on how to maintain or resume their professional authority in relation to others, in particular students' parents, the general public and the media. Examples of such identities could include teachers' claims of the importance of work ethics and a sense of integrity as professionals, and teachers' reflections on the existing (positive or negative) relationships with others in particular school contexts. On the right side of this axis, teachers tended to prioritise their responsibilities to provide an educational service to students and parents. In other words, these teachers' narratives often define their roles and responsibilities according to others' demands or needs. One example of such a characteristic is teachers' engagement with critical reflections on students' needs and engagement in personal development to cope with the challenges to achieve their professional goals.

(3) ***Service*** as an orientation in professional identity narratives that indicates the teacher's focus on navigating their ways to serve the public good through meeting students' and parents' educational

needs. Teachers' coping strategies vary from critical engagements with others to linking professional goals to needs for further professional and personal development.

(4) ***Authority*** as an orientation in professional identity narratives shows the teacher's focus on maintaining or resuming their professional authority and credibility in relation to others, in particular parents, the media and the education administration. Teachers' coping strategies include calling for the state's legal and structural support and addressing the institutional values.

I earlier discussed the four types based on the comparative analysis across 16 teacher cases based on one or two interviews. It is also important to note the overlaps among the four orientations embedded in individual teachers' narratives. This two-dimensional matrix suggests four situated TPIs. Table 24 summarises the characteristics of the typology of TPIs.

Table 24 Typology of teachers' professional identities

		Teachers' positioning in relation to others	
		Service	Authority
Teachers' approach to multiple roles and identities	Flexibility	Quadrant 1: Transcendence (9.3.1) Different roles and sub-identities contribute to the development of each other (***retrospective***) and connect the teachers' personal experiences, contexts and the professional goals to serve the public good. Teachers' often developed a sense of wholeness and integrity in teaching. Sub themes: • Involving identities • Lifelong learning • Positive attitudes to continuing professional development (CPD) • Resilience and cross-boundaries	Quadrant 2: Determination (9.3.2) Different roles and sub-identities coexist and contribute to the awareness of need for change and progress for equity and effectiveness in school education (***prospective***). Teachers often address the key of professional authority in achieving the goals. Sub themes: • Sense of membership • Work ethics • Specific of CPD needs • Representative
	Regulation	Quadrant 3: Enhancement (9.3.3) Alignments of multiple roles and sub-identities with structural rules and social expectations to recapture one's fitness and competences in unified professional image, status and culture that orient to meet the needs of students' developments. Sub themes: • Need for community • Resistance and/or representative	Quadrant 4: Control (9.3.4) Struggles and ongoing attempts to align conflicting roles and sub-identities (***tensions***) to meet the need of professional authority and sense of achievements. Sub themes: • Role fragmentation • Job progression • Trust and relationships • Internal conflicts and tensions

9.3 Towards a typology of situated TPIs

The proposed typology points to four main types of TPIs based on the 16 TPIs Investigated in this thesis from a comparative perspective. In this section, I will describe these four types: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement; and 4) control. I will treat them as separate proposed types for discussion purposes and illustrate them using selected excerpts from different teachers' narratives. Finally, I will use these types as a basis for discussing hybrid professional identities through analysing specific examples of cases of the 16 teachers' narratives.

9.3.1 Transcendence

The word "transcendence" is often used in the literature to describe a kind of religious experience and a state of excelling or surpassing the limits of material experiences. As an emerging theme in this research study, this term is used here to describe the kind of teachers' narrative reflecting the state of being above the usual limits of one's previous experiences and current situations. The characteristics of TPI as transcendence is found in four teachers' narratives: Xiwen (A1); Qizhen (B1); Yu (C3); and Ting (D3). All of the four teachers positioned their experience of teaching in terms of active personal efforts and achievement. The narratives reflect the sense of transcendence that is both culturally conforming and individually focused for the three teachers. Table 24 summarises the background information about these four teachers.

Table 25 Teachers backgrounds (Transcendence group)

Teacher	School	Gender	Years of teaching	Subject	Education Background
A1. Xiwen	Willow	Female	1 year	Chinese	MA
B1. Qizhen	Aspen	Female	20 years	Chinese	Diploma
C3. Yu	Ash	Female	4 years	Math	BA
D3. Ting	Redwood	Female	1 year	Fine art	BA

As presented in Table 23, flexibility and service are the two major orientations that characterise TPIs in transcendence. In terms of the teachers' personal understandings of their professional identities, these individual teachers' narratives demonstrated not only their awareness of their multiple roles, but their own capacities to adopt and create new roles in different situations, helping them to be more tolerant and reflective about changes and conflicts they experienced in teaching. These teachers' narratives also showed their feelings related to trust and understanding of others in their daily interactions. The moral value of teaching as serving the public good is another common theme identified in these teachers' narratives. All four teachers in this group

positioned themselves as “public servants” to parents and students and pointed out different coping strategies to link their professional goals with their personal development.

These teachers’ narratives reflected teachers’ lives as a fluctuating cycle of creation, destruction and transformation, and a sense of self as a constant and dynamic process of becoming. In this process, teachers began to connect their daily tasks in meeting assessment targets, behaviour management and curriculum objectives with a more creative and humanistic perspective on teaching. Being aware of the complications in teaching seemed to help these teachers to think deeply to respond appropriately and accurately to both the needs of the students and the curriculum reform. In examples of the teachers' own words, the “authenticity” in their personal experiences at work as a teacher should not be lost in the curriculum reform as it is essential for their self-understanding and sense of satisfaction.

> I think each teacher has their own characteristics and they like to use different methods. I think a teacher needs to have his or her own teaching style. One must not follow others, doing whatever others are doing. I will try to become a teacher with my own personal characteristics. That’s enough. (Qizhen)
>
> I hope one day I can make changes and be an innovator in education. I hope I can develop my own theory. (Xiwen)
>
> Every teacher has his or her own style. I’m the joyful kind of teacher for my students. In this way, I can make my students feel more energised. I like an engaging and active class. The school doesn’t want to fix one learning model for everyone. I think every teacher is different. (Yu)
>
> I think teaching is the same where ever you go. But I could always choose my own values and goals. Different people have different opinions. (Ting)

These four teachers’ narratives were particularly characterised in four aspects, which I will explain in the following sections.

- Evolving identities
- Lifelong learning
- Positive attitudes to CPD
- Resilience and cross-boundaries

a. Evolving identities

The word “evolve” derives from the Latin *evolvere* in the early 17th century, and in general means “to make more complex or develop”. In this section, the four teachers were found to have

experienced different stages of transition when they juggled a wide range of different responsibilities and requirements. In this process, these four teachers adopted a variety of strategies to adjust to the changing nature of their work and different demands from the students and schools. They were able to draw on multiple social and cultural notions to frame their professional identities, in particularly with relation to teacher–student relationships and job progression, which both resisted and reaffirmed the given professional roles and professional pathways. Examples of these social and cultural notions included:

- Teacher–student relationship

Ting: "Do not do unto others as you would not like to do onto yourself."[52]

After quoting the well-known Confucius doctrine, Ting attempted to address the importance of her own experiences in influencing her daily practices in teaching and interactions with students. She reflected upon and learned from her negative experiences with her primary school teachers and had made it important in her job "not to create the same burden" for her own students.

Qizhen: "A student will believe in teaching only when he gets close to his teacher."[53]

Qizhen explained her strategies in maintaining her positive relationship with her students. Although this sentence was originally said to encourage students, Qizhen quoted it to address her role as an instructor to organise school activities and create opportunities for students to express their feelings and thoughts and show their talent in front of the teachers and each other.

- Expectations for job progression

Yu: "Water flows to lower place, man (woman) goes to higher position."[54]

Yu used this phrase when she narrated the career choice that she made to leave the state rural school to the private international school. On the one hand, it showed the advantages of teaching in the private international school over the rural state school; on the other, it also expressed Yu's hope of working in a better environment, especially after she had achieved many teaching awards in the rural school.

Xiwen: "Aim high, you may achieve the average; aim average, you may attain the low."[55]

Xiwen said she wanted to become a famous educational theorist and to bring changes to the educational system and the culture in China. She employed this quotation from both *the Analects* by Confucius and the *Art of War* by Sunzi to explain that she might not be able to achieve such an

[52] 己所不欲, 勿施于人。
[53] 亲其师，信其道。
[54] 人往高处走, 水往低处流。
[55] 求其上者得其中；求其中者得其下。

ambitious goal. Yet she still believed that keeping the aim high would help her work in the long term. And she could always learn something from this process.

In addition, these four teachers' narratives also reflected their competencies to negotiate with others as well as change organisational and societal contexts in constructing their professional identities. As such, teachers were developing and adopting more individual-oriented strategies to enable themselves to succeed and find satisfactions through teaching.

b. Lifelong learning

The four teachers held views and perceptions that are more aligned with the vision of engaged lifelong learning. These teachers (4) also tended to have developed the broader views on the subject knowledge. This means that they did not perceive the subject as being bounded within the classroom assessment or school context; instead, they believed that it was also linked with lifelong skills such as critical thinking, communication and collaboration that support students' functioning in society.

The four teachers tended to place students' interests in the centre of their narratives of teaching. Their narratives of classroom teaching were also more attuned to the constructive pedagogical approach. In particular, these teachers notice that students' active participation is crucial to effective learning; they are also aware of the need to continuously develop their skills to elicit students' responses and facilitate their active engagement in analysing and questioning in classrooms. Xiwen (A1) shared and expressed these particular views during the interview:

> What we lack in our school now is the cultivation of students' independent thinking skills. Although we talked about it for a long time, it has not been realised. What I am facing is to try to change my role and inspire students' thoughts and motivate them to learn to solve problems. (Xiwen)

Despite the difficulties in dealing with the heavy workload and stress in managing classroom discipline, they are aware that they could learn and improve their pedagogical practices in the context of school reforms. For the SSTs (Xiwen and Qizhen), in particular, taking the role as facilitators in students' learning in group works was considered beneficial for students' learning. Although the teacher still has questions and issues in implementing them, she was "open" to new ideas and to trying to adapt their practice to improve students' learning. For the PST, Yu (C3) and Ting (D3), this aspect of teachers' narratives is closely linked with their positive attitudes towards professional development, which I will present in the following section.

c. Positive attitudes to CPD

In the practical level, these four teachers tended to be more open to making changes, and committed to their professional development and remaining flexible so they can adopt new methods in their teaching. The teachers' narratives often reflected a broader concept of learning that needed to connect the subject knowledge to lifelong learning and well-being for the learners' future success and happiness. Reviewing their past teaching, they could identify their limitations in understanding both the subject knowledge and requirement in implementing the curriculum reform. These teachers seem to be receptive to the professional development arrangements in the school. They constantly pointed out the necessity of an open and humble attitudes towards personal limitations, commitment towards their professional development and willingness to find opportunities to learn new methods and engage with others in a broader community. In addition to such teachers' positive perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in terms of students' learning and their pedagogical practices, these teachers tended to be very active in aligning their identities to their own professional development in the context of educational reform. The four teachers addressed the importance of reflecting their personal values and attitudes and beliefs about teaching to contribute to their students' development. They also demonstrated their confidence in their work and expressed the feeling of achievement in bringing positive changes to the students' future and the development of China's education system in general.

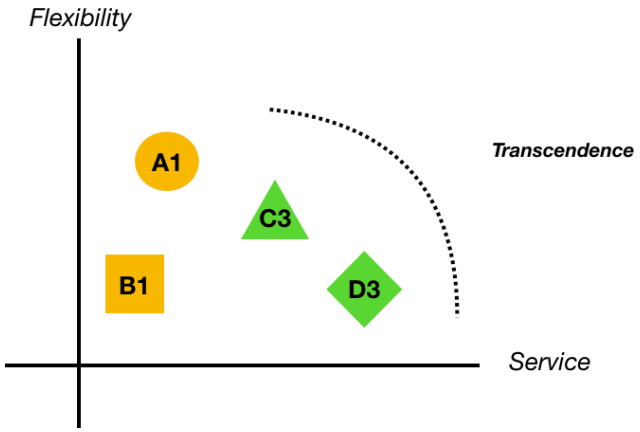
d. Resilience and cross-boundaries

Teachers talked about the relational aspect of their work and the complex power dynamic with students, parents, the government and the media in the context of school reforms. The two SSTs (Xiwen and Qizhen) talked about the tension between parents and teachers. They pointed out the challenges to cope with parents' high demand but lack of engagement in students' learning, and further argued that the balance of power was the key to the success of schools to make changes. Teachers were capable of developing a series of strategies to negotiate the balance of power with parents. Xiwen and Qizhen constructed identities as active problem solvers and advocates for collaboration among different stakeholders in schools at the policy level. As for the two PSTs (Yu and Ting), a sense of vocation and personal satisfactions in teaching became an important element for making sense of their identities as teachers. The findings also indicate structural obstacles that were thought to undermine teachers' ability to place aspects of social justice and diversity in their instructions, which included: 1) the large numbers of students in classes; 2) conflicts and tensions with parents; 3) a lack of collaboration among stakeholders in schools; and 4) a lack of consensus and applicable guidelines on professional practice.

Figure 18 seeks to illustrate the comparative positioning of the four TPIs in the transcendence group. It is not my intention here to give an accurate mapping of the exact emphasis of each side of the matrix given by one teacher to their narratives. Such an aim would not contribute to answering

my RQs in this research study and it would also require much more sophisticated and rich data to achieve. The positioning was based on a qualitative comparison, rather than quantitative measurements, to include the individual characteristics in the discussion.

Figure 18 Characteristics of individual teacher case in transcendence



As is shown in this quadrant, these four teachers seemed to differ in their position relative to the four orientations in the proposed matrix. Among the four teachers, Qizhen (B1, Chinese, 20 years, female) was closest to the centre in the matrix. Although she considered serving students' needs as at the centre of her professionalism, Qizhen did not want to lose her sense of professional authority. On the contrary, Qizhen argued that teachers needed to maintain their professional authority by actively engaging with students and parents, to build connections and trust with each other, especially when the profession's absolute authority was often challenged and even attacked by the general public. At the same time, Qizhen also developed a set of professional roles she needed to carry out. For instance, she was more certain that classroom teaching should be the primary responsibility for teachers, and that she spent a great amount of time helping young teachers to develop their professional and pedagogical skills. This observation was also supported by observation during the fieldwork.

Similarly, Xiwen also tended to connect the orientations of service and authority in her narrative. When she had made changes in teaching as a response to parents' criticism and demands, Xiwen first needed to adjust her attitudes towards the parents – from considering them as "uneducated" to admitting that they "knew better about their children and how they learn". She argued that those criticisms and demands were helpful for her to understand others' needs, yet she remained the authority who made her own decisions. In her narrative, Xiwen also critically reflected on her previous experiences and expressed her willingness to make things different. Instead of putting herself in an oppositional position to others, Xiwen also called for collaborations between stakeholders in education to make positive changes possible for the children. In this sense, Xiwen maintained her flexibility and interest in new opportunities when it came to tensions and conflicts.

Yu and Ting are two teachers from the two different private schools. In comparison with the two SSTs, Yu and Ting's narratives were less involved with the discussion of teachers' authority; most of what they shared was focused on how they want to support students' learning as a way to be responsible for the schools and the students in undertaking their job. Therefore, their positioning seemed to align towards the orientation of service and away from the orientation of authority. Between these two teachers, Yu seemed to enjoy more possibilities for flexibility in her teaching than Yu. This could be mainly contributed by changes of professional roles in different school contexts. To be more specific, the Redwood charity school was going through a structural transition towards following the Dulangkou model, which attempted to change pedagogies and curriculum in a more systematic, yet intensified way.

9.3.2 Determination

Determination as one strategy in TPIs construction is characterised by the teachers' flexibility in dealing with change. The teachers in this group were often internally focused: they have a higher sense of autonomy in defining successful teaching, which is framed tacitly rather than explicitly. The theme of determination mainly emerged in the narratives of five teachers (A4, B3, C1, C2, C3) as the process of developing the quality of courage and endurance in achieving one's professional goals and work ethics regardless of the difficulties and barriers in daily practices and career progressions. Like the transcendent identity process, determination indicated that the teachers are individually focused: the attention to individuals' actions and responsibilities contributed to these teachers' sense of professional identity. The background information about these five teachers is summarised in Table 26.

Table 26 Teachers' backgrounds (Determination)

Teacher	School	Gender	Years of teaching	Subject	Education Background
C2. Cong	Ash	Female	20 years	Maths	Diploma
C3. Baihe	Ash	Female	10 years	Chinese	BA
C1. Zhulin	Ash	Female	8 years	English	BA
D2. Meng	Redwood	Male	10 years	Chinese	BA
A4. Yifan	Willow	Female	30 years	Chinese	Diploma
B3. Zhe	Aspen	Male	3 years	Chinese	BA

As presented in Table 23, flexibility and authority are the two major orientations that characterise TPIs marked by determination. The five teachers in this category seemed well aware of the multiple roles they needed to take on in the school context and their narratives reflected their self-

identities as teachers with authority. That is to say, all of the teachers, more or less, had already assumed the necessity of giving authority to teachers, rather than framing their authority as a process of development and negotiation in different contexts (as could be found in the previous section on "transcendence"). As such, these teachers did not seem to engage with their previous experiences and personal stories to connect with their activities in schools. The participant teachers' self-images tended to be more aligned with each other. The common characteristics of the determination category are: 1) being reflective about one's professional practices; 2) keeping a positive attitude in the face of challenges; and 3) being open to learning to guide students through classroom teaching. These themes were common examples of the determination category, as they were perceived as helpful for teachers to improve their professional skills and to retain moral and relational authority in teaching. These teachers' satisfaction seemed to come from the actualisation of their professional roles and responsibilities. Their multiple roles and sub-identities tended to be more unified and stable, and these teachers tended to enjoy a high level of trust and positive relationships with others.

a. Sense of membership

These five teachers (A4, B3, C1, C2, C3) perceived themselves as belonging to a community and as creating a sense of unity within the school. Teachers' personal identities were more connected with the sense of membership in the community on top of the technical aspects of teaching. These teachers developed a strong sense of satisfaction in their working lives, particularly through their involvement in activities and communications with colleagues and students. A distinguishing element of these teachers' narratives are the positive influences of school improvement, including the school vision (C1, C2, C3), leadership (C1, C2, C3), school facilities and the use of ICT (C1, A4), the school reputation (C1, C2, C3, B3) and curriculum changes (C1, C2, C3, A4), as well as the diverse and more advantaged students' family backgrounds (C1, C2, C3 B3) in contributing to their sense of a positive attitude towards their profession as well as their personal lives. These five teachers presented an integrated sense of identity, thus demonstrating a strong sense of self-discipline and satisfaction through taking on different roles and responsibilities.

> I didn't do housework before I worked in this school; yet I will do some housework no matter how tired I am. I became more respectable to others and my family and became more understanding and tolerant. I don't know if this shows my tolerance or my lack of principles. (Cong)

> I think, to other colleagues, I'm very diligent and always want to achieve the best result. I think I'm a perfectionist, while others would say I'm workaholic. [...] My work goes in front of anything else. If I can't finish my job, I wouldn't be at ease. I have many colleagues who are the same, because this is what the school requires for us. Our principal is a typical perfectionist. None of us could compete with him. (Baihe)

Teachers in this group often show their appreciation for the school culture where all those involved in influencing the lives of learners showed their respect and trust in each other in and beyond the learning community. They all expressed the sense of satisfaction with regards to the friendly collegial relationships in schools. However, these five teachers also faced the paradox of high-level commitment, a sense of belonging and the ever-increasing demands from the school and parents. As such, these teachers might face more challenges in developing strategies to maintain a sense of unity when situations become more complex and workloads get heavier. Balancing their ambition at work with a relaxing lifestyle seemed to be a major concern for these teachers (e.g. relationships with partners and children and maintaining positive relations with students' parents).

b. Work ethic

Teachers' belief in the benefits of hard work and diligence for improving their professional abilities and bringing in intrinsic values reflected the teachers' strong sense of work ethics. Often as a part of teachers' self-image and expectations, work ethic is closely linked to these teachers' understanding of their learning and professional progress. All the five teachers considered themselves hardworking and diligent in different contexts, as such a quality was also expressed by others to them.

> I don't settle until I'm sure I've done a good job. Some of my colleagues said I'm a very diligent and even perfectionist or workaholic. (Ting)
>
> I think I tend to set up high benchmark for others and to myself. That's how others would see me as well. (Cong)
>
> I'm trying to be good in every aspect really. I hope to be a capable teacher for the parents and the school. Therefore, if they ever need someone, they knew I'm capable of helping. (Zhulin)
>
> I'm not a very intelligent person. But I think I'm very diligent. I never ignore students' questions or mistakes. I guess diligence is my merit. [...] I think this is my job and I just need to love it and do it well. (Yifan)
>
> I think every task in the school is important enough to be handled well. I think if the school give me a job, I naturally need to do it well. I think a teacher needed to have the mindset. [...] I would not prioritise some tasks over others depending on my subjective judgement of what is more important. Rather I consider every aspect of my job as equally important. (Zhe)

A common theme in these five teachers' narratives is the attempt to carry out their responsibilities unquestioned and to do well in different aspects of their professional lives. These teachers also

considered their work ethic as an inseparable part of their identities as hard-working employees. These tendencies were particularly evident among the female teachers (C1, C2, C3, A4). Ting, Cong, Zhulin and Yifan described their strong work ethic as their personal characteristic that may distinguish them from others, while Zhe (B3) tended to position himself in a more formal way, in which he expressed a way of doing one's job as how he thought it should be done. Nevertheless, these five teachers addressed their strong sense of work ethic as crucial in engaging with their job in schools.

c. Being more specific with CPD needs

Another common characteristic of these five teachers' narratives is that they seemed to be more specific when it came to their needs for CPD. This is a distinguishing feature from the last category, where teachers were more general and addressed the importance of their own engagement in development activities. In contrast, these five teachers were very clear about what was and would be actually helpful to their professional development. Zhulin, for instance, considered learning about schools in other countries as most useful for her to reflect on her own experiences in Ash. Baihe also appreciated the observation of foreign teachers in Ash, as they helped her to learn about others' daily practice and to make specific adjustments at the micro level. After reflecting on her long-term career in teaching, Cong said she wanted to return to learning theories to help her further contribute to the field of education. Yifan and Zhe believed that learning about the use of technology and classroom instruction would be helpful for them to make further progress in teaching.

d. Representative and boundary building

These five teachers also tended to be more representative of the professional group they found themselves belonging to. The three PSTs' narratives seemed to represent a "culture of care", whereas the two SSTs were more likely to represent themselves as belong to a "culture of cadres".

> The difference between private schools and state school was that we focus more on students' personalised learning. In the school, everything matters, big or small. We need to know their living habits and feelings. While in the state school, teachers could not do this because of the large group of students. Naturally, we would have different expectations for our students. (Baihe)

> [When I changed my job from a state school to Ash,] I didn't like to do the pastoral care. But now I think pastoral care is so important for students' moral and emotional development. It's not just about managing the students' behaviour, but to prepare them to live independently. (Cong)

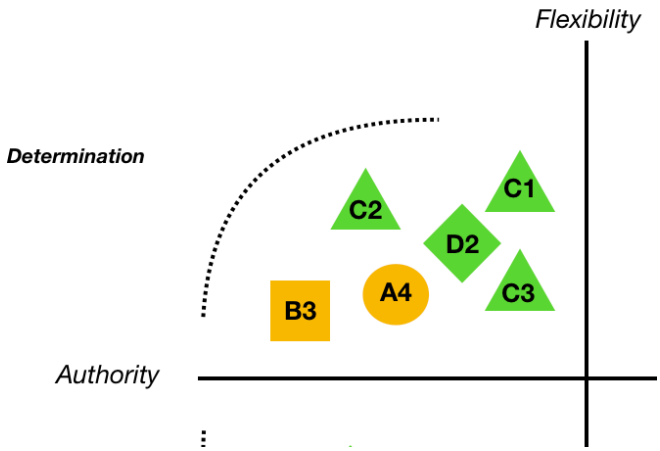
What the three PSTs argued was that teachers needed to create a culture of care where students could feel more connected and supported, rather than managed, by the teachers in the private

school. Teachers learned to change their positions after they had learned more about what was expected from teachers. Similarly, the two SSTs seemed to retain a more institutionalised role as the "cadres", who needed to demonstrate certain leadership roles in the school contexts.

> I think I'm calmer and more engaged now. I'm heavily involved with editing the school magazine. The leader asked me to do it, so I thought I ought to do it well because I'm also a party member. I ought to embody the advancement of the Communist Party. (Zhe)
>
> I feel I'm a teacher everywhere and can't do things that are unethical or illegal. These even influenced how I react to people and my relationship with neighbours and families. (Yifan)

The word "cadre" is originally a French word meaning "frame". The term is adopted by the communists and used in China as *ganbu,* a public official who is responsible for holding certain leadership and managerial positions. Although a *ganbu* may not always be a member of the Chinese Communist Party, it is more likely that someone who has attained an important position is a member of the party. Zhe came from a family that included a few governmental officials. According to him, he always wanted to become a cadre just like his other family members. He had experiences working as a college graduate cadre before becoming a teacher. Therefore, his identity as a party member became a part of his motivation in engaging with the school work. The phrase "the advancement of the Communist Party" first appeared in the 16th Party Congress Report in 2002 to address the role and leadership of Communist cadres in Chinese society. Party members were encouraged to be role models and actively engage with local communities, so as to enhance the connections between the party and communities. Although Yifan did not explicitly address her role as a Communist Party member, the image she portrayed of herself as a role model by "being a teacher everywhere she goes" was highly aligned with how Zhe considered himself as a Communist cadre. Figure 19 demonstrates the comparative positioning of the four TPIs in the categories of determination.

Figure 19 Characteristics of individual teacher case in determination



The quadrant above demonstrates the comparative characteristics locating individual teachers in this category. Among the five teachers, Zhe (B3, Chinese, 3 years, male) was farthest from the centre of the matrix. In comparison with the other four teachers, Zhe tended to be more authority-oriented and less flexible than the rest of the group. On the one hand, he had more integrated and representative identities, which might be influenced by his family background and previous experience as a local cadre member. Zhe clearly described himself as a young and passionate teacher who was willing to take on different roles in the school context (i.e. editing the school magazine and receiving officials) and progress according to the clearly defined professional stages. On the other hand, Zhe drew on institutional values and structural supports of teachers' roles, such as cultural heritage and occupational sacrifice as a narrative strategy, seemingly to help him cope with some of the tensions and changes for teachers to maintain their authority. Yifan (A4, maths, 30 years, female) was an SST returning from her retirement. Yifan also tended to take an authoritative position in terms her relationship with parents and students, yet she was more explicit about teachers' vulnerability and the difficulties she had faced in teaching in the past.

Zhulin (C1, English, 8 years, female) and Baihe (C2, Chinese, 10 years, female) were the least authoritative teachers in this category. They found themselves fitting into the school contexts and considered meeting students' needs as important to succeed in teaching. These two teachers were also flexible with adapting different roles in the school, which they considered important for students' informal learning at school. This was different from Zhe's positioning with regards to the non-classroom teaching work he was asked to carry out, although all the teachers reflected that they had expanded their skills by taking on these non-classroom roles. The reason that Baihe was located as less flexible was that she certainly had a personal preference for focusing on classroom teaching, rather than other school activities. Cong (C3, Maths, 20 years, female) assumed more authority in her narrative; perhaps most of this was due to her previous experiences in a leadership

role in a rural school. She was capable of keeping a flexible approach to the differences between the two different schools and demonstrated an open attitude to changes in her relationship with students and parents. Cong also did not want to limit herself to being seen as a typical "female teacher"; as noted previously she pointed out that she was almost masculine in her determination and was iron-willed.

9.3.3 Enhancement

Enhancement is a strategy that teachers employ to make themselves feel good about being a teacher, particularly in situations of failure and when faced with threats to their self-esteem. In this research study, three teachers (A1, B4, D3) were very concerned about their work performances in schools, the decrease in their professional status and social relationships. The three teachers expressed a mixture of both positive and negative views on their relationships with others. They often accorded significant importance to job stability as their motive for remaining in teaching. These teachers tended to draw on institutional values, rather than school supports, to build on their positive self-image. Peer comparisons were common among this group of teachers and teachers also tended to use self-regulatory strategies to address their perceived weaknesses. Thus, the pattern of alignments of teachers' multiple roles and sub-identities with structural rules and social expectations emerged in the data analysis process. Teachers tended to recapture their fitness and competences in a unified professional image, status and culture. The background information for these five teachers is presented in Table 27.

Table 27 Teacher backgrounds (Self-enhancement)

Teacher	School	Gender	Years of teaching	Subject	Education Background
A2. Ruolan	Willow	Female	3 years	Chinese	BA
B4. Jianguo	Aspen	Male	5 years	Maths	BA
D3. Wei	Redwood	Male	1 year	PE and Chinese	BA

a. Need for communities

Communities and organisations often demonstrate how they engage with others in the public in their work attitudes and practices by adopting or creating institutional values. In this research, teachers pointed out the lack of trust and mutual respect in the schools. Some teachers addressed the feeling of unhelpfulness when the value and attractiveness of teaching had decreased among the public, in particular when the status given by the State is considered as being more important than their work itself. Likewise, teachers addressed the importance of including disadvantaged

students in their classroom; they also tended to demonstrate their commitment and vision to engage learning experiences and outcomes and to encourage learning experiences and prepare students for a better future. Nevertheless, they often felt they do not "fit" in the social trend and are uncertain about possible policy and organisational changes. In the narratives, these three teachers highlighted the public values of their work for the students as well as for the society as a whole. They perceive themselves as important to create values for the public through their work and advocated that positive social environment would help them increase their sociability with the public and professional authorities in the classroom.

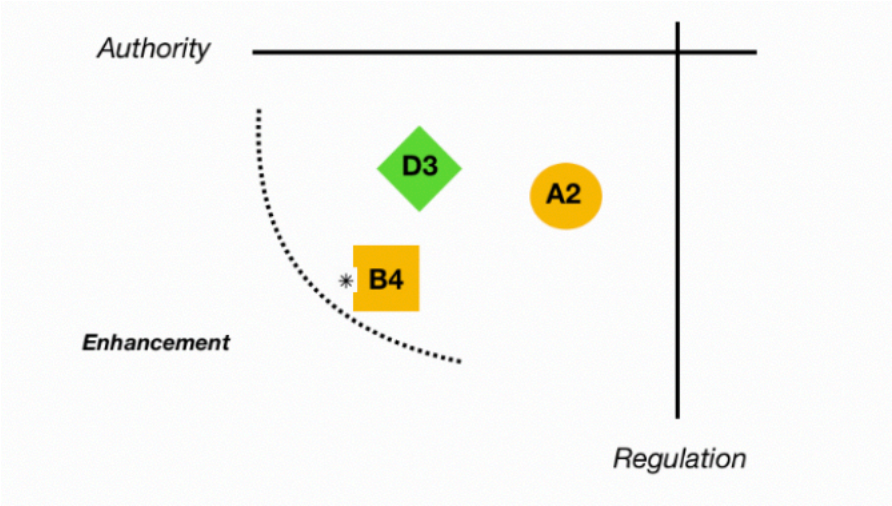
b. Resistance and representative

It is important to note that such an indirect indication of teachers' identity enhancement could also be found in the observation of teachers' reactions to the researchers' presence and in their interactions with students in the classroom. The following fieldnote described one teachers' request for the researcher, which reflects teachers' identity enhancement to maintain his authority in the classroom. While the researcher only agreed to present her student's life to the grade one students, the teacher tended to use the researchers' presence to legitimate corporal punishment as a "commonly used" method to discipline the students. The teacher invited me to give a public speech to his students and the following observations made me felt rather shocked:

> [*Fieldnote*] I'm finally done with my story as a "successful learner" who went to Oxford. I was not prepared for this at all and I wished I didn't say anything that might give students any pressure after all. Students were quiet when I asked if they have any questions for me, so the teacher took the turn. "Teachers give corporal punishment in South Korea, right?" I was first shocked by his question, and my "scholar" role came up. "Yes. But it's not considered as a proper way of dealing with naughty students." What was really shocking to me happened: the teacher turned his face to the students (grade one students) and said: "In many developed countries, like the UK, Japan or South Korea, corporal punishment is widely used. Teachers only use corporal punishments for the students' benefits."

In summary, authority and regulation were the two orientations that characterised the three teachers' narratives. Teachers tended to maintain and resume their professional authority in their narratives and the three teachers all addressed a fixed set of roles and responsibilities, rather than personal experiences and values to support their statements. Figure 20 demonstrates the comparative positioning of the four TPIs in the categories of determination.

Figure 20 Characteristics of individual teacher case in enhancement



The quadrant demonstrates the comparative characteristics of the individual teachers in this category. Among the three teachers, Jianguo (B4, Maths, 5 years, male) was farthest from the centre of the matrix. Jianguo's resisting participation deserved a note of caution in the comparative analysis process. Jianguo was defensive and assumed a high level of authority in the way he responded to me. One of my observations was that Jianguo faced towards the door in front of us throughout the interview, looking like a soldier. He rarely looked me in my eye and seemed to resist engaging fully with the interview, despite his voluntary participation in this research study. Although I had showed the consent form and tried to ask questions in different forms, he still maintained a distance from me.

One way that Jianguo tended to assert his authority was through the way he presented himself in the interview. Jianguo refused to give specific examples of his personal experiences or observations to demonstrate these processes. The lack of trust with the researcher and later on the misuse of the researcher's position with his students made the research process feel dehumanising. In a sense, Jianguo may actually sense a threat to his sense of identity, therefore, trying to limit and resist answering my interview questions. In addition to this, the later misunderstanding of the researcher's role to misrepresent corporal punishment in his classroom might indicate this teacher's need to enhance his authority with his students in the classroom.

Zhe (D3, PE and Chinese, 1 year, male) was one case among the 16 teachers. Taking administrative and leadership roles and responsibilities at a very early stage of his career in a private school might require him to be very resilient to complexities in both teaching and working in general. Zhe's narrative was heavily engaged with philosophical concepts and theories, which also seemed to lack

much connection with his actual experiences and practices. Zhe tended to be less closed with his narrative with regards to the openness and flexibilities for his career plan and his respect and positive interactions with the researcher. In comparison, Ruolan (A2, three years, Chinese, female) seemed more capable (or willing) of elaborating on her experiences than the other two teachers in the group. She also incorporated the work of care in her narrative of being a professional teacher. In addition, she was also aware of the behavioural strategies (i.e. smiling in the mirror and giving positive words) she took when it came to negative thoughts and experiences of tension. The strategies might still be more restricting than empowering to her.

9.3.4 Control

This section focuses on a group of teachers whose TPIs were characterised by a sense of control, especially when teachers were experiencing high level of tension and uncertainty described in their narratives. These three teachers (A2, B2, D1) viewed and talked about students' learning as bounded by external structures, such as the curriculum and examinations. Such teachers felt that they were forced to focus on the usability of subject knowledge learning in practical terms, such as students' performance in examinations or social functions. Their explanations also included sharing more life-applicable examples.

Table 28 Teacher backgrounds (Control)

Teacher	School	Gender	Years of teaching	Subject	Education Background
A2. Haoting	Willow	Male	10 years	Maths	BA
B2. Xinxin	Aspen	Female	3 years	Maths	BA
D1. Linjia	Redwood	Female	1 year	Maths	BA

a. Fragmentation

These four teachers might speak positively or negatively about school reform. However, despite being able to reflect on and claim the importance of such a practice, these three teachers often position themselves in the early stages of understanding the reform with a sense of uncertainty. Teachers' perceptions of their goals and their capacity to take up the practices consistently also seemed to vary due to different external conditions and situations. For instance, Haoting expressed his uncertainty due to the change in school leadership and management style:

> If we want the classroom reform to be successful, the school needs to keep with one model for the long term rather than being temporary or changing too frequently [...] Otherwise, we would not achieve anything in the end.

For Haoting, following the school policy seemed to be the main way he understood the pedagogical change:

> Now the policy is 30% teaching and 70% managing, which means that teachers need to talk less and let students [...] actively learn. Teachers need to improve their classroom management and pay more attention to students who sit at the back of the classroom.

According to Haoting, this policy was implemented three years ago but the school leader is not satisfied with the outcomes: "He thinks that teachers are not at ease letting students learn on their own, and still rely on lecturing in their teaching." Haoting explained that this is because teachers are under pressure to improve students' examination results and therefore need to prove their performance in the ranking system for future job promotion. As he said: "The outcome could be better if they do not rank students and teachers. For the benefit of job promotion, teachers cannot ignore the scores but still rely on lecturing in teaching."

The combination of perceived structural restraints and negative self-efficacy seemed to result in teachers in this category feeling frustration with the lack of career progression. As a whole, despite these teachers' comment on the positive influences of the constructive pedagogy and the idea of student-centeredness, the findings suggest that the respondents often feel a bi-directional pressure – being pulled towards different sets of values, beliefs or practices. The participant teachers often feel they need to be prudent to become some kind of future version of themselves. It is especially the case when these teachers tend to take into account a wider range of external factors, including school management, requirements in examinations, crowded classrooms and ineffective professional development regimes, etc. Although these teachers addressed the importance of students' active learning, the consideration of external constraints seemed to have influenced their capacity to put into practice what they thought was ideal for students. This is indicative of the fragmentation of teachers' multiple identities, which seemed to further relate to teachers' low self-efficacy. Haoting expressed this near the end of the interview:

> I do what the school asks me to do. It's different from what I think and believe. There are lots of pressures from the school and it's impossible for me to reach what I've imagined, that is to make the classroom more relaxing and more vivid. That's impossible.

b. Low trust and negative relations

These teachers reported persistent barriers in managing their relations with parents. They tended to be discouraged by the change in parent–teacher relations in schools, especially when the change did not align with their expectations for respect and collaboration. For these teachers, parents' disengagements from their children's education turned out to be one of the major challenges in teaching. This is not to say that parents and teachers did not engage with each other to promote students' learning and well-being. Instead, teachers noted that parents were too busy at work but

said they still tried to keep in regular contact with parents through mobile messages and WeChat groups, most of the time to inform parents about the homework for each day. What makes these teachers different is that they seemed to lack a sense of authority and feel insufficiently equipped to connect and gain active support from others to realise their professional goals for children's development. This is in contrast to other teachers in the sample, who gave the impression at interview that they could more easily establish collaborations with other colleagues and parents and facilitate engagement by employing a range of communication strategies.

c. Job progression

In comparison with other teachers in this study, those who belonged to this sub-group tended to be less capable of identifying the value and relevance of professional development to their practices and job progression. For example, Haoting and Ruolan, in particular, seemed to share experiences of ineffective professional training at different stages of their career. While observing Haoting's class, I realised that his PowerPoint presentation was very colourful and dynamic with little apples falling down from the tree to show the numbers. The form seemed to me to be strongly developed. I was curious to know if Haoting made the presentation himself and if so, what did he mean by saying he needs more training on making presentations. He then told me that he had found the high-quality presentation online, and he really liked it: "It has background music and so it's pretty good." Haoting's priority in professional development seemed to be not situated in the context of mathematics, but his capacity to master various tools (making PowerPoint files, playing music, drawing) in his teaching. In addition, Haoting said that he chose this job for security reasons. As a male teacher, he is also an important financial resource for his family. However, his said his wage was very low and he did not see much hope for job promotion, and thus Haoting appeared to struggle to maintain his commitment and investment in further professional development. As he said:

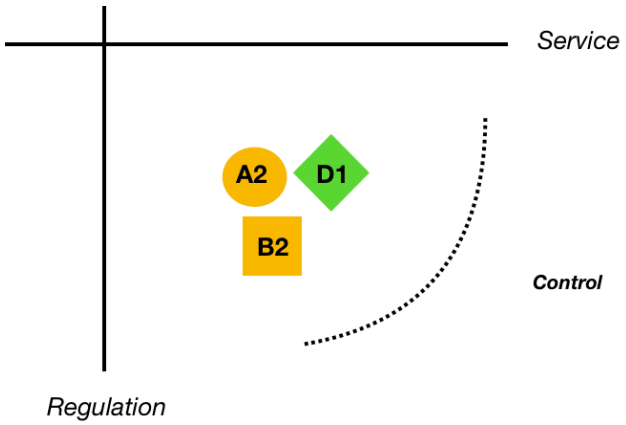
> I can see my career on one path, and I will basically be a teacher my entire life. My level is basically set and that means there's not much space for development. That's it.

Teachers who are located in this category seemed to be more willing to engage with professional development when they received sufficient encouragement and instructions. Real impact, contextualised goals and educational theories, as well as the sustainability of the implementation, are important for these teachers to be convinced to make changes to the classroom. Therefore, if teachers could receive their professional development in a way that is structured to meet their learning needs, as well as an appraisal system that motivates teachers in terms of job promotion, there would be more potential for teachers' learning to take place.

In summary, teachers whose identity narratives were characterised by *control* tended to feel confused and isolated, and experienced a lack of support in learning about and developing the

curriculum. These teachers perceived the reform to promote constructivist pedagogy in both positive and negative lights, yet they felt that their lack of knowledge and support limited their capacity to implement the reform-based practices. They are not as committed to this pedagogical approach; rather, they tended to consider the pedagogical approach as simply "another trend" to follow. Moreover, these teachers did not seem as invested in professional development and appeared reluctant to change; they might also be inflexible in adapting to new technology and methods in teaching. They often felt unsupported and disempowered due to the lack of job progression and lacked knowledge about and resources for professional development. In terms of their social relationships, these teachers might not be receptive to the opinions of others and might feel insufficiently equipped to connect with others. Sometimes they see themselves as legitimately entitled to deference and respect. Their interactions with others were based on reference to collectively expected values, interests and utility purpose, yet not necessarily on individualistic, materialistic or maximising bases. All combined, the multiple tensions created the feeling of suspense and control that may amplify the fluctuating effect experienced in existing multiple roles and sub-identities in response to changes. As it is shown in Figure 21, the four teachers showed some similarities in terms of the subject of teaching (three maths teachers) and emotional experiences (tension and helplessness).

Figure 21 Characteristics of individual teacher case in control

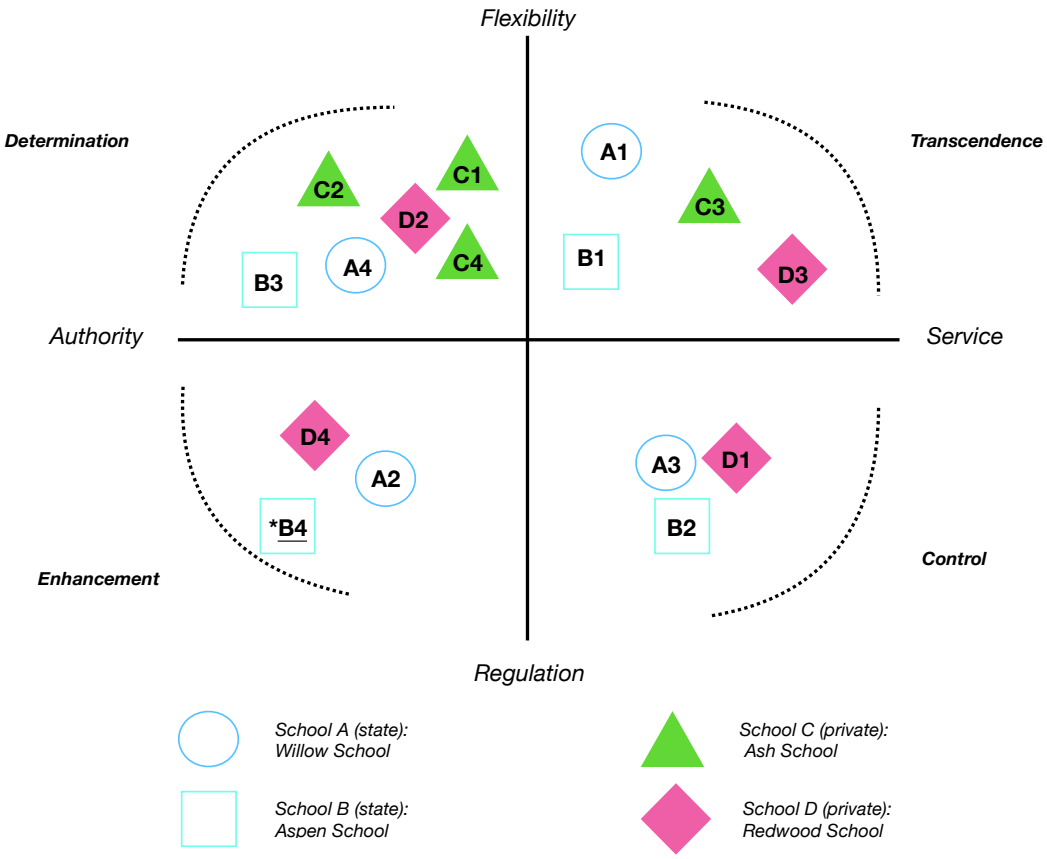


Summary

In this section, I conducted a comparative analysis, in combination with diagrams, to identify teachers that were categorised in four different yet interrelated types of TPI: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement; and 4) control. To summarise this section, Figure 22 shows the overall layout of the 16 individual teachers in terms of their positioning within the original framework developed from the data analysis. I do not intend to present the exact positions; rather,

I used this figure to help identify the comparative characteristics of individual teachers in each quadrant. Figure 22 also incorporates colours, shapes and lines to demonstrate the comparative characteristics among teachers from the same school contexts. I have labelled individual teachers with the letters assigned to each school. The presentations of the school cases are also reinforced by the spread-location plot with different and lines.

Figure 22 Mapping teacher cases in the TPI matrix



Although the limited sample size is limited, the diagram suggests that school context may exert more influence on PSTs than on SSTs. This may be becausee the two private schools served very different student groups. As it is shown in this figure, the participant teachers in the Ash International School (C) were more homogeneous than in other schools. In particular, three out of the four teachers from Ash were located in the category of determination. In contrast, participant teachers in the Redwood school (D) tended to show varying perceptions of their experiences. The figure showed that the differences among the four teachers from the Redwood school seem to be greater than those among teachers from the Ash school. Teachers from Willow and Aspen were also different from each other. In addition, two teachers (A1 and A4) from the Willow school demonstrated more flexibility in comparison with the two teachers (B1 and B3) in the Aspen school.

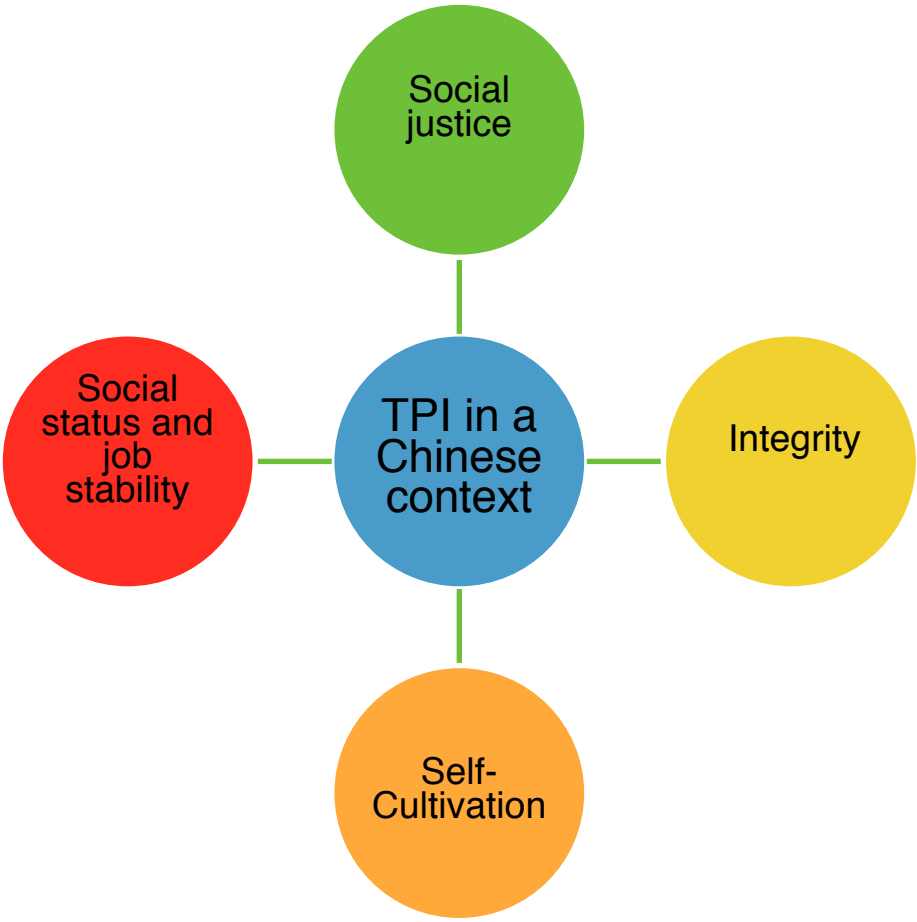
Similarly, the other two teachers (A2 and A3) showed less tendency in regulation compared to the other two teachers (B2 and B4) from the Aspen school.

Seeing the matrix as a whole, the distribution of 16 teachers between authority and service (the horizontal axis) is generally equal. There were nine teachers who were more authority-oriented and seven teachers who were more service-oriented in their professional identity narratives. More teachers (10) were flexibility-oriented than regulation-oriented (6) (the vertical axis). This might indicate that overall TPIs across the state and private schools were more likely to differentiate in terms of teachers' individual strategies in specific contexts than the teachers' perceptions of their relationships with others in the school contexts. In the next section, I move on to the discussion of the distinguishing cultural values identified among the 16 teachers' narratives from China.

9.4 Reflections on Chinese culture and TPIs

The cross-case analysis suggests the influences of Chinese culture on the process of constructing TPIs. This research study is conducted with 16 primary school teachers in one county in Shandong province in China. All the participant teachers' Interviews revealed that they approached certain aspect of their professional lives by employing concepts and ideas from Chinese philosophy or literature. Figure 23 demonstrates the four interacting core values that characterise these Chinese teachers' professionalism, as revealed by interviews. These interlinked values seemed to be strongly influenced by the ideal image of teachers, social norms and the perceptions of personal growth that are culturally important in the Chinese traditions.

Figure 23 Core values reflected in the construction of Chinese teachers' professional identities.



Social justice (*gongdao*[56])

In Chinese philosophy, the term "justice" or "fairness" could be translated into *gongdao* (the principle of justice). Although teachers used different words and statements to address the issue of inequality in education, the concept of *gongdao* was very helpful to capture the meaning behind these claims, as it indicates the idea of preserving cosmic harmony by removing injustice. It is often used when people think of certain unacceptable or unjust situations that should be corrected. In this research context, 12 teachers explicitly talked about barriers to achieving equally good learning experiences and outcomes for their students. Ten teachers addressed the importance of school or their classroom being inclusive for disadvantaged students. Almost all the teachers (except case B4) tended to demonstrate their commitment and vision to engaging learning experiences and outcomes and to encouraging learning experiences and preparing students for a better future. Eleven teachers addressed the importance of children's agency in communication and decision making in their own learning experiences. At other times, "justice" could be translated as *zhengyi*, which is a combination of Confusion concepts *zheng* (righteousness) and *yi* (moral integrity).

[56] 公道

Despite the differences, teachers' narratives tended to reflect the teachers' sense of purposes at work to achieve *gongdao* for their students.

Pursuit of integrity (*lianzheng*[57])

There seemed to be different views of what "integrity" means for these teachers. In this research, a few teachers used the word "authenticity", *zhenshi*, to describe one's truthfulness to one's original commitment and honesty about who one is as an individual. Of course, the word "commitment" could be used as a broad umbrella term that covers a wide range of teachers' intentions, promises, convictions and relationships of trust and expectation. In this research context, teachers addressed the importance of reflecting their personal and attitudes and beliefs in teaching to contributing to students' development. These teachers also demonstrated their confidence in their work in that they could bring positive changes to the students' futures and to the development of China's education system in general. In Chinese culture, the concept of *integrity* is often upheld in opposition to corruption and/or lust. Rather than endorsing personal desires, the participant teachers framed their professional identities as their personal stories of holding consistently true to their commitments.

Self-cultivation (*xiushen*[58])

The concept of Xiushen is from the Book of Rites (Liji). The concept is closely associated with the Confucian notion of moral and ritual self-discipline. In this research context, all the teachers' narrative reflected the gradually developed sense of trust and respect through their interactions with others. These teachers also demonstrated their capacity to develop multiple reactions and reflections in social encounters. These encounters included teaching in open classes, gathering and showing understanding to parents' feedbacks, and setting rule and boundaries with others, and actively learning and asking for suggestions from colleagues. Although some teachers from the Ash international school often show their appreciation for the school culture, most teachers tend to believe the achievement and progression of their professional and personal lives ultimately depended on their adaptive capacity and mindset of lifelong learning. Such perception also goes hand in hand with the mutually beneficial relationships among members of a community. As noted in the Analects: "in desiring to reach a goal, [one] helps others to reach the goal and influences other to 'become their best, not their worst'". All the teachers also mentioned their willingness to learn from and guide others and that their appreciation of a community where all those involved in influencing the lives of learners showed their respect and trust to each other in and beyond the school.

[57] 廉正
[58] 修身

Social status and job stability (*tizhi shenfen*[59])

The word "system" is often translated as *tizhi* in Chinese. Often times, the phrase *tizhi shenfen* (or "system status") indicates that an individual works in the State system or has the status and social and welfare benefits of a State employee. Such a status also often comes with a higher social status in society and a close attachment to the local government. All the participant teachers in this research study wanted to obtain the *tizhi shenfen* as teachers, either due to their personal choices, the influences of their parents or their self-expectations. The significance of *tizhi shenfen* was particularly important among the Redwood school teachers, as many of them considered having *tizhi shenfen* as significant for guaranteeing job stability and a more positive social image as being a "public servant" and maintaining their sense of self-esteem in remaining in the teaching profession.

9.5 Summary

In this chapter, I extended the comparative elements of this research study by a cross case analysis comparing themes across the eight SST and eight PST narratives in order to identify the common and contrasting characteristics of TPIs in the four different state and private schools. In this chapter, I first summarised the comparative characteristics of TPIs in the private and state schools. I then presented the orientations of TPIs based on a two-dimensional matrix developed from the cross-case analysis. I identified four orientations in TPI narratives: 1) flexibility; 2) regulation; 3) service; and 4) authority. The intersection of the four orientations suggested four types of identity processes: 1) transcendence; 2) determination; 3) enhancement and 4) control. At the end of this chapter, I mapped each individual teacher on the original framework to revisit the comparative characteristics of TPIs in and among each school cases. The comparison was also helpful to elicit common cultural influences on TPIs in the Chinese context. In the next chapter, I seek to draw conclusions from these findings and link my research to the TPI literature. I will also discuss the implications, strengths and limitations of this research study.

[59] 体制身份

Chapter 10: Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, I will conclude this research study by reviewing the RQs and research findings that addressed these questions (10.1). I will also explain how the findings relate and contribute to the existing literature on TPIs (10.2). Following this, I will summarise the key findings in this research study (10.3) and also link these findings to my earlier MSc study (10.4). A revision of the concept of "state" and "private" is included in Section 10.5. The following sections will contribute to the discussion of the limitations and contributions of this research study to knowledge and recommendations for practice and further studies (10.6).

10.1 Addressing the RQs

This research study sought to explore the comparative characteristics of primary school TPIs in four private and state schools in one county (Nanqi) in the Shandong province of China. By using narrative inquiry and comparative case study design, I aimed to answer the following RQs:

RQ 1: What characterises teachers' sense of their professional identities in the four different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools) in Nanqi in China?

Sub-question 1: How do teachers within each school construct their professional identities?

Sub-question 2: How do teachers experience and reconcile identity tensions?

Sub-questions 3: What are the other characteristics of TPIs?

RQ 2: What personal and social factors do teachers consider important in shaping their professional identities?

RQ 3: What are the differences and similarities in the TPIs in the two state schools and two private schools in Nanqi?

10.1.1 What characterises teachers' sense of professional identities in the four different primary schools (two state schools and two private schools) in Nanqi in China?

This RQ focuses on the perceived influences of school contexts in shaping teachers' sense of professional identities. Most of the teachers were actively engaged with the research process to reflect on their experiences of teaching at different schools. Despite differences in teachers' backgrounds, family influences and professional experiences, and in roles and positions in the school, the 16 teachers shared some commonalities in all three components of TPI construction. The findings indicated that the school context remains significant in teachers' experiences of teaching, professional images and relationships, as well as in teachers' sense of job satisfaction. With regards to teachers' self-perceptions as professional teachers, all sample teachers addressed their commitment to students' moral development as the core of their professional identities as

primary school teachers. This research study also identified a range of conditions that would help support them achieve their professional goals. These factors include:

- flexibility to adapt to students' needs depending on age and family background;
- community and school-based learning at work;
- strong rapport with students;
- effective communication and support from pupils' parents;
- sense of personal satisfaction and happiness; and
- knowledge and mastery of the content of the curriculum.

At the same time, all teachers felt that they had to deal with a range of *restrictions* to carry out their responsibilities and develop a sense of autonomy and satisfaction in teaching. Teachers often felt that these factors had made teaching rather a discouraging experience. Some teachers that they experienced:

- a heavy workload;
- tensions between schools and parents / lack of parents' engagement in children's learning;
- lack of job progression;
- ineffectiveness in curriculum reform implementation;
- multiple and conflicting professional roles and responsibilities; and
- negative social images of the teaching profession.

All the 16 teachers reflected upon the problematic social image of teaching as a profession in media reports and public opinion in China. Teachers' low social status and vulnerability seemed to be particularly stressful for the sample teachers. In general, TPIs are characterised by the constant negotiation between the sense of satisfaction in teacher–student relationships and the lack of structural support in all four school cases. The comparative analysis of themes of teachers' narratives also indicated that *teachers' experience of tensions* is a universal component of the development of their professional identities. Teachers might be influenced by different factors and respond to tensions they experienced at work in different ways.

10.1.2 What personal and social factors do teachers consider important to the development of TPIs?

A key component of the second RQ is to identify a range of personal and social factors that teachers considered important influences in the process of developing their sense of belonging and professionalism. I identified three different factors through the thematic analysis: 1) task aspects; 2) social aspects; and 3) material aspects.

First of all, teachers' understanding of the purpose of their work tasks, including the learning and management purpose of these tasks, seemed to be an important part of teachers' learning in the workplace, which further contributes to these teachers' sense of identity, control and satisfaction at work. For example, in the private schools, where the school emphasised the pastoral care as a part of students' learning experiences at schools, teachers were more likely to incorporate this aspect of teaching into the narrative of who they are as teachers. Other examples include the teachers' understanding of tasks assigned to them during the curriculum reform and the influence of such an understanding of teachers' attitudes towards curriculum and school changes. Teachers who developed such an understanding seemed to be less resistant to changes and showed an attitude of "openness" at a time of uncertainty. Despite teachers' capacity to understand those purposes of the working tasks, however, an overall tendency to feel overwhelmed and distracted from classroom teaching was evident in both SST and PST narratives. In this sense, the process of planning and managing changes in the school cases could be improved by ensuring teachers' awareness of support and not expecting them to take on too much in terms of external educational reform. Keeping teachers and the wider community well-informed prior to major curriculum and organisational changes could be valuable for the stable development of TPIs.

Secondly, the social aspect of schoolwork seemed to exert a significant impact on the development of TPIs. The most common aspects were parental engagement in learning, teacher–student interactions, school leaderships and peer influences. Teachers' positive views towards parental engagement included their support for students' moral and behaviour improvement, as well as interest in students' academic progress. Teachers also identified a number of practical barriers to engaging parents, including the lack of time, practical skills on the part of parents, as well as an understanding of how to relate to and negotiate with teachers and schools. Introverted young teachers in state schools seemed to feel particularly vulnerable when they had to face questioning from parents, who were often older than the teachers and perceived as upholding more social experiences and privilege. Teachers who could successfully negotiate the imbalance of power tended to support a collaborative culture where teachers could also learn from parents and work *with*, rather than *for*, parents.

Another element of the social aspect of teachers' work that exerted influences on TPIs is the teacher–student interactions. Most teachers reported that both state and PSTs considered their interactions with children as satisfactory, and often said that both offering emotional support to the students and students' demonstration of closeness and trust towards them were the most

enjoyable part of their work and the sense of satisfaction. Despite the different stories individual teachers told, the benefits of a respectful relationship between students and teachers was evident the teachers' narratives.

School leadership was another main factor that teachers perceived as important in contributing to their sense of belongingness and awareness of support. It is worth noting that PSTs tended to be more explicit in talking about school leadership than SSTs, which might be due to the extent to which teachers felt comfortable discussing school leadership with the researcher and the different power relationships between school leaders and their staff in the two sectors. Nevertheless, teachers' narratives reflected their perceptions of the characteristics of effective leadership based on their professional experiences and needs. These characteristics included:

- Headteachers' involvement and specialised knowledge in teacher training and development.
- A collegiate and facilitative style of leadership.
- A clear and promising educational vision.
- A courageous personality and encouragement of bottom-up innovation.

A strong theme from this research is the positive influence of colleagues in providing encouragement and feedback, establishing role models, helping build confidence and supporting their practice. It seems that teachers not only make sense of their work and TPIs as individuals, but as a collective body that they form in both formal and informal networks with their peers. Many teachers enjoy their relationship with colleagues and often consider teaching as a profession that focuses more on students' development and is less disturbed by "office politics". This idea might be the product of the idea of teaching as serving the public good for students' development and the form of school organisation, where teachers are often assigned particular titles and extra pay to be responsible for managing students' lives outside classroom teaching.

In addition, the material and technological aspect of schoolwork emerged as an important influence on teachers' sense of professional satisfaction in schools. A few teachers mentioned the use of technology, visual facilities and equipment as positive changes to their daily communications with others. On top of these generally positive attitudes towards technological changes, teachers of different age groups, together with school contexts, demonstrated different levels of engagement and attitudes with the use of technology at work. The older and more experienced teachers tended to consider themselves as less capable of using technologies in their teaching, while young teachers were more aware of and satisfied with applying technology in class preparation and collegial communications, as well as in their engagement with parents. This might be due to different contexts, kinds of training and the guidance which teachers received before and after they apply technological tools at work. Investigations of teachers' identity development in

applying digital tools would be very helpful for further explaining the new forms of learning and TPI developments in the age of digital technology.

The imbalance of TPI developments among individual teachers and sub groups of teachers appeared to be due to multiple layers of personal and social influences. Teachers' narratives suggested that the extent of teachers' ability to cope with identity tension varies according to personal experience and preference. Large-scale quantitative research designs would be helpful to explore the relationships among different facets and how they influence TPIs.

10.1.3 What are the differences and similarities in the TPIs between the two state schools and two private schools in this research?

As discussed in the previous chapters, there are many common characteristics that were evident across the different school cases. In this section, I will focus on answering the questions related to the divisions of TPI developments between the eight SSTs and the eight PSTs.

All 16 school teachers demonstrated their commitment to students' learning despite the apparent lack of career choices in their narratives. In the interviews, three highlighted the structural problems of family education and the approaches to implement the curriculum reform. Positive teacher–student interaction is found to be a significant contributing factor to the 16 teachers' sense of achievement and satisfaction at work.

Teachers in the state schools seemed to be more engaged with policy and social issues in education in negotiating the challenges they faced in their everyday lives. The sense of a threat to their professional authority was a distinguishing theme in these SSTs' identity narratives, which might exert both positive and negative influences on teachers' development of identities. Some teachers were able to express their political opinions, and others showed signs of confusion, anxiety and tensions.

Teachers' narratives also reflected the influence of political and cultural factors. In this sense, the SSTs' TPIs seemed to have more similarities in terms of the macro-narratives across school cases. These teachers were reflective of the tensions among the main stakeholders in primary school education and the challenges they faced to cope with structural changes. Individual TPIs also seem to vary on the micro-level. By this, I mean the participant state teachers seemed to have varied and imbalanced development of identities in terms of their individual sense of self-efficacy and coping strategies. On the other hand, PSTs seemed to develop more contrasting macro-narratives in terms of their approach to professional development, career pursuits, professional images and job motivations. Yet teachers' micro-narratives (i.e. individuals' micro-stories of their personal actions, experiences and strategies in different contexts) reflected more similarities than those in state schools. In addition to addressing the TPI similarities and differences in different state and private primary schools in Nanqi, the findings from this research can also be compared with the findings on TPIs in the existing literature, which is presented in the following section.

10.2 Reconnecting with the existing literature and existing practices

The findings of this research largely support the general conclusions of previous studies in the area of teacher knowledge, teacher emotions and reflection. Through an innovative methodology that combines narrative inquiry and cross-case analysis, and drawing on the concept of narrative identity, professionalism and the empirical data from this research study, TPIs could be understood as not only assemblies of different sub-identities, but as processes of regenerating and creating narratives that integrate personal experiences, institutional values and professional discourses into an evolving story of the "teaching self" that provides the individual teacher with a sense of purpose, social status, expertise and belongingness.

10.2.1 Teacher training and education

The present research findings agreed with the general benefits of teacher training and education to contribute to the development of TPIs. Teachers in this research study demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards professional learning and a willingness to engage with further studies to adapt to further changes and challenges. This research is effective in responding to recent discussions on the potentially positive roles of tension and conflict in the development of TPIs in teacher training and educational settings. The limitations of such interpretations were that most of the discussion was based on the kind of systematic investigation in a particular teacher training project or education context.

Due to the exploratory nature of this small-scale research study, I did not focus on one or two particular training settings, which helped to clarify teachers' access and general preferences for teacher training and education in different school contexts. Teachers' narratives allowed them to select the particular professional training experiences they found most helpful or inefficient in constructing their professional identities. In addition to the effective teacher training projects that involved teachers' reflection of their own practices and awareness of roles, the findings from this research study also suggest that teachers' awareness of their informal learning and the benefits of personal development in the school contexts could be a significant facet of their TPI development. This seemed to further indicate that if the teacher training institute, universities or school-based training agencies could be the training vehicles for the development of TPIs, they too need to become flexible, as the teachers they are trying to engage have urgent needs for adaptability as a result of increasing complexity in the changing educational contexts. It is important to note here that teachers seemed to hold different attitudes towards the similar situation, which could be further categorised as positive tension and negative tension. The following are some examples:

- ***Negative tension***: Although the teacher disagreed with the focus on academic found in the Chinese educational system, the teacher had to form an argument about the benefits of academic performance yet complaining about the burden of curriculum and assessment. This seems to indicate a *negative tension* in which teachers reluctantly perform in certain

ways due to the limitations of the external structure and the lack of teacher agency.

- ***Positive tension***: Some teachers tended to perceive the current limitations as resources for their reflection and a space for creativity and feel content with their imaginations about future changes of the system.

This difference might be influenced by various factors, including years of teaching experience, differences in the subjects (Chinese and maths), the kind of training they had or simply the quality of textbooks and the effectiveness of assessment themselves.

10.2.2 Professionalism and policy demands

The research findings suggest the "persistence of professionalism" in teachers' narratives in both state and private primary schools which accords with earlier work (Hoyle and Wallace, 2010). Teachers' narratives also demonstrated the orientation of three pillars of teachers' professionalism: 1) peer networks; 2) professional knowledge base; and 3) autonomous decision making (Wang et al., 2014). On top of this, my research suggests that the State *bianzhi* status remains the main motivation for participants to become and remain in teaching: teachers perceived *bianzhi* as a guarantee of future job stability and legitimate professional status as state employees.

More research studies could be done to explore the potential contributions of teachers' subject knowledge in the construction of their professional identities. This is due to the situation that the process interview could very much depend on teachers' capacities to organise their language to perform a professional narrative. For instance, Chinese teachers might be more familiar with the literal meaning of identity and the dialogic self than maths teachers, so they might be more likely to become more engaged and demonstrate an integrated TPI than maths teachers. The English teacher, on the other hand, seemed to address the importance of leadership and the enjoyment of learning about education in foreign countries due to the link between language and cultural differences. In addition, school accountability and curriculum implementation were the other two influential dimensions of the educational policies. The approaches in implementing curriculum reform were often forceful and disengaging for teachers in the two state schools and the private charity school. The static job progression in the accountability system and the lack of professional autonomy often led to teacher frustration and demoralising experiences. This is particularly the case for the participating SSTs in the mid-stages of their teaching career.

A final point this research study which could add to the current discussion of teacher professionalism and policy demand is the role of teacher unions and representative bodies. In this research study, most teachers experienced the problem of representation. Some teachers considered themselves as a "marginalised" group that is "represented" rather than one that "represents" themselves. Chinese teachers often do not have a legally constituted labour group representing them and allowing collective bargaining. The contextual constraints could be one of the contextual influences on teachers' sense of disempowerment as professionals, especially when

it comes to the biased representations of the teaching profession in the public and social media. Some teachers also expressed a sense of "resentment" and a lack of social justice towards teachers and unsatisfactory pay, which might further limit teachers' motivations at work and disempower teachers from critically engaging with unethical conduct in schools.

10.2.3 Community and collaborations

All the teachers considered their collegial relationships as crucial for both their professional development and personal satisfaction. This finding generally agrees with other research studies in different country contexts on the influence of networks and professional communities from teachers' viewpoints (Graham, 2006; Lieberman, 2008). Most young teachers and mid-stage teachers found strong connections with colleagues in the context of professional collaborations and daily communication. Yet the constraint of Wenger's (1998) CoP could be developed by including the casual aspect of teachers' school lives and communication, through which teachers demonstrate care for each other and created a relaxing atmosphere for others to feel that they are accepted and emotionally supported. In this sense, teachers' "legitimate participation" might be enhanced not only by their access to certain professional and cultural capital in the formal setting, but also an inclusive and friendly organisational culture shared by peers, managers and parents in the school.

10.2.4 Sense of vocation and personal values

Another important part of the TPI literature argued that teachers' personal experience and emotions in their interactions with others on a day-to-day basis constitute an important part of their professional identities. A number of research studies have sought to integrate teachers' emotions in investigating TPIs, including Hargreaves (1998) and Day et al. (2007). As Hargreaves emphasised:

> Educational change initiatives do not just affect teachers' knowledge, skill and problem-solving capacity. They affect a whole web of significant and meaningful relationships that make up the work of schools and that are at the very heart of the teaching process [...] Teachers make heavy emotional investments in these relationships. Their sense of success and satisfaction depends on them. (1998:838)

Some of the teachers' narratives seem to correspond to Nias' (1989) finding on the incorporation of the social identity as "a teacher" into individual teachers' self-images over time. In addition, teachers tended to address the "core value" that they hope to bring through their work, regardless of the difference between state and private schools.

10.3 Linking the MSc and DPhil findings

This DPhil thesis was informed by my earlier MSc study on TPIs in private tutoring schools in Shandong province in China (Liu 2012). I was interested in TPIs due to my personal experiences in

founding a private tutoring institute and my interest in understanding teachers' experiences in private schools and how the schools and policy makers could support PSTs' professional developments and well-being. The DPhil study set out to expand on the MSc dissertation by including SSTs to deepen the current understandings of TPIs against the wider background of educational reform in China. Findings from the DPhil research enriched and extended the previous MSc findings by adding to the investigation an analysis of the impact of different school contexts. The comparative analysis in the DPhil study also led to findings related to the similarities and differences across individual teacher and school cases. A typology of TPI was developed as a framework for further exploration and review (see chapter 9).

10.4 Revisiting the concepts of "state" versus "private" schools

This research, by developing a more developed typology of TPIs and the influencing factors and conditions, is intended to contribute to the debate about how teachers, school leaders, parents and local policy makers might better promote teachers' well-being and professionalism in primary education. Historically, private schools have long history in China. Current understandings of the role of private schools in the Chinese context needs to extend the current market-oriented approaches to private schools as it was in the era of new liberalism. Instead, an approach that is more in line with community-based understanding of private education seemed to be more applicable. At the same time, the challenges in reforming the state schools are also worth noticing when SSTs also often face the pressure of parents demanding better education for their children yet who felt reluctant to engage with the school in a positive and guided way. Private schools were rewarded freedom yet were highly reliant on the relationship with local government and a rigid system in protecting its roles to contribute to the public good in China's education system by celebrating diversity, addressing social mobility challenges, and promoting social and economic development and global citizenships.

At the level of practice, the contribution private schools could make to the development of TPIs is highly dependent on the collaboration between the local government and private school managers. With regards to teachers' professional development in both state and private schools, findings from this research that teachers are no longer neatly bounded in a constrained community, nor do schools operate in a purely state-dominated educational system. For these reasons, teachers' and educators' abilities to challenge and negotiate social and professional categories can be seen worth encouraging. This research study also has helped to identify a series of values that could be further connected with the long-standing Chinese traditions of education and social development across two sectors though which teachers might feel engaged in educational reform. Teachers have argued that they need the space and support necessary to express their emerging and sometimes critical selves. The challenges lie in translating this call, in responding to teachers' desire that other stakeholders in education treat them as respectable professions, rather than the "educational labourers" or "second-class citizens".

10.5 Reflections on trustworthiness and quality in narrative studies

As has been discussed in chapter 4, this research adopted a design for a qualitative study of teachers' narratives to explore TPIs in different school contexts in one province in China. While carrying out this research study, I pondered over questions of the quality of the study of teachers' narrated experiences. "How valid is narrative inquiry and the data analysis process? How do I know if the participants were telling truthful stories? What does it mean if the teachers make up stories?" I referred to influential texts in narrative inquiries and qualitative research methods in chapter 4 and drew the conclusion that alternative terms to evaluate the quality of qualitative research project need to be employed. Research validity should not be understood as a series of scientific rules for eliciting the "objective truth"; instead, it is a component of the research design and process that support the credibility of the account of the description, interpretations or conclusions. A developmental approach was presented in chapter four that included three connected parts: research design; data collection; and data analysis. As I went back and forth between different stages in developing this study, I found two analytical issues demand further details, namely verisimilitude and utility.

- Verisimilitude

In research literature, verisimilitude was defined as "a criterion for a good literary study, in which the writing seems 'real' and 'alive'" for the audiences and can effectively guide the readers to the world of the study (Creswell, 2007:250). For this study to be trustworthy, it must achieve verisimilitude to allow others to experience what it is like to be the participant teachers in the similar situation and making decisions. To address this issue, techniques of member checking, and audience validation were used in this research.

- Utility

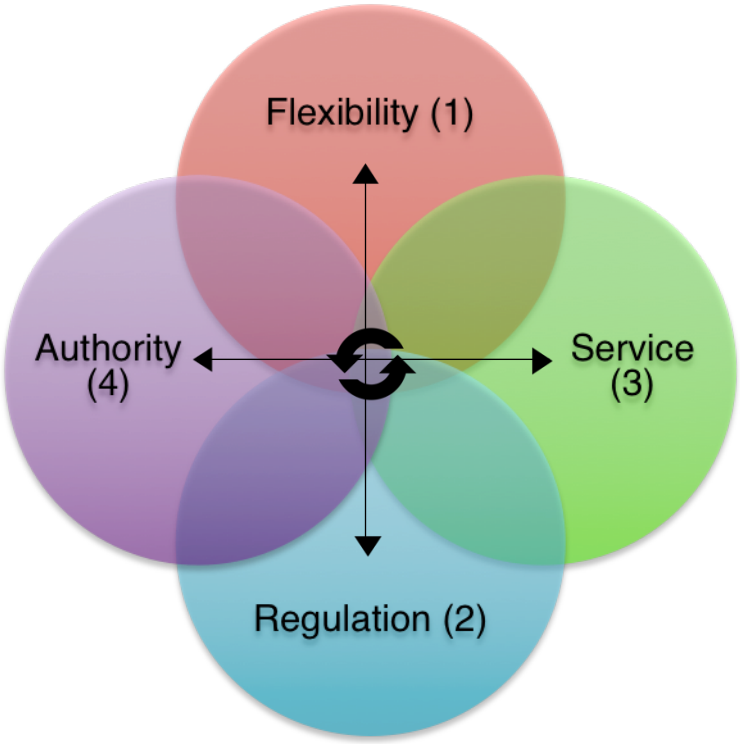
The second issue that needed attention was how relevant and useful findings might be for members of the research community and teachers' professional communities. The list of criteria that Eisner (1998) developed might be useful to test this study's usefulness, namely 1) comprehension: could the research help understand a confusing situation? 2) anticipation: can the descriptions and interpretations provided go beyond the information given about them? And 3) guide and map: provides directions and deepens current understandings of the research topic. The summary of my reflections on these three criteria will be included in the following section.

10.6 Summary of the contribution to knowledge, strength, limitations and recommendations for further studies

The primary contribution of this study comes from the cross-case analysis of SST and PST identity narratives in particular school contexts in Shandong, China. A wide range of influencing factors

and narrative characteristics of TPIs were identified in four Chinese primary schools. In this research study, I also adopted a combination of narrative inquiry and cross-case design to explore the dynamic interactions between teachers' personal and professional identities. The matrix I developed is grounded on both a prior literature review and data analysis of teacher narratives and observations. It builds on and extends previous approach to teacher identities by articulating key components based on this sample of 16 teachers. This matrix (Figure 17 below), together with the associated typologies, provides a new basis for both researchers and practitioners to analyse the impact of school cultures and teacher policies, as well as the consequent impact on both teachers' well-being and professionalism.

Figure 17 The orientations of teachers' professional identity narratives



Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when seeking to apply this matrix. The rationale for choosing 16 teachers embedded in their particular schools was that I could investigate TPIs from both state and private schools with the possibility of investigating the comparative dimensions of this research study. Although the findings have the potential to apply to other teacher cases in similar contexts, these findings were still only developed out of the analysis of a small number of teacher cases in four schools in one county in China due to the exploratory nature of the research and the limited time and resources of a DPhil study. The matrix needs to be further tested and evaluated in different personal and professional situations. Notwithstanding these limitations, this research study has documented the complexity and dynamics of teachers' agency in their unique

social and cultural contexts in China and developed original frameworks to help guide further research on TPIs based on teachers' narratives.

In conclusion, this research study suggests that future research could further examine the applicability of the framework proposed here to other contexts. Through an in-depth analysis of teacher narratives, the findings may prove of value to teachers and teacher educators in both state and private schools in China's changing educational context and provide evidence on the kinds of support that may foster more positive TPIs. Indeed, this research also found the more diverse professional identities, with the boundary between "state" and "private" being dynamically blended in support of teachers' sense of identities and professional pursuits in increasingly complex settings.

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Appendix A. The school principal interview guides

A. Introduction

1. Please tell me briefly about yourself
Probe: How come do you choose to work in the school/ to found the school?

2. Could you introduce the establishment and development of the school?
Probe: How was the institute first established?

3. How do you think this school is different from others?

4. From your viewpoint, what are the challenges the school is facing?

5. How do you think the school has changed in the past few years?

B. Teacher quality and motivations

6. What are the teachers' responsibilities in their work?

7. What are the important qualities for a successful teacher?
Probe: Could you give me some examples?
Why do you think this is so important for a teacher?

8. From your viewpoint, what motivate and demotivate teachers in teaching and schoolwork?

9. What are your opinions on setting up a set of formal rules in regulating teachers in the school?

C. Teacher development and career planning

10. What are the school policies and measures to promote teachers' development?

11. How do inexperienced and experienced teachers develop in this school?

Probe: What kind of (personal and organizational) support is offered for new and experienced teachers?
How is a new teacher introduced in his or her workplace? Could you describe in detail what they do in this process?

Could you give me some examples?
How about experienced teachers?

12. How are teacher education/training organized in your school?
Probe: How would evaluate if the training is effective?

13. What general career planning is offered to teachers in this school?
Probe: Is that common in this school?

D. Teacher recruitment

14. Could you introduce the process of teacher recruitment in this school?
Probe: How many teachers are in this school?
Are they all full-time employees?

15. What are the criteria for recruiting new teachers? Are the standards achievable ?
Probe: What are the problems and why is so?
Some school faces problems in teacher turnover; Does this school have the same problem? (This question emerged in the conversation, since it is a main problem for less developed and minban schools. In my pilot interview, the principal mentioned about the workload in keeping teachers, while in the state school, teacher turnover rate is low for that teachers are hired as state employees and school does not have the authority.

16. What are the policies and plans to solve this problem?

E. **Leadership and organizational culture**

17. What role do you see for yourself in the school?
Probe: What are the most important tasks in managing this school?

18. How are school decisions made in your school? Could you give me some examples?
Probe: How do you normally do it?

19. Could you tell me some of your experience working in the school?

Could you give me some examples?
How about experienced teachers?

12. How are teacher education/training organized in your school?
Probe: How would evaluate if the training is effective?

13. What general career planning is offered to teachers in this school?
Probe: Is that common in this school?

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14. Could you introduce the process of teacher recruitment in this school?
Probe: How many teachers are in this school?
Are they all full-time employees?

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16. What are the policies and plans to solve this problem?

E. **Leadership and organizational culture**

17. What role do you see for yourself in the school?
Probe: What are the most important tasks in managing this school?

18. How are school decisions made in your school? Could you give me some examples?
Probe: How do you normally do it?

19. Could you tell me some of your experience working in the school?

Probe: Have you experienced any conflicts and dispute in school? What did you do?

How do you maintain or promote communications among employees in this organization?

20. How would you evaluate yourself as a leader in this school?

F. Policy and practices

21. How do you think the government shall do to support school development?

22. What do you think of the recent policies on school/ minban school reform?

23. Is there anything else do you want add to this interview?

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix B. Teacher interview guide

A. Background and previous experiences

1. For how long have you been working as a teacher?

   - How long have you taught in this school?
   - What did you do before you became a teacher?
   - What made you choose to be a teacher?

2. Please briefly describe your job as a teacher in this school.

-What do you teach?

- How is a working day organized?

- How do you prepare for the class?

- How do you participate in the class preparation group?

- How about teaching and homework correcting (and other activities if mentioned)?

-Can you tell me about your students?

-How do you think about your relationship with parents?

-Do you have other tasks except teaching?

-What do you think about the work conditions in your school?

3. Can you talk about your education experiences?

   - Where did you to school and university?
   - Did you have any favorite teachers?
   - Why did you like her/him?
   - Were there any teachers you disliked? Why?

B. Perceptions and experiences

4. How do you perceive teachers and the teaching profession?

5.How do you think society views teachers? What do you think gives rise to these perceptions?

A. Background and previous experiences

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   - How long have you taught in this school?
   - What did you do before you became a teacher?
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-Can you tell me about your students?

-How do you think about your relationship with parents?

-Do you have other tasks except teaching?

-What do you think about the work conditions in your school?

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   - Where did you to school and university?
   - Did you have any favorite teachers?
   - Why did you like her/him?
   - Were there any teachers you disliked? Why?

B. Perceptions and experiences

4. How do you perceive teachers and the teaching profession?

5.How do you think society views teachers? What do you think gives rise to these perceptions?

6. Some say that the public perceptions of teachers have changed, what do you think?

7. What are your perceptions of minban education and the teaching profession in minban schools?

Probe: Some say that teachers in minban schools have lower status than state teachers, what is your opinion?

How did you come to have such an opinion?

8. If I ask your family and friends to talk about how they think about your job, what do you think they will say? Could you tell me your opinion about why they may think this?

9.What do you think your colleagues and the school principals think about being a teacher in this school?

10.What do you like about your job? When do you feel the most enjoyment in your job?

11.What do you dislike about your job?

C. Expectations

13. How is the conception of successful teacher formed in your mind?

    - Do you think such a perception relates to your prior experiences?
    - Would you please tell some experiences that have influenced your conception?

14. What kind of teacher do you want to become ultimately?

- Why?

- How far away do you think you are from that ultimate goal? Why?

15. What is your long-term career goal? How would you work towards that ultimate goal?
16. Do you have any questions or is there anything else you want to add to this interview?

Appendix C. The CUREC form

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities



The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution.

They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research on human subjects is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check the **CUREC flowchart and NHS flowchart** first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your supporting documents, to your **Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)** (**if applicable**). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to **ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk** using your official **ox.ac.uk email** address. **Only emailed applications will be accepted.**

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST IS DESIGNED FOR

This **CUREC 1A checklist** is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities where ethical issues are relatively few and straightforward. Interviews, field work and oral history are also included in the CUREC process.

The **full CUREC 2 application** is only required where certain project characteristics (e.g. type of participants, or procedures) result in a more complex set of ethical issues. It is expected that only in a limited number of cases will it be necessary for researchers to complete a CUREC 2 application. The checklist below will direct you to a CUREC 2 application if needed.

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST WILL NOT ASSESS

This checklist does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, or compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires. As principal researcher, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met.

CUREC does not review studies classed as **audit** (see Glossary and Decision Flowchart for CUREC on our website).

Further information on the University's research ethics procedures are available from the CUREC website: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec.

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC2 application

This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues which require the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application.

(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column as appropriate to indicate your response.)

1. Are research participants classed as **people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question**? (This may include those under 18 (though see "competent youths" in **FAQ C12**), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's **Safeguarding Code of Practice** and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk, including the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. (**Note**: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, please answer 'Yes' here **and** also answer question 4 below.)		No
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?		No
3. Does the research involve the **deception** of participants?		No
If you have answered 'No' to all of the questions above please go to **Section B**. If you have answered 'Yes' to any question above continue to question 4 below.		
4. Is your project covered by a CUREC approved procedure (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?		
If yes, please give research procedure number(s):		
If you answered '**Yes'** to ANY of questions **1-3**, **and** answered '**No'** to question **4**, **please stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, please complete the CUREC 2 application form from the CUREC website. Then submit the CUREC 2 form for ethical review. If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, **and** answered 'Yes' to question 4, please go on to **Section B**.		

SECTION B: Contact details and project description (NB: must be typed not handwritten)	
Contact details:	
1. **Principal researcher/**supervisor (title and name) (if student research):	Professor Pam Sammons
2. Name of student (if student research):	Haoran Liu
3. Degree programme, e.g. DPhil, BA, MPhil, BSc, MSc (if student research):	DPhil Education
4. Department or Institute name:	Department of Education, 15 Norham Garden Road, Oxford OX2 6PY
5. Address for correspondence (if different from 4 above):	
6. University e-mail (**not** private email) and telephone contact:	Haoran.liu@gtc.ox.ac.uk 07490190634
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project, e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant:	

SECTION B continued	
Project description:	
8. Title of research project:	A comparative study of *minban* teachers and state teachers in Shandong province in China.
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted:	
10. If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork, by the time the research starts, will you have completed and returned a travel risk assessment form? (This has to be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out University travel insurance.)	Yes
11. Anticipated duration of research project overall:	22 months
12. Anticipated start and end dates of the research project involving human participants:	From: (01/02/16) To: (01/12/17) Please note that you will need ethics approval **before** you start your research. CUREC1As may take up to 30 days to process.

13. Title and very brief and simple lay description of **research** (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants.

a) Title and brief lay description of research (150 words). When describing the research, please include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. **Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.**

Research title: Teacher identities in minban education reform in China: a comparative study of minban teachers and state teachers in Shandong province.

This research looks at teachers' experiences in *minban* (non-state) schools in China, focusing on the implication of minban education reform on teacher identity development in Shandong province. Taking a qualitative approach, this project is to gain insight of the teachers' storeis of their work expereinces in the context of policy changes in China.

This research study consists of two stages. The first stage attempts to understand the contents and process of educational polices that governs teachers' work in minban schools. Analysis of state policy documents and school documents will be used to identify the policy discourse and actors around the problem of minban education and issues around minban school teachers. Informed by the Interpretive Policy Analysis (IPA), this stage is crucial for the researcher to gain insights of the different interpretations of policies. The second stage are school-based study that is designed for understanding schools' responses to policy changes in terms of organsitional structures and managments. By interviewing school principals and teachers, I hope to explore how contructed teacher identites in policies are negotiated in the school contexts. I will visit 3-5 minban schools to conduct the data collection. In-depth interviews and non-participant observations will be used. The interview scheudle will include questions about teachers' backgrounds, their perceptions and personal expereinces of minban education development, career choices and job satisfactions will be asked in the interviews. Fieldnotes in the non-participant observation and document analysis are considered as important data sources in this study to gain deeper insight of the organizational environment. They could also help add potential questions in the interviews. Follow-up interview schedules with teachers will be developed based on intial data analysis. Audio-recordings of interviews will be taken during the fieldwork with the permission of school principals and teachers.

Given that this rsearch focus on teacher identity development, teachers' might reveal their personal informatoins and perceptions of stage and school policies. To prevent risks and burdens for the participant, I will keep all data

anonymous. The transcription and summary of the data analysis will be send back to pariticpants for review and feedback. If any sensetive information are identified by the researcher or the participants, the information will not be published unless written permissions from the research participant are given.

SECTION B continued

b) Description of participants and obtaining informed consent (200 words). When describing participants, please include

- criteria for inclusion/exclusion
- method of recruitment
- processes for consent to participate

Please ensure you attach as separate documents (if applicable, in English translation):

- your recruitment and advertisement material e.g. a poster or brief invitation letter/ email
- information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part e.g. written participant information sheets or (only if applicable) oral information scripts
- a document to record informed consent. Templates for written consent forms and/or oral consent scripts (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- a guide to interview questions (this may be a list of questions to be asked, or a preliminary scope of questions), or a sample of other instruments (such as a sample questionnaire)
- (if relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part

A maximum variation sampling strategy is adopted in this study. The criteria are:

1. Participants must be interested in the topic and willing to participate;

2. Participant teachers must be teaching in different schools.

3. Both *state* teachers and *minban* teachers must be included

4. Participants must be at different professional life phases (e.g. less-experienced or experienced).

In my attempt to gain access to the different schools, my previous experience in co-establishing and managing a private tutoring school and attending educational conferences enables me to connect resources and build interpersonal trust with school principals and teachers in other schools. I will begin by contacting friends, colleagues and families who have connections with school principals. I will expect to be introduced by my friends through formal and informal meetings and explained the aims and methods of my research.

I also provided the consent form and information sheet for further information. The consent form is in Chinese will be provided, explained and signed by participants before the interview. I will also probe questions on the consent form to help participants understand the practical and ethical considerations surrounding the research project. All of the interviews will be audio-recorded. Participants' permissions for the recording will be asked before the interview.

14. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? Please do not answer 'none'. The committee needs to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. These issues could relate to:

- your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher (please see the University's and Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance
- participant burdens and/or risks, and
- data protection/ confidentiality.

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/resources/.

Given the controversial roles of minban schools in education policies, my previous experience as a manager of minban tutoring school, and my relationships with the participants, it is imperative to give particular attention to the issue of ethics for the integrity of this study. My own identities and experiences will be actively used to engage participants. The research study will be framed as a friendly conversation. I will emphasise my identity as a *minban* teacher and student researcher, which may appear non-threatening and non-authoritarian.

Shandong province is where I'm originally from. My familiarity, knowledge and awareness of the research environments in Shandong can help me avoid potential risks. There will not be any lone work or cash handling involved in the fieldwork. I will keep equipment (digital recorder and mobile phone) with me all the time with have them well hidden.

For that the management of schools could be authoritarian, teachers could be passively appointed by the school principals to participate in this research study. To avoid this, I will make explicit that voluntary participation need to be guaranteed and confidentiality to be carefully addressed throughout the research process; meanwhile, participants' rights to refuse to answer certain questions and to limit the time of participation will also be respected.

Section B continued

15. Will you obtain informed consent according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline before participation?	Yes	

If you have marked '**No**', please give a brief explanation and justification for this decision here:

16. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues? This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.		No

If you have marked '**Yes**', please make sure that you have included some **supporting information** (as directed in question 13 of this section) showing the range of questions covering these issues.

17. Will you ensure that **personal data** collected directly from participants or via a **third party** is held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act?	Yes	

18. How will you ensure that any personal or sensitive data are captured, transferred and stored securely?

In particular if data are to be captured electronically, please consult with your local IT department and, with respect to University IT security policies, please comment on how you will capture such data in the first instance, how you will transfer them over networks or via portable media and how and where data will be stored. For more information please see the University's web pages on research data management:

http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/

The data collected will be kept strictly confidential with the institutes' and participants' names made anonymous. The data are available only to my supervisors and myself with all digital recordings, documents and transcripts be kept in two separate USBs and put in locked conditions for five years before the destruction and the anonymised data will be saved only for the academic use.

SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used

Method used: Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet	**Please mark 'X'**
1. Analysis of existing records	X

2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	X
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	
4. Participant observation	
5. Covert observation	
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	X
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	
9. Using social media	
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	
12. Focus group	
13. Interview	X
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	X
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
17. Others (please specify):	

2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	X
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	
4. Participant observation	
5. Covert observation	
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	X
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	
9. Using social media	
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	
12. Focus group	
13. Interview	X
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	X
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
17. Others (please specify):	

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. **Note**: this is not an exhaustive list.		**Please mark 'X'**
Research specialism/ methodology	**Association and guidance document**	
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth	
Criminology	British Society of Criminology: Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology	
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics Royal Geographical Society: Research Ethics and Code of Practice	
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	
Internet-based Research	British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide Also see our Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research	
Law (Socio-Legal)	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research	
Management	Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics	
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Also see "Internet-based Research" guidance above	
Social Research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	X
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	X
Visual Research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		

1. Please indicate what training in research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/training).

If no formal training has been undertaken, please indicate any discussions of research methodology between researchers and supervisors here.

Online training course on research ethics as a part of D.Phil in Education from 2012-2013, Univesrity of Oxford:

www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/integrity

Professional and research ethics training, as part of MSc in Educational Research Methodology from 2011-2012, University of Oxford:

Research ethics in the foundation of educational research course, [Completed 2nd November 2011].

Ethical dimensions of research in strategies of educational research course, [Completed 20th November 2011]

Research integrity and ethics [Online resource], Research support, University of Oxford, [Completed 14nd December 2011].

Ethics 1: Good research practice [Online course], Weblearn.[Completed 23th Janurary 2012]

Ethics 2: Working with human subjects [Online course], Weblearn. [Completed 25th Janurary 2012]

SECTION E: Signatures

- 'Electronic signatures' sent as email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities.
- If you have obtained handwritten (wet-ink) signatures, please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.

Please ensure this checklist is signed by:

For staff research:	**For student research**:
1. **Principal researcher**	1. **Principal researcher (project supervisor)**
2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**	2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**
	3. **Student researcher**

1. **Principal researcher signature/supervisor signature** (if student research)

I understand my responsibilities as **principal researcher** as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal researcher on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signature: ……..
Print name (block capitals): …….. **Date**: ……...

2. **Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal researcher to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal researcher's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
(iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate **peer review**; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the **public interest**.

Signed by Head of Department or nominee *(example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies)*:

Signature: ……..

Print name (block capitals): ……..... **Date**: ……...

3. **Student signature** (if student research)

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal researcher properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by student: HAORAN LIU
Print name (block capitals): HAORAN LIU **Date**:15/12/2015.

SECTION F: SUBMITTING THE COMPLETED CHECKLIST	Please mark 'X'
1. Check you have completed all sections (A-E)	X
2. Ensure your application is signed by you, your supervisor (if student) and department	X
3. **Please attach all supporting documents (see section B, question 13b for details).** If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. **This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.**	X
4. Ensure you have declared conflicts of interest (if any) in Section B, question 13.	X
5. If your department has a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), submit this checklist and supporting information to the appropriate departmental officer.	X
6. If your department does not have a DREC, submit the checklist and supporting information to the SSH IDREC (email ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk).	
7. Applications must be sent by email from your official ox.ac.uk email account. Please do not send applications by post.	X

Ethical dimensions of research in strategies of educational research course, [Completed 20th November 2011]

Research integrity and ethics [Online resource], Research support, University of Oxford, [Completed 14nd December 2011].

Ethics 1: Good research practice [Online course], Weblearn.[Completed 23th Janurary 2012]

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SECTION E: Signatures

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- If you have obtained handwritten (wet-ink) signatures, please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.

Please ensure this checklist is signed by:

For staff research:	**For student research**:
1. **Principal researcher**	1. **Principal researcher (project supervisor)**
2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**	2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**
	3. **Student researcher**

1. **Principal researcher signature/supervisor signature** (if student research)

I understand my responsibilities as **principal researcher** as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the principal researcher on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signature: ……..
Print name (block capitals): …….. **Date**: ……...

2. **Departmental endorsement signature**

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal researcher to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal researcher's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
(iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate **peer review**; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the **public interest**.

Signed by Head of Department or nominee *(example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies)*:

Signature: ……..

Print name (block capitals): ……..... **Date**: ……...

3. **Student signature** (if student research)

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal researcher properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by student: HAORAN LIU
Print name (block capitals): HAORAN LIU **Date**:15/12/2015.

Appendix D. Sample of teacher interview transcript

好的，那我们就开始今天的采访。你课可以说一下您在这个学校工作了多久了么?				Ok, I think we now can begin today's interview. May I know how long have you worked in this school?
去年，2015年2月，啊，3月工作，2月定档案。	个人背景			Since last year, February the 2015. Oh no, I began to work since March. the record file was done in February.
那就是在这之前你就是				So before this, you were…
学生				A student
一直在读书是么?				You were student without break?
对，学生。我是2014年7月毕业就准备这一个考试。之前是准备公务员，公务员没考上，然后就准备老师的考试，然后就考上了，在这里工作了。	个人背景			Yes, just a student. I began to prepare for the exam since July, 2014. I took the government official examination but I failed. After that I began to prepare for the teacher examination and I passed, started to work here.
您之前是没想做老师么?				You didn't want to become a teacher?
没有没有。我不想当老师的。因为可能个人的职业追求吧。我就觉得当公务员能施展自己的一些政治抱负。	起初施展理想抱负追求和对教师职业的差距			No, no. I didn't want to be a teacher. Maybe it is (because of)my occupational ambition, I think being an government offer can realise some of my political aspiration.
恩				Yes
然后可能阴差阳错吧，老师差一点，老是差一点。所以无奈之举考老师。因为我觉得老师比较好考，就考上了。				Maybe it is just a strange combination of circumstances, I nearly pass it every time I take the exam. I had to take the teachers' exam because it is easier and I got it.
恩...老师也可以施展一些..				Yes, would not the teaching job get your political aspiration realised?
当时因为对老师这一行主要是不太喜欢。可能我是属于干一行爱一行的。接触了之后，慢慢了解之后觉得，哎? 也可以施展一些自己的理想抱负。	职业的个人选择			At the time, I didn't really like the vocation of teaching. Maybe I'm the kind of person who can adapt to different things. After a while, I realise that I can still try to achieve my ideals and aspirations in the job.
那当时你为什么没有当老师的想法? 在做教师之前你对这个职业有什么看法呢?				Why didn't you like to be a teacher? Do you have any opinions on this vocation?
对老师么?				To teachers?
对老师我就觉得，其实没有..当老师就比较累吧。然后要操心。其实以前更没有想过当小学老师。	职业预期与小学教师工作的特殊性			The teachers' job…I actually didn't have (interests)….maybe because it is really tiring and consuming. I didn't even imagine I would one day become a primary school teacher.
因为我硕士毕业，我的同学有当大学老师，有高中的。我就觉得他们大学老师潇洒自在，高中的就是太累。反正没想到自己应验到这个小学上了。				Because I have a master degree. Some of my classmates became University lecturers or high school teacher. I think those who teach in University can live a casual and elegant life, while those who teacher in high school would be exhausted. Anyhow, I never had thought of myself to become a primary school teacher one day.
要抓小学生的基础教育，所以刚开始教学的时候就跟不好教，因为总是从自己的观点去教他们，所以教不好。没有背好这个学情。	学情(learning situation)的重要性			So I need to work on the basic education. The beginning was very difficult because I teach the kids based on my own ideas and perceptions. I didn't do the student analysis.
那你在大学是学什么专业的?				What did you major in college?
大学的时候是学汉语言文学，研究生的时候是学中国古典文献学。	个人背景			I studied Chinese literature for my undergraduate and classics philology for graduate studies.
所以跟你现在教的专业还是很相关的。				So can I say it is very related to what you teach?
对，就是师范专业。				Yes, it is a teacher training degree
你学的就是师范专业	因为惜文前提到入职后教学的问题，我以为是因为她没有师范教育和教学的经验。			So you have a teacher education background
对，教师资格证就是直接发的。				Yes, I'm given the teacher qualification when I graduate.
那你毕业之后就没有想当老师				But you didn't want to be a teacher.
没有，当时就考研究生了啊				No, because I wanted to go to graduate school.
恩				yes
当时考了研究生之后就更不想当老师了。	教育背景和职业选择。	为什么呢?		After that, I get even less interested in becoming a teacher.

Appendix D. Notes on the researcher's reflexivity

My doctoral research explored teacher professional identity in 16 primary school teachers' narratives in different state and private school contexts in China. The study was supervised at a University in the UK and the fieldwork took place at four primary schools in China, where I had previously lived and worked as an English language teacher. In this sense, I was an insider researcher. Reflecting on my fieldwork experiences, I first reviewed the positioning of myself in this research study. Issues such as my own professional history, aspirations for improving understandings of private education and teachers' working in private schools influenced my choice of topic, the research questions, research design, data analysis and approach to representing the findings.

The research process is embedded in the process of finding my own voice as well. The engagement of this research study has led to the development of my identity as an educational researcher. Throughout the continuous phases of designing the research instrument, negotiating access, conducting the fieldwork, and later translating and analysing the empirical data, I stepped back and reflected on the learning and experience of exploration. These processes added new meanings in my experiences and helped me gain deeper understanding of myself, my evolving research practice and the purpose of educational research studies. This capacity to operate reflexibility allowed me to further summarise and theories my practices.

Courage

If I could frame my research process as a journey, the beginning of the journey was filled with not only expectations and excitement, but also risks and uncertainties. It took courage to tackle challenges in the field work and sometimes reframing questions and challenge my own assumptions. I wish I knew that what I was trying to do had no guarantee of ultimate success. Questions like the following had been the source of my fear and anxiety in designing and carrying out the research project: how would this research be rooted in one or exist across various fields? What if the research topic is out of fashion and be considered lower value in academic community? Could I get access in my fieldwork? What if my readers found the research useless? Most of these questions reflected my expectations for a stable and secure path towards a successful PhD experience. My actual experiences in this journey, however, directly reshaped my understanding of academic research and my own identities as a young researcher. Instead of trying to find the "right" path or simply procrastinate, being open to new perspectives and possibilities, challenging the boundaries, having the courage to be determent and to start reaching out when I needed advice or support became the key part of this research journey.

Respect

In early stage of the research, I'm well aware that I might have more social, cultural, and symbolic capital than the research participants, especially when the I am from a distinguished higher education institution. This realisation had alarmed me of my positions when it comes to encouraging participant teachers to answer my interview questions, some of which could be challenging and required the teachers to be more reflective than what they would normally engage with in their busy lives. Several interviewees seemed vulnerable and tended to consider the interview as a therapy session, where they could talk about their problems in a confidential setting. In occasions like this, I found it almost impossible to not offer at least some comfort by saying something moderately nice to cheer up the participant teacher. I found the caring and soft part of my personality and therefore my relationship with the participants could hardly be determined by a methodological position as a researcher.

Being respectable or other people has been a part of my cultural identity, but I still found very difficult to figure out what it would mean in a research context. Does that mean I ought to meet all the subjects' needs even if I could not? Does it mean I need to keep a "safe distance" from the research subjects to maintain my social-image as a researcher? In addition to being aware of the risks of manipulativeness and power dynamics, I gradually come to understand how respect should not only be put in words, but in daily actions. The practices of keeping promises, good timing, showing my honesty and patience, and remain the academic curiosities throughout the research process were very helpful to keep a respectable relationship with not only the research subjects, but also myself and other people in my DPhil life.

Sustainable community engagement

Community engagement comes to a challenging element of carrying out the PhD research project. In the beginning of my PhD study, I wanted to change my research study to an action research with a group of rural school teachers to help develop a new curriculum for rural school students. This was because I believed the value of academic research should not only be the intellectual and academic achievement I make, but its relevance and benefits to practitioners in the field. However, I gradually developed the sense that doing a PhD research needs even greater efforts to developing the original research topic, seeking feedbacks, managing fieldwork schedules, securing funds, chasing citations, and getting to know a particular research community. Often, I also need to assure the health and wellbeing of families and myself. These limitations in space and time left me barely enough time to develop the research study in to an action research with the teachers and practitioners.

I chose to stay with the original research plan and carried out the small-scale research study with available supports I could access from others. At the same time, I kept moderate contacts, instead of continuously active engagement with my research participants, which turned to be convenient

and beneficial for both sides. I have been adjusting and changing my own expectations for myself as a postgraduate student. In this process, I come to understand community engagement has been only helpful for me and my research subjects when I approached it in a sustainable manner.