

# Comparison and Analysis of Chinese Language Teachers and International Chinese Teachers: A Case Study

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**Abstract.** In recent years, with the increasing influence of international Chinese education, some Chinese language teachers have also begun to engage in the work of international Chinese teachers. To address the various issues that may arise when Chinese language teachers transition to international Chinese teachers, this study adopts a case-comparison method. It involves interviewing both Chinese language teachers and international Chinese teachers, observing and evaluating their teaching, and then processing and analyzing the data. Based on the findings, the study provides insights and suggestions for teachers before and after taking up their international teaching positions, which are of positive significance for the construction of the team of international Chinese teachers.

**Keywords:** Chinese language teachers, international Chinese teachers, comparative study, case study

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## 1. Introduction

Looking at the current employment situation, some Chinese language teachers, after graduating from normal universities or after a few years of employment, participate in the work of international Chinese teachers for various reasons. They sometimes place great importance on past internship and educational experiences, transferring them to a completely different teaching context. It is undeniable that the two jobs are similar in some respects, and Chinese language teachers have inherent advantages when engaging in international Chinese education [1]. However, the distinct teaching characteristics of each role are clear, and different factors can interfere, causing previous educational experiences to sometimes not adapt well to the new work environment. Most teachers experience negative transfer of teaching knowledge, impacting the quality of teaching. This paper attempts to explore the advantages and potential problems in the transition from Chinese language education to international Chinese education and provide corresponding solutions through research on teacher development. It aims to address the maladjustment issues of Chinese language teachers sent abroad as international Chinese teachers, helping them to smoothly and quickly navigate through their developmental phase.

Current domestic research primarily focuses on teaching content [2], teaching environment, and teaching subjects [3] [4]-that is, starting from the characteristics and nature of the discipline and curriculum itself, largely ignoring the core issue of teacher development [5]. However, in terms of actual teaching, regardless of the subject or teaching method, teachers who face development issues will inevitably interfere with their ability to teach, thereby affecting teaching outcomes. This paper will employ qualitative research methods, focusing on the personal teaching and development characteristics of teachers. It will compare the views of Chinese language teachers and international Chinese teachers on teaching, environment, and other factors, exploring potential problems during the career transition and providing viable solutions.

## 2. Research Design

This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach, focusing on two teachers with approximately four years of teaching experience each: one international Chinese teacher and one elementary Chinese language teacher (both teaching students aged 6-13 years). The study comprises two parts. The first part involves two online interviews with each teacher, aimed at exploring their subjective views on teaching and students to complete the related qualitative research. The processing of interview materials follows Sun Dekun's qualitative research method [6], which involves transcribing the interviews into text. In order to facilitate research, some repetitive and redundant corpus is removed while retaining the original meaning of the texts. By thoroughly reading these texts,

representative keywords and sentences are identified to explore the unique teaching environments and psychologies of the two teachers. After optimization, the transcribed interview text of Teacher Bian (Chinese language teacher) is 10,145 characters, and the transcribed interview text of Teacher Ma (international Chinese teacher) is 11,133 characters.

The second part involves process-oriented observation and evaluation of two teaching periods for each teacher. The handling of classroom video follows Cui Yunhong's classroom observation method [7], focusing on four aspects within the "teacher teaching" dimension: allocation of teaching content time, distribution of various teaching behaviors, teacher's explanation behavior, and the handling of students' mistakes. This aims to understand how the two teachers handle teaching details in the classroom and whether the views mentioned in the interviews are reflected in their actual teaching, i.e., "knowledge calibration." The study conducts a comparative analysis of classroom data from both teachers.

Based on the case analysis of the two teachers, this study also incorporates the opinions of an international Chinese teacher transitioning between the two professions. It explains the process and potential problems of transitioning from Chinese language education to international Chinese education, offering corresponding solutions. The data triangulate the opinions of the transitioning teacher with those of the two teachers to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the conclusions.

### 3. Case History Analysis

#### 3.1. Teacher Interview Analysis

##### 3.1.1. Interview Report with Teacher Bian

Teacher Bian has been engaged in Chinese language teaching at a public elementary school in China for five years. In her teaching work, besides focusing on interaction with students and considering students as the leaders of the classroom, she also exhibits some distinctive features in her teaching. For example, in China, the role of the head teacher is generally taken by the Chinese language teacher. This gives Chinese language teachers a characteristic different from teachers of other subjects, as they need to attend to aspects of students' lives beyond teaching—this includes morning reading sessions, long breaks, lunch, home visits, and regular communication with parents. These tasks reflect, to some extent, the state of students' lives and the development of good habits in both study and life, which heavily depend on the family environment, leading to frequent forms of interaction between teachers and parents.

*"Generally, a low-profile approach is primary because the children are not that big. For some, they might just be seeking more attention through certain actions, or they bring up issues that, to us adults, seem unimportant. It's about the scale of the issue. If it's just about a pencil or an eraser, then it's simple: the kids can apologize to each other, then you slowly tell them, venting emotions is okay, and things will get better. It's not that they're unreasonable; the children themselves know what's right."*

In the work of Chinese language teachers in China, "moral education" is also a very important part, reflected in the teachers' perceptions of their students. For local students, teachers must maintain a certain distance; getting too close could lead to some students seeking attention or showing off, which is detrimental to class discipline. This is why domestic teachers are more adapted to the traditional teaching philosophy of "respecting teachers and valuing education." Even though the classroom environment adapts to the "respecting teachers and valuing education" atmosphere, the societal viewpoint of "respecting teachers and valuing education" seems to be gradually diminishing. Teachers themselves find it hard to feel respected by parents and tend to view their job as purely service-oriented, which is not conducive to the development of teachers' sense of teaching efficacy.

##### 3.1.2. Interview Report with Teacher Ma

Teacher Ma has been engaged in international Chinese language teaching at a school in Kyrgyzstan for nearly four years. The educational environment in countries outside the Confucian cultural sphere is relatively relaxed, and classroom atmospheres are lively, bringing students and teachers closer together. This closeness sometimes leads to students asking questions unrelated to teaching, such as "Do you have a boyfriend?" Differences in teaching culture also mean teachers often emphasize the use of games in teaching, adapting to the educational culture abroad.

In international Chinese teaching, there is no specified textbook. Even within the same Confucius Institute, the materials can differ based on the teacher's language proficiency, making group lesson planning difficult. Thus, lesson planning is primarily an individual effort. During lesson preparation, teachers pay attention to issues related to cross-cultural communication, avoiding questions in texts or dialogues that may not suit teaching needs. Should issues arise during teaching, teachers try to resolve them independently, with little reliance on parents.

*"Well, I might not continue doing this in a few years, because this isn't exactly a long-term job, is it? Confucius Institutes have these full-time teachers for either five or eight years, but our positions aren't considered long-term. There are teachers who do this long-term, for about five or six years, but after a period, they still return to China to pursue their careers."*

Contrary to what one might expect, despite the open and lively teaching culture abroad, overseas Chinese classes place significant importance on teaching outcomes and achievements. They want their children to learn more language skills and social abilities, most tangibly reflected in the emphasis on children's exam scores. Because of this reliance on teachers' educational outcomes, teachers generally enjoy a higher social status and can distinctly feel respected by society.

### 2.1.3. Interview Results Analysis

The interviews primarily focused on the teaching environment and perceptions of students. The results indicate significant differences in the environments of the two teachers, with both advantageous and disadvantageous factors affecting the transition from Chinese language teachers to international Chinese teachers.

Advantageous factors first manifest in the elevation of teachers' social status, which is beneficial in stimulating teachers' enthusiasm for their work [8]. Chinese language teachers who initially venture into international Chinese education can easily perceive this difference, enhancing their internal motivation for teaching and thereby improving teaching effectiveness.

Another advantage is the relative reduction in workload. In addition to teaching duties, domestic Chinese language teachers generally also take on responsibilities related to students' morning and evening self-study, break activities, dietary safety, etc., fulfilling the role of a "homeroom teacher." International Chinese teachers, however, are not required to undertake these additional tasks and need only ensure the quality of their teaching. The number of students also affects homework volume; domestic classes typically have around 50 students, and a teacher may be responsible for two classes, amounting to about 100 students, whereas international Chinese teachers usually oversee 10-20 students, not exceeding 40, significantly reducing the workload related to homework grading. This allows teachers more time for professional development, especially for developing experience-based and rational understanding through professional evidence and data mechanisms, which requires considerable time for reading and data processing [9].

Disadvantageous factors start with the pressure of lesson preparation. Domestic Chinese language teaching benefits from the use of standardized textbooks, allowing for collective lesson planning to significantly reduce preparation pressure and providing authoritative teaching reference books for consultation, thus ensuring a certain level of lesson plan quality. However, international Chinese teaching lacks the conditions for collective planning and designated teacher's guides, requiring each teacher to select materials and prepare lessons independently, creating substantial pressure for those reliant on teaching aids and collective planning. Nevertheless, once teachers adapt to independent lesson preparation, their teaching abilities can significantly improve.

Not just lesson preparation, but cross-cultural communication is also an area that Chinese language teachers need to adapt to. Even professionally trained pre-service international Chinese teachers may encounter various degrees of cross-cultural issues when they first teach abroad [10], let alone those without any experience. The need for adaptation in international Chinese education work mainly concerns living and teaching aspects, with a focus here on teaching. Firstly, for Chinese language teachers accustomed to the more serious domestic teaching environment, dealing with unrelated classroom questions from particularly younger foreign students can be challenging. If teachers start teaching abroad without proper training, they might find themselves at a loss when faced with students' questions in class. Secondly, in the domestic environment where most Chinese language teachers also serve as homeroom teachers, students' issues in learning and life can be addressed with the help of their relatives, a unique advantage of the homeroom teacher role. However, while teaching abroad, even though there are channels like parent WeChat groups for communication between teachers and families, teachers rarely rely on families to solve teaching problems. Only classes for overseas Chinese more frequently contact parents, but without specifically pointing out which student has issues. This requires Chinese language teachers teaching abroad to gradually reduce their dependency on parents. Yet, family education remains a crucial part of educational work, necessitating teachers to find a balance. Without disturbing families, teachers need to pay attention to students' family education situations to effectively advance teaching work.

## 3.2. Actual Teaching Analysis

Overall, Chinese language teachers face several differences in classroom teaching that require adaptation.

The first difference lies in teaching discourse. For Chinese language teaching, the educational goals are more comprehensive, requiring students to master a balanced mix of knowledge in language, literature, and culture. As this involves teaching in one language, students' grasp of phonetics and grammar tends towards acquisition, and their understanding of the nuances of Chinese is deeper. In contrast, for international Chinese education, students' primary goal is to use Chinese for communication, with less emphasis on culture, and students lack a rich linguistic environment for extensive, effective practice. To ensure students understand classroom language, international Chinese teachers often repeat a word or phrase three to four times, and the overall pace of speech is slower compared to Chinese language teachers. Additionally, some Chinese language teachers might be so immersed in their own lessons that they insufficiently monitor the repetition and pace of their speech, making it difficult for foreign students to understand their words and instructions, leading to less effective teaching.

The second issue is the language used in the classroom. Although international Chinese teaching advocates teaching in the target language, grammar-translation methods are still widely used, relying on the native language for teaching and classroom management. This poses demands on the teacher's proficiency in foreign languages. Domestic Chinese language teachers' spoken English is generally not professionally trained, failing to meet the minimum requirements for fluent conversation. If Chinese language teachers undertake international Chinese teaching without foreign language training, they might struggle to handle unexpected situations in the classroom, leading to awkward moments, such as not understanding what a student says during class, or being unable to answer a question in Chinese that students can understand.

The third issue concerns tolerance for errors. Chinese language teachers generally have a low tolerance for phonetic and grammatical errors, as language accuracy is prioritized higher for native learners, aiming for Mandarin without any errors. In a native-speaking environment, numerous errors can cast doubt on the ability of the student or teacher. However, for second-

language learners, phonetic or grammatical errors that do not hinder communication are often tolerable, and not every learner aspires to speak flawless Mandarin, thus teachers have a higher tolerance for student errors. Second-language learners are often affected by negative transfer from their first language, leading to numerous phonetic and grammatical errors. Teachers with a low tolerance for errors might dampen students' enthusiasm for learning Chinese, affecting teaching outcomes.

## 4. Quantitative Comparative Analysis

### 4.1 Analysis of Teaching Commonalities

In modern educational practice, the role of teachers has gradually shifted from being transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning. The teaching records of both Mr. Ma and Mr. Bian reflect this trend. They primarily employ a teacher-led explanatory approach in the classroom. This method not only helps ensure the systematicity and completeness of teaching content but also enables coverage of a greater number of topics within limited time. This teaching strategy occupies more than half of their teaching time, a relatively high proportion in the education field. This indicates their significant emphasis on the authority and professionalism of teachers in the classroom. Additionally, both teachers allocate a similar proportion of time for student self-study, demonstrating their emphasis on fostering students' autonomous learning abilities. Through this approach, students are encouraged to independently explore and solve problems under the guidance of teachers, which not only helps cultivate students' critical thinking skills but also stimulates their interest and motivation for learning. Both teachers also incorporate textbook language to some extent, as textbooks typically contain meticulously selected and organized subject knowledge. Although there are differences in the frequency and allocation of time for using textbook language, these variances may reflect their differing understandings and adaptations to classroom interaction and student needs.

While Mr. Ma and Mr. Bian employ different teaching methods, both reflect a profound understanding of the student learning process and a high regard for teaching quality. Their teaching practices offer valuable insights for other educators in improving teaching effectiveness and promoting comprehensive student development. Through the analysis of their teaching records, we can better understand how teachers can maintain the rigor and systematicity of teaching content while also focusing on students' personalized learning needs and the cultivation of their autonomous learning abilities.

### 4.2 Analysis of Teaching Personalities

When delving into the teaching styles of Mr. Ma and Mr. Bian, we can understand their teaching methods from a broader educational philosophy perspective. Mr. Ma's teaching style embodies a structured and systematic teaching philosophy. Her significant investment in teaching new knowledge and practice might stem from the belief that systematic knowledge delivery can help students build a solid knowledge foundation. This approach emphasizes the professionalism of teachers and the logicity of course content, facilitating students in forming clear knowledge frameworks. On the other hand, Mr. Bian demonstrates a more flexible and student-centered teaching style. His diversified teaching methods in the classroom, such as encouraging student explanations and teacher-student interaction, as well as using personal language and multimodal teaching approaches, aim to create a more interactive and dynamic learning environment. This method may be better suited to accommodating different students' learning styles and needs, promoting active learning and deep understanding among students. Although the teaching methods of the two teachers differ, both reflect a profound understanding of educational goals and a focus on student development. Mr. Ma's teaching may be more suitable for students who require clear structure and direct guidance, while Mr. Bian's teaching may be more suitable for those who need more interactive and exploratory opportunities. Combining these two teaching styles may provide students with a more comprehensive and balanced learning experience.

In educational practice, teachers need to select the most suitable teaching methods based on students' specific situations and learning objectives. The teaching practices of Mr. Ma and Mr. Bian offer two different models from which educators can draw inspiration to better meet the diverse needs of students. Through continuous reflection and adjustment of teaching strategies, teachers can create a richer and more meaningful learning environment for students.

## 5. Suggestions and Insights

### 5.1. Provide Targeted Pre-service Training for Chinese Language Teachers

For Chinese language teachers with actual teaching experience, it's important not to overly emphasize the specialized knowledge typically covered in general pre-service training. Years of practical experience and professional knowledge can serve as crucial guarantees of teaching quality. The focus of pre-service training should be placed on cross-cultural communication and foreign language skills, which are characteristic of international Chinese education. Oral foreign language proficiency is one of the capabilities for Chinese language teachers working abroad in international Chinese teaching, serving as an important tool for daily life and instructional communication. Enhancing teachers' cross-cultural sensitivity can help reduce the manifestation of culture

shock and decrease the occurrence of cultural conflicts during teaching, ensuring a positive interaction environment between teachers and students and ample effective teaching time.

## 5.2 Teaching Reflection Should Focus on Reviewing and Adjusting Classroom Discourse

Experienced Chinese language teachers can adeptly handle the design of teaching segments and sudden classroom situations. However, the significant differences in classroom discourse between the two require time to change and adapt. Chinese language teachers need to adapt to a slower pace of teaching discourse on top of their existing mastery, and during lesson preparation, identify phonetically challenging or easily confused words and phrases based on comparisons with foreign languages, repeating these multiple times in the classroom environment. Novice teachers should also make necessary adjustments to classroom discourse after teaching to ensure its effectiveness and acceptability. Experienced teachers can act as a "scaffold" to enhance the efficiency of this reflective process [11].

## 5.3. Encourage International Chinese Teachers After Transition to Actively Participate in Teacher Community Building

According to the analysis of interview results, the construction of teacher communities in domestic primary and secondary schools has become increasingly refined, with standard modern mentorship and lesson preparation groups providing effective suggestions for teaching practice. However, due to differences in language proficiency among teachers, a late start in development, and weak teacher resources, the construction of international Chinese education communities is still in its initial stages, with many teachers not valuing the internal work of the community, leading to it being practically insignificant. Initially, Chinese language teachers accustomed to the domestic teaching environment might perceive this as a reduction in workload, but it is actually detrimental to their long-term development. Teachers who have transitioned should actively participate in community building under limited conditions, engage in research activities while ensuring their own professional development, and contribute to the improvement and development of the teacher community.

## 6. Conclusion

Comparative studies between first language (L1) teaching and second language (L2) teaching have been quite comprehensive. Scholars like Liu Xun [12] and Zhou Xiaobing [13] have analyzed the two from a theoretical perspective. Under the premise of well-developed theories, practical applications should be advanced to serve teacher development. This paper, employing a case study method in a comparative manner, summarizes the potential maladjustment issues Chinese language teachers might face when assigned to teach international Chinese abroad and attempts to provide viable theoretical solutions based on these issues. However, due to limitations in resources, it was challenging to conduct large-scale surveys and analyses for this study. Given the generalizability issues of case studies, the conclusions drawn here are somewhat limited and require further in-depth exploration.

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## Appendences

### Appendix A: Classroom Analysis

*Teacher Ma*

#### 1. Allocation of Teaching Content Time

|                               | Content                                   | Time (Minutes) | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|---|----------------|------------|
| Review of Old Knowledge       | Review of Textbook Content                | 2.07           | 5%         |
|                               | Recalling Old Knowledge by Reading Text   | 4.18           | 10.1%      |
| Introduction of New Knowledge | Explanation of Remaining Textbook Content | 29.51          | 71.9%      |
| Conclusion of Class           | Session of Reading and Explaining Text    | 5.27           | 12.8%      |

#### 2. Allocation of Various Teaching Behaviors

| Behavior Category           | Time (Minutes) | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Teacher Explanation         | 22.12          | 54%        |
| Student Explanation         | 3.6            | 8.8%       |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | 6.2            | 15%        |
| Group Discussion            | \              | \          |
| Student Self-Study          | 8.1            | 20%        |
| Non-Teaching Time           | 0.92           | 2.2%       |

#### 3. Teacher's Explanation Behavior

|                    | Observation Content   | Frequency | Percentage | Ranking |
|--------------------|---|-----------|------------|---------|
| Typical Behaviors  | 1. Use of Textbook Language   | 7         | 23.3%      | 1       |
|                    | 2. Use of Personal Language   | 4         | 13.3%      | 3       |
|                    | 3. Use of Examples  | 1         | 3.3%       | 5       |
|                    | 4. Use of Repetition, Pauses, Rhythm  | 5         | 16.7%      | 2       |
|                    | 5. Observation of Student Reactions   | /         | /          |         |
|                    | 6. Integration of Student Language  | 5         | 16.7%      | 2       |
|                    | 7. Use of Board Writing   | /         | /          |         |
|                    | 8. Use of Multimedia  | 4         | 13.3%      | 3       |
|                    | 9. Use of Body Language   | 3         | 10%        | 4       |
| Overall Impression | The classroom seems to lack dynamism compared to traditional impressions of international Chinese teachers' classrooms. |           |            |         |

*Teacher Bian*

#### 1. Allocation of Teaching Content Time

|                               | Content                             | Time (Minutes) | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Pre-class Introduction        | Pictures (Fox, Tiger)               | 1.2            | 3%         |
|                               | Student Reading of Text             | 3.17           | 7.9%       |
| Introduction of New Knowledge | Practice of New Vocabulary          | 17.87          | 45.7%      |
|                               | In-class Vocabulary Testing (Games) | 2.67           | 7.7%       |
|                               | Explanation of Text Content         | 12.61          | 31.5%      |
| Class Summary                 | Reading of Text                     | 2.46           | 6.1%       |

#### 2. Allocation of Various Teaching Behaviors

| Behavior Category           | Time (Minutes) | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------|
| Teacher Explanation         | 21.98          | 55%        |
| Student Explanation         | 5.7            | 14.3%      |
| Teacher-Student Interaction | 5.52           | 13.8%      |
| Group Discussion            | \              | \          |
| Student Self-Study          | 6.77           | 16.9%      |
| Non-Teaching Time           | \              | \          |

### 3. Teacher's Explanation Behavior

|                    | Observation Content   | Frequency | Percentage | Ranking |
|--------------------|---|-----------|------------|---------|
| Typical Behaviors  | 1. Use of Textbook Language   | 3         | 10%        | 4       |
|                    | 2. Use of Personal Language   | 8         | 26.7%      | 1       |
|                    | 3. Use of Examples  | 2         | 6.7%       | 5       |
|                    | 4. Use of Repetition, Pauses, Rhythm  | \         | \          | \       |
|                    | 5. Observation of Student Reactions   | 2         | 6.7%       | 5       |
|                    | 6. Integration of Student Language  | 7         | 23.3%      | 2       |
|                    | 7. Use of Board Writing   | 2         | 6.7%       | 5       |
|                    | 8. Use of Multimedia  | 5         | 16.7%      | 3       |
|                    | 9. Use of Body Language   | 1         | 3.3%       | 6       |
| Overall Impression | The classroom atmosphere is livelier, but teaching remains primarily lecture-based. |           |            |         |

## Appendix B: Interview Outline

### I. Basic Information

1. What is your educational background?
2. How long have you been working in your current position?
3. In what language do you teach, and do you have a set curriculum?
4. What age group do most of your students belong to, and what is the class size?

### II. Lesson Preparation

1. What resources do you refer to when preparing lessons, and what criteria do you base your preparations on?
2. Is your lesson plan stable, and how often do you update it?
3. How much time do you typically spend on lesson preparation, and why?
4. What insights have you gained from lesson preparation?

### III. Teaching Situation

1. How is the interaction between teachers and students, and what is the classroom atmosphere like?
2. What unexpected situations may arise during class, and how do you handle them?
3. How do you perceive the impact of your teaching on students?
4. What teaching methods are you familiar with, do you apply them in class, and what are the results?
5. What skills do you prioritize in student development, and why?
6. How do you understand the role of a teacher, what should teachers do, and what abilities are required?

### IV. Reflection on Teaching

1. How often do you reflect on your classroom teaching?
2. What aspects do you focus on when reflecting (management, design, methods, content, discourse, etc.)?
3. Do you have a specific process for reflection (design reasoning, concepts, etc.)?
4. Are you satisfied with the quality of your teaching reflection (strengths, weaknesses)?

### V. Environmental Factors

1. Are you satisfied with your current economic income and social status, and why?
2. Do you experience high pressure in your work and research, and where does it mostly come from?
3. Are you optimistic about the future prospects of your work, and why?

### VI. About Students

1. How do you understand the teacher-student relationship?
2. Do students have many non-academic needs, and what insights and difficulties do you encounter when dealing with them?
3. What are the criteria for distinguishing between good and bad students?