



# Chinese language teachers' expectations and perceptions of American students' behavior: Exploring the nexus of cultural differences and classroom management



Wenying Zhou<sup>\*</sup>, Guofang Li

Michigan State University, USA

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 21 April 2014

Received in revised form 30 September 2014

Accepted 14 October 2014

Available online 28 November 2014

### Keywords:

Chinese as a Foreign Language

Chinese language teachers

Cross-cultural teaching

Classroom management

Culturally different practices

Instructional adjustment

## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on six Chinese language teachers' experiences and perceptions of their classroom management in the United States of America. The analysis revealed that the teachers experienced cultural mismatches between their Chinese cultural expectations and American students' actual classroom behavior and struggled with challenges of understanding the demands of American classroom management, lack of effective strategies for managing American classroom, and language barriers. However, the teachers were able to adopt strategies commonly used by American teachers to manage their American students while retaining some of their Chinese practices. The findings suggest that cultural differences in classroom management play a significant role in affecting Chinese language teachers' classroom instruction and must be addressed in Chinese language teachers' preparation programs as well as their continued professional development in the U.S. and similar contexts.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

With China's rapid economic development in the past decades, more and more people around the world are interested in learning about China and its language. In the U.S., for example, in 2000, 24,000 7–12 graders were learning Chinese in the U.S. and this number rose to 59,860 in 2007–8 (Asia Society, 2011). The growing interest in learning Chinese in the U.S. has led to a serious shortage of Chinese language teachers and a growing demand to recruit qualified teachers from China. In the last six years, more than 700 Chinese language teachers have been brought over to classrooms across the U.S. (College Board, 2013). These teachers often come without any prior experiences in the classrooms in the U.S., which influence how they perceive and manage American students' classroom behavior. Many of them have found it “difficult to teach in a way that Western learners can relate to well” due to their lack of proper preparation to teach in international settings in their teacher education programs in China (Wang, Moloney, & Li, 2013). Cultural differences between Chinese language teachers (CLT) and their American students can lead to “disaster when the person is untutored in American pedagogy” (Shrier, 1994, p. 56). These challenges indicate an urgent need to examine cultural influences on these teachers' cross-cultural teaching when they teach non-Chinese language learners in western countries.

Research has found that teachers form, convey, and act on expectations through their culturally educational experiences (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Good, 1981, 1987). In a comparative ethnographic study of primary school teachers'

<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [zhouwenying@msu.edu](mailto:zhouwenying@msu.edu) (W. Zhou), [liguo@msu.edu](mailto:liguo@msu.edu) (G. Li).

expectations and perceptions of their students in their respective classrooms in England and France, [Planel \(1987\)](#) found that British teachers preferred a more caring and informal approach to classroom management than did the French teachers, while the French teachers preferred classroom order and structure more and expected their students to follow their guidance. Similarly, in a comparative study of Dutch and American classroom management practices, [Wubbels, Brekelmans, den Brok, and vanTartwijk \(2006\)](#) found that Dutch teachers' view of an orderly classroom was interpreted as disorder by American teachers. Similar findings were also observed in [Whitman and Lai's \(1990\)](#) study that compared classroom management in selected schools in Hawaii and Japan, in which they found that Hawaiian teachers emphasized more clear structure and rules for acceptable student behavior than did the Japanese teachers.

While these studies reveal much about the influences of different cultures on teacher expectations for student classroom behavior, most of them focus on teachers who share the same cultural backgrounds as their students in the same country. Little is known about how classroom management is mediated by culture in cross-cultural contexts where teachers do not share the same language or cultural backgrounds as their students. Given the steady increase in the number of Chinese language teachers recruited to teach in the U.S., there is a critical need to better understand their classroom management practices in such cross-cultural contexts.

Recently, with the growth of Chinese language education in the U.S., there is a growing research interest in Chinese language teachers' and teacher candidates' experiences in U.S. schools. Existing studies have focused on different aspects of Chinese pre- and in-service teachers' transitioning experiences such as teacher identity (e.g., [Gao, 2010; Xu, 2012](#)), teacher perception of student-centered teaching (e.g., [Haley & Ferro, 2011](#)), and teachers' acculturation and induction processes in the U.S. schools (e.g., [Liu, 2012; Romig, 2009](#)). Collectively, these studies revealed several important findings about how cultural differences between East and West played a significant role in shaping these teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, including their classroom management styles. First, the studies found that Chinese language teachers are aware of the cultural differences between Chinese and U.S. schools including differences in classroom management practices. For example, focusing on 16 pre- and in-service teachers' (6 Arabic and 10 Chinese) perceptions of student-centered approach in the U.S., [Haley and Ferro \(2011\)](#) found that the teachers were cognizant of the cultural differences between their own teacher-centered, grammar-translation schooling background and the expectations to change these practices to align with a learner-centered approach in the U.S. schools.

Second, the studies also found that Chinese language teachers struggled with these differences as cultural differences presented tremendous challenges in teaching including classroom management. [Gao \(2010\)](#), for example, examined how two Chinese immigrant teachers negotiated their professional identities as an immigrant and a Chinese language teacher in foreign language classes in the U.S. public schools. Gao found that the teachers struggled with juggling with two competing storylines of "Chinese" and "American" teacher identity on a daily basis. For example, they struggled to balance between students' own choice (U.S.) and teacher's push (Chinese), value of freedom (U.S.) and being strict with students on small things (Chinese). These tensions are also reflected in [Xu's \(2012\)](#) case study that investigated seven Chinese expatriate teachers' perceptions of transitioning to teach in U.S. classrooms. [Xu \(2012\)](#) showed that, besides the challenges of culturally different teacher role and changing teacher-centered teaching methodologies as well as the language barrier, the teachers also reported challenges of dealing with students with special needs, and communicating with U.S. parents who did not have the same respect for teachers as Chinese parents. These challenges were also reflected in their class management difficulties in the U.S. In another case study of three Chinese language teacher candidates' internship experience in the U.S., [Liu \(2012\)](#) found that, compared to interns who were more familiar with U.S. culture and institutions, the Chinese language teacher candidates had more difficulty dealing with American students' misbehavior and differentiating instruction for them.

Finally, in light of these challenges, research also revealed the importance of developing competency to balance the tensions between "American" and "Chinese" teaching styles and beliefs and adapt to American classroom management practices. [Romig's \(2009\)](#) ethnographic study on four Chinese novice teachers' acculturation processes in a U.S. Chinese–English immersion school reported that while the Chinese language teachers mainly reacted to inappropriate classroom behavior by using culturally embedded disciplinary strategies such as demanding respect from students in their first year, some of them were able to adopt some proactive classroom management practices modeled by their U.S. teaching partners to create a respectful environment during the second year. Moreover, these teachers were able to embed some cultural strategies (such as arranging students in assigned seating) in their new proactive classroom management techniques. These hybrid practices, however, were not always effective, and at times, are "detrimental" to their teaching, due to many cultural mismatches between teachers and students. As a result, some teachers had to be removed from their teaching positions due to their insufficient development in classroom management skills despite being a qualified teacher of Chinese. [Romig \(2009\)](#) concluded that the Chinese teachers' ability to develop cultural competency to interact within and across two distinct cultures directly affected their classroom behavior management.

In sum, this small body of research on Chinese language teachers in the U.S. suggests that the ever-present cultural differences in Eastern and Western pedagogical practices can create serious challenges and tensions in classroom management. With the high influx of Chinese language teachers to the U.S. schools without prior preparation in classroom management demands in the U.S. classrooms, it is imperative to have more nuanced understanding of their cultural expectations on their students' classroom behavior and how these expectations affect their development in cross-cultural classroom management skills. This study on six Chinese language teachers' classroom management experiences in the U.S. addresses this urgent need. The study is guided by following research questions:

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373087>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373087>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)