Picture Your Identity: Proficient English Teachers' Professional Identities in China

Hengzhi Hu iD
National University of Malaysia, Malaysia

Feifei Huang iD
Monash University, Australia

Ying He iD
Monash University, Australia

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Hengzhi Hu, Feifei Huang, Ying He

Abstract

Teacher identity remains an area of interest in teacher development research because of its importance in influencing a teacher's professional practices, and the discussion of language teacher identity has come into public view with special attention attached to the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). Organized in China, this research presents Chinese English/TESOL teachers' understanding of their professional identities demonstrated through drawing, an innovative research method that can reveal the participants' inner and subconscious perceptions. Through content analysis, it is found that Chinese English teachers' role identities are closely linked with human capital that includes subject knowledge, technical knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Meanwhile, their role identities are connected with their emotional capital, and most participants hold positive emotions with their profession. However, some Chinese English teachers are unsatisfied with their business value and thus hold a negative view towards their role identities. This highlights the need to achieve homeostasis in Chinese teaching system.

Keywords: Teacher identity, Chinese English teachers, Human capital, Emotional capital

Introduction

Teaching is a complex issue, and how teachers position themselves in their teaching profession will affect how they teach and interact with students. Traditionally, in China, a teacher is normally expected to play the roles of knowledge gatekeeper, learning supporter and manager, strict disciplinarian and role model for students (He, 2016; OECD, 2016), and their identity is always described and linked with the so-called engineer theory, gardener theory, candle theory or lamp theory in metaphorical forms (Cortazzi, Jin, & Wang, 2008; Jin & Cortazzi, 2016; Qi, 2018). However, to a large degree, this merely reflects the expectation from the whole Chinese society for teachers rather than how teachers themselves perceive their identity and corresponding roles, and the broader social anticipation may contradict with teachers' personal senses of self or identity (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006), the dynamic construction of which lies "at the core of the teaching profession" (Sachs, 2005, p. 15) as well as "in the individual, the social interaction and social institutions" instead of remaining fixed as a natural property (Fan & Ren, 2018, p. 70).

Research on foreign language teachers' identity issue has gained considerable attention in recent years, as it is expected to play a vital role in ensuring teacher' dedication to their profession and adherence to responsibility. That means, more specifically, that the reflection upon teacher identity "allows language educators a useful lens into the 'who' of teaching and how teachers construct and reconstruct their views of their roles as language teachers and themselves in relation to their peers and their context" (Farrell, 2011, p. 54) and explores "questions about the sociocultural contexts of learning and learners, pedagogy, language, ideologies, and the ways in which language and discourses work" (Miller, 2009, p. 172). As teachers and researchers in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), the authors of this paper are highly interested in the research of TESOL teachers' role identity that could shape and mediate their views and understanding of 'how to act', 'how to be' and 'how to understand' their roles and responsibilities in their profession and that is expected to be distinguishing to that of teachers of other disciplines and subjects. A great deal of research has been conducted to analyze TESOL teachers' professional identities with constructive findings. However, in line with the view that steep changes of teacher identity may be frequently witnessed at the beginning of the career with smaller changes afterwards (Pillen, Den Brok, & Beijaard, 2013), pre-service TESOL teachers enrolled in the initial teacher education (ITE) program (e.g., He & Kroiss, 2020; Kelly, 2018; Nguyen, 2017; Nguyen, 2019) and novice EAL teachers who have just completed the ITE and started their teaching journey (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Othman & Senom, 2020; Raman & Yiğitoğlu, 2018; Sayer, 2012) always tend to be the main research participants to analyze the diversity, otherness and flexibility of teacher identity, providing few insights into how TESOL teachers at the middle stage of their career perceive their role identities.

This paper presents a study aimed at bridging this research gap by analyzing how Chinese English teachers who have accumulated years of teaching experience perceive their role identity at the mid-stage of their profession. Different from traditional research methods, such as interviews, questionnaires and case study, which have been always applied to investigate teacher identity development, painting as an innovative and arts-based research method was utilized in this study as a participatory act which could the participants "to more directly express their voices through artistic media with the goal of enhanced self-expression" (Walsh, Rutherford, & Crough, 2013, p. 121). By examining the participants' perceptions of their role identities, some valuable insights are expected to be produced and offered to Chinese educators, school leaders and other stakeholders so that they could better understand English teachers' identities and thus facilitate teacher professional development in the long run.

Literature Review of Teacher Identity

Identity remains a central focus in various disciplines, such as comparative politics (Deng, 1995; Ross, 2000), sociology (Côté, 1996; Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003), philosophy (Hirshman, 1992; Sollberger, 2013), international relations (Berenskoetter, 2010; Bucher & Jasper, 2016), anthropology (Finke & Sökefeld, 2018; Sökefeld, 1999), to name but a few. Basically, it is defined as the fact or characteristics of who a person is (Oxford Dictionaries, 2012; Scott, 2014). However, it is hard to judge if this definition is correct or not, or more strictly speaking, if it can appropriately summarize the meaning of identity, as primarily, "there is…no clear concept of identity" that is often "used widely and loosely in reference to one's sense of self, and one's feelings and ideas

about oneself" (Scott, 2014, p. 331), and the conceptualizations of it may vary considerably in different study areas. However, in line with Gleason's (1983) observation, it could only be said safely that the complex meaning of identity used in diverse study fields is not well complied into dictionary definitions that merely signify the literal and old senses of the word with a longstanding debate surrounding the attributes of identity, which is described by Vignoles (2011) as the existing numerous but contradictory ways of describing identity, such as stable versus fluid and personal versus social. It seems that identity is a term that is too broad to be clearly identified, while against this, the view that identity is complex and dynamic and being constructed and re-constructed both in mind and in social contexts through the interaction and socialization with others is embodied in this paper. That is to say, identity is a "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group…together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63) and "references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other" (Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996, p. 59).

As for teacher identity, various understandings have been developed. From a rather basic perspective, teacher identity is about the self-definition of a teacher with regard to their professional commitment and pedagogical relations (Day et al., 2006), and it can be further elaborated as an "ongoing process of integration of the 'personal' and 'professional' sides of becoming and being a teacher" at the core of their profession and the center of their beliefs, perceptions, values and attributes that would affect their practices (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004, p. 113). Likewise, a teacher's role identity is always at the status of construction and reconstruction as a result of the synergy of complex context, prior experience and social status, exactly as the view put forward by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) that teacher identity is being shaped and affected by context factors over time. Whatever the definition and interpretation of teacher identity may be, what is clearly illustrated is that teacher identity serves as a specific model of who a teacher is and how to act as a teacher based on the teaching field needs and individual internal recognition of teacher role and normally represents "multiple things (ranging) from teacher perceptions of what they do in the classroom, to enacted pedagogies in the classroom, to observed teacher dispositions" (Ballantyne & Grootenboer, 2012, p. 368).

Disciplinarily, the analysis of language teacher identity (LTI) has come into public view from a social and personal perspective, with a comprehensive explanation offered by Barkhuizen (2017, p.4) who maintains that:

> *Language teacher identities (LTIs) are cognitive, social, emotional, ideological, and historical-they are both inside the teacher and outside in the social, material and technological world…They are core and peripheral, personal and professional, they are dynamic, multiple, and hybrid, and they are foregrounded and backgrounded. And LTIs changes, short-term and over time-discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, administrators, and the wider community, and in material interaction with spaces, places and objects in classrooms, institutions, and online.*

This view is foundationally embedded in the nature of LTI that is actually dynamic, multiple and subject to various context factors, and to put it in a more straightaway manner, the foci of LTI are generally related to "social recognition, how teachers learn to perform as professionals, how they apply theory in their teaching practices, how they theorize their practice…(and) how they teach" (Salinas & Ayala, 2017, p. 36) within the general framework of identity and teacher identity.

In the category of LTI, English teacher identity has been an emerging topic for the past decades with special attention attached to TESOL teachers who may also be addressed as teachers of English as an additional language (EAL), English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). In the field of English language teaching (ELT), how teachers "see themselves and the various roles that are imposed, assumed, and/or negotiated while they teach in different settings" and how they "are seen as TESOL teachers by others and as such influences decisions made by the teacher themselves" in classroom could well summarize the focus of discussion about teacher identity that represents who they are and what they do in an evolving way at their profession (Farrell, 2017, p. 34). Scholars and educators have formulated different frameworks to analyze TESOL teachers' identities. A comprehensive one is developed by Pennington and Hoekje (2014) who maintain that a TESOL teacher's identity is subject to their practices at workplace (e.g. instruction, disciplinary field, profession, business, service) and the overall ELT context, whether that being global, local or sociocultural.

From a holistic view, this framework takes into account differing facets of EAL teachers' identity, and all of these factors make up a teacher's role identity. However, a problem with this framework may be that the dimensions of the teacher selves are mainly professional. According to Zacharias (2010), a teacher's identity — whether they are a TESOL teacher or a teacher of other subjects — should be multidimensional and "includes the interplay between the personal and professional dimensions" (p. 180). These two dimensions may be well-balanced, while in most cases, they are the 'site of struggles'. That is to say, a teacher's identity can be influenced by their practices at work and their personal feelings or situations. It is possible for a teacher to have mixed and competing identities. This view provides the basic framework for the study presented in this paper, and how multidimensional teacher identities can be is what to be explored.

Methodology

Procedure

This qualitative research was conducted online under the circumstance of COVID-19. All the participants were notified in advance of the academic purpose of this research and that their drawings were not related to their job performance evaluation or any other profession assessment while being invited to participate in this research. They were not compulsorily required to identify their personal information (e.g. gender, school types, year levels, education background) on drawings but were encouraged to do so for further data analysis. They also signed the research agreement to consent to have their drawings included in this paper without private information disclosed. Data are collected from primary and secondary school teachers who are based in a major Chinese city participating in it. After being explained the task details, the participants were given sufficient time to make their drawings, the submission of which occurred at the completion of them.

Participants

Officially, there are five hierarchical grades to indicate the career stages for Chinese teachers, including novice teachers, intermediate teachers, advanced teachers, senior teachers and professor senior teachers, and strict and

complex requirements are needed for a teacher in order to gain a more advanced professional tile (OECD, 2016). In this research, the selection of participants was based on a much simpler grading level developed by Chinese educator, Lian (2008, as cited in Yang, 2013), who divides the career of teaching into three stages after ITE, including novice teacher, proficient teacher and expert teacher, which basically complies with the categorization "following preservice preparation as induction and the early years, the middle years, and the later years leading toward retirement" (Christensen, Burke, Fessler, & Hagstrom 1983, p. 4) and Huberman's (1993) career model that includes early career stage, mid-career stage and later-career stage. In line with this type of categorization, all the participants in this research were at their mid-career stage and considered proficient after three to five years of teaching experience. Drawings were submitted by 176 proficient English teachers, and all of them hold the People's Republic of China Teacher's Qualification Certificate or other certificates that qualify them to teach English in China.

Data Collection

Drawing upon the idea that images can well categorize and realize how teachers see themselves as teachers in their profession embedded in a psychological view that drawings could serve as a channel of expression of a person's inner and subconscious values, desires, perceptions and thoughts that could be hardly released at a verbal level (Diem-Wille, 2001), the participants were required to draw a picture to represent their teacher identity without strict time limit. While drawing, they were also asked to write a few words to explain what they had drawn for the convenience of further analysis, which corresponds to the idea that when using drawing as a research method, both drawing and writing should be entailed to elucidate the embedded meanings (Mair & Kierans, 2007). The drawings were then submitted to the research organizers via email, fax or messenger applications.

Data Analysis and Reliability

Since only a small number of participants (n=16) identified their gender, age, education backgrounds, school types and other relevant information when submitting their drawings or on their drawings, all the drawings were regarded as a whole set of data during analysis without taking into account the aforementioned factors. All the submitted drawings included texts, because the participants were asked to write a few words to explain what they had drawn during the initial data collection process, whereas the examination of drawings outweighed the analysis of words that only played a supplementary role in helping researchers to understand the details of paintings, which was in line with the primary research purpose in analyzing how teachers themselves perceive their professional identity instead of examining their expectations of an ideal teacher or their views of what kind of teacher they want to become. The collected data was organized, coded and categorized by examining the details on the drawings. The results were then reviewed through content analysis that focuses on the precise interpretation and understanding of a specific type of content (Krippendorf, 2004) to minimize the influence of subjectivity on the analysis results.

Results

Summary of Results

Except for several pieces of drawings (n=8) that were not identifiable and thus were considered invalid, the other drawings (n= 168) were considered as valid data with various elements demonstrated, including teacher, students, colleagues, family, artifacts (e.g. book, table, whiteboard and laptop) and other designs (e.g. candle, heart shape, walker, tree and mountain). After examining the common elements presented on the drawings, the valid data was finally categorised into (1) teacher, students and artifacts; (2) teacher only; (3) teacher and artifacts; (4) metaphor; (5) teacher and students; (6) teacher, students and other stakeholders; (7) other. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Results

Category	Explanation	Frequency	Percentage
teacher, student(s) and artifacts	The elements of drawings include teacher, student(s) and artifacts.	52	30.23%
teacher only	There is only a teacher in the picture.	32	18.6%
teacher and artifacts	The elements of drawings include teacher and artifacts (e.g. books, whiteboard, laptops)	32	18.6%
metaphor	There are other designs (e.g. candles, trees, lighthouse) in the picture to refer to teacher identity in metaphoric manner.	28	16.28%
teacher and student(s)	The elements of drawings include teacher and student(s).	16	9.3%
teacher, student(s) and other stakeholders	The elements of drawings include teacher, student(s) and other stakeholders (e.g. colleagues, parents).	4	2.33%
other	The elements of drawings do not strictly belong to any of the above categories.	4	2.33%
		In total: 168	

Category 1: Teacher, Students and Artifacts

A majority of the submitted drawings (n=52) include teacher, students and various types of artifacts. For instance, Figure 1 that is in the form of four-frame comic presents a particular participant's role identity in different settings from before-class preparation to after-class activities. Specifically, before class, the teacher is planning her lessons, and it is worth nothing here that she does not only plan to present her classes using technologies but also attempt to combine other disciplinary areas into her teaching, such as music and arts. As shown in the second part of this picture, confident and well-prepared, she is teaching English alphabet with a book and a pointer in hands. She looks quite cheerful and dedicated to her profession, and this particularly can be shown from the rest part of the picture in which she overruns her class and even participates in after-class

tutoring during her break to cater for student needs, though students may complain about that. This drawing demonstrates that the participant's role identity is connected with professionalism and dedication and recognises that teaching is a complex issue that may involve the application of a teacher's pedagogical skills and knowledge reserves other than language expertise, and she regards herself as a knowledge imparter, a dedicated volunteer who spares no efforts to help students and most importantly and a teacher who is proficient in utilising different language teaching approaches.
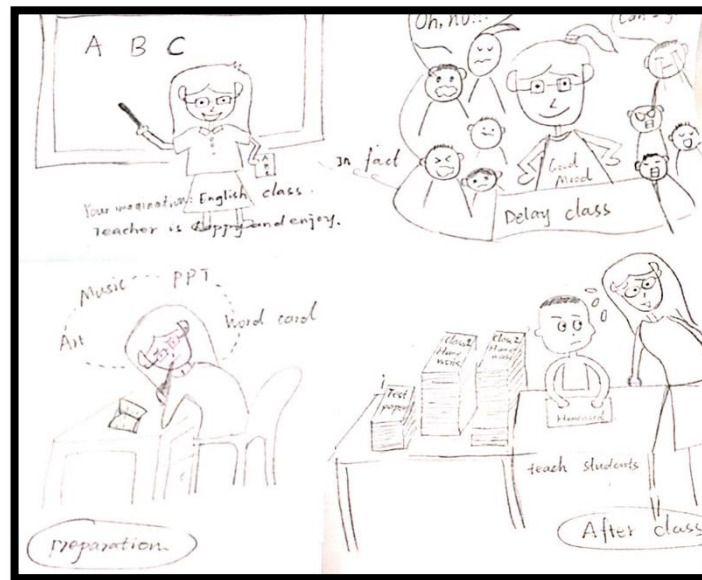

Figure 1. A Sample Picture in Category 1

Another sample drawing is shown in Figure 2, and this represents another typical scene in this category.

Figure 2. A Sample Picture in Category 1

The teacher is delivering an English class with the assistance of traditional teaching tools (e.g. whiteboard, chalk, books) as well as information communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g. laptops, computers). The students are chattering with each other, and the teacher is trying to continue their teaching as well as trying to maintain the class discipline. This picture also reflects the complexity of teaching in the manner that beside knowledge communication, an EAL teacher also needs to manage the class and use modern technologies to assist their teaching.

Category 2: Teacher only

The second category contains the drawings (n=32) that only pictured teachers themselves, the focus of which lies on the multiple roles a teacher plays and the diverse abilities and skills they have. The first example, as shown in Figure 3, depicts a versatile teacher. The participant regards themselves as a 'bodhisattva of thousands hands', and each hand represents different roles and skills needed in profession. It is the embodiment of jack of all trades characterized by versality and multiple abilities. That is to say, the participant believes that he or she does not only take the responsibility of teaching English as an expert, but also, more importantly, play other roles, such as learners' friend, cameraman, to name but a few. Similarly, Figure 4 that portrays a male teacher who is delivering English classes, telling stories, organizing classroom activities, looking after students and even using dance and performance to supplement his teaching also highlights the multiple capabilities and versatility that a teacher needs.
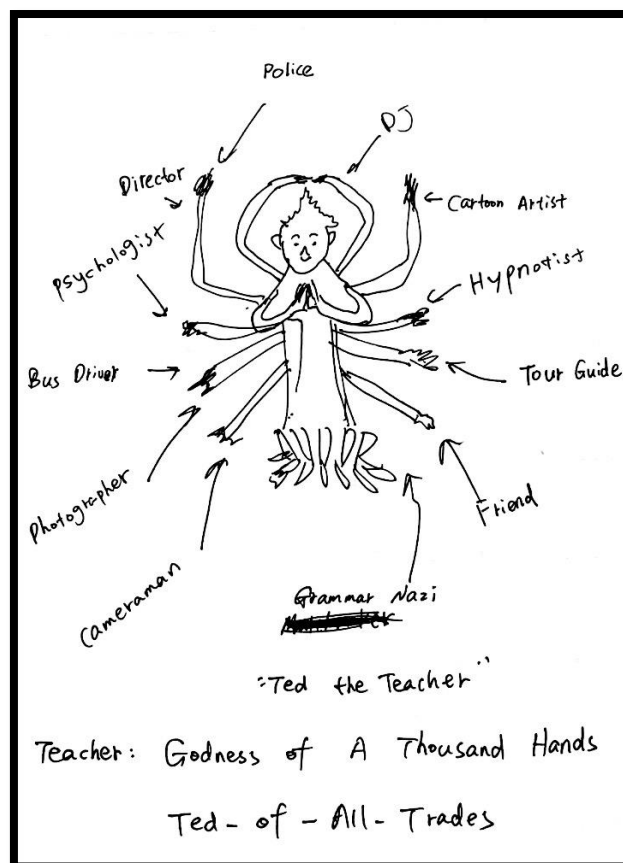

Figure 3. A Sample Picture in Category 2

These two sample pictures signify that teachers are teaching experts, play multiple roles and need a vast repertoire of knowledge and skills of diverse areas. What is generally reinforced here within this category is a teacher's self-development and personal abilities that are connected not only with teaching and academic expertise but also to the diverse skills corresponding to the different roles they play in their profession.

Figure 4. A Sample Picture in Category 2

Category 3: Teacher and Artifacts

Many participants (n=32) drew a teacher with artifacts to show their role identity. A typical drawing is shown in Figure 5, which presents an approachable female EAL teacher in formal suit standing beside the whiteboard with a cheerful smile. With a book in hand, she is teaching English alphabet and elaborating the letter A using an apple picture as an example.

Figure 5. A Sample Picture in Category 3

Similarly, in Figure 6, the teacher who is in formal dress and explaining a specific syntax structure on board also

presents a professional and confident profile. Generally, this category reflects a positive teacher profile, and according to their similar dressing style, expression and practices, it can be assumed that they regard themselves as professional knowledge imparter and take a positive, friendly and confident attitude during teaching practices, which denotes that their self-role identity as EAL teachers is linked with professionalism, knowledgeability and positive dispositions.
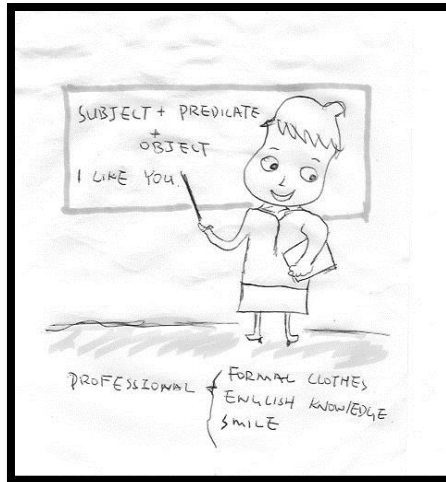

Figure 6. A Sample Picture in Category 3

Category 4: Metaphor

Some participants (n=28) used metaphoric methods to show their role identities, and the displayed items on the drawings are not necessarily the common elements contained in the other categories but can still indicate how the participants evaluate their profession. For example, in Figure 7, there is a nearly-spent lit candle against the dark background, and it lights up the surroundings with globules of wax dripping from it.

Figure 7. A Sample Picture in Category 4

This scene was summarized by the participant as the conduct of 'sacrificing myself to ignite others'. Obviously,

this is exaggerated expression, but what is demonstrated here with regard to the participant's teacher identity is that they regard themselves as a helper who is assisting students in overcoming upcoming challenges and devoted into voluntary labor without asking for returns at an ideal and moral level of their profession. Another example of this category is Figure 8, in which there is a small tree and a big tree that stand for students and teacher respectively. The big tree grows straight and tall and almost reaches up into the sky, and it is regarded as the role model for the smaller one. In other words, this participant equals a teacher's identity to a role model who is always positive and confident in themselves and continues to strive for bigger objectives.
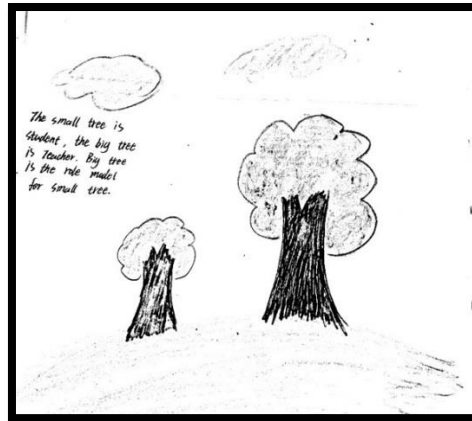

Figure 8. A Sample Picture in Category 4

Category 5: Teacher and Student(s)

Some drawings (n=16) only portrayed teacher and student(s) interacting with each other. In Figure 9, a teacher who holds a student's hand is pointing straight ahead and leading the way, and this mainly reflects that this participant believes that he or she plays the role as an instructor and helper in student development of various areas, whether that being academic, moral or related to different aspects of life. Also, a sense of trust can be detected from this picture, especially from the hand-holding behavior.
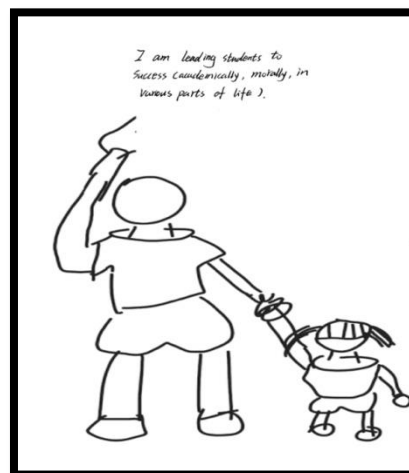

Figure 9. A Sample Picture in Category 5

Category 6: Teacher, Students and Other Stakeholders

A small number of drawings (n=4) depicted the characters of teacher, students, colleagues and parents. As shown in Figure 10, the neatly dressed teacher positioned in the middle appears confident and aimable, and he is connected with students, colleagues and family by double-sided arrows, which symbolizes that the teacher plays a significant role in and is confident of assisting, supporting, promoting and strengthening the communication among different stakeholders as a part of their profession instead of isolating them. The students, parents and colleagues presented in this example look rather joyful and content, which further emphasizes the importance of building inclusive relationships among school, students and family.

Although this category only takes the smallest portion and is not related to academic expertise that may firstly enter into one's mind when asked about the profession of an EAL teacher, it does signify an important element of teacher identity from a whole-school perspective, which is about a teacher's role as an expert negotiator and communicator committed to building engaging relationships amongst different stakeholders.

Figure 10. A Sample Picture in Category 5

Category 6: Other

A few participants' submitted drawings (n=4) were categorized into this group. Although each of these pictures included teachers, they were still labeled as a special set of data that is different from the aforementioned categories because of the interesting similarities these drawings show as to some teachers' negative emotions arising in their profession. As illustrated in Figure 11, disappointed and downcast, the teacher is complaining about the salary that she gets paid, and the 100-yuan banknote is highlighted, which further emphasizes that she is discontented with the considerable imbalance between the salary and the workload she has coped with. This reflects that the participant's professional identity is associated with low economic status, which can well

summarize the teacher identity the participants of this category attempted to express with special attention to unsatisfying social and business values.
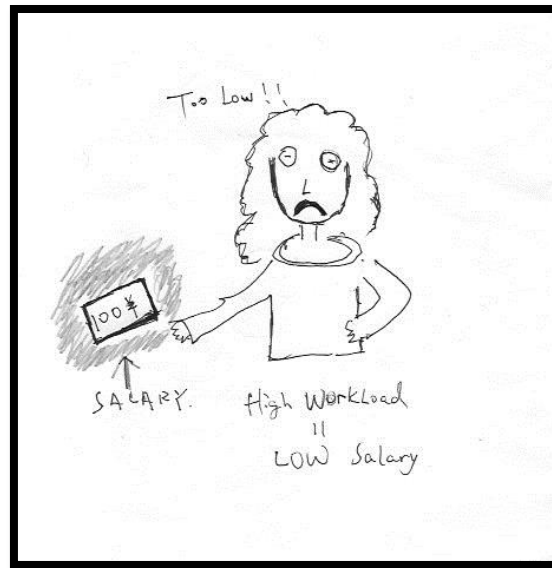

Figure 11. A Sample Picture in Category 6

Discussion: The Complexity of Teaching

Summary of Findings

Teaching is a complex issue, and the above data analysis demonstrates different sorts of teacher identities of in-service Chinese English teachers who are at the mid-stage of their profession. Generally speaking, human capital and emotional capital are two manifest features of the collected drawings, from the perspective of which the subjects' teacher identities will be discussed in what follows.

Human Capital

There is not absolutely correct answer with respect to what kinds of attributes an English teacher needs to have, whereas this research has presented a high level of diversity of teacher attributes and capital, whether that being human or emotional, positive or negative. Human capital is normally "considered as a collection of features, life trade, knowledge, creativity, innovation, and energy, which people invest it in their work" (Pasban & Nojedeh, 2016, p. 250). With respect to teaching, human capital can generally refer to subject specialism, technical knowledge and application of knowledge and skills into teaching. Both in China and in a global context, an English teacher's or a TESOL teacher's subject knowledge of English is considered to be foundational for effective teaching, underpinning their entire profession (Flynn, 2007; Li, 2010). Generally, the knowledge transmitter profile that many participants pictured can still reveal that they regarded subject knowledge as a key to their profession and knowledge communication as one of their professional goals, which can be seen from the classroom situation in most of the aforementioned allocated categories, such as Teacher, Students and Artifacts,

Teacher only, Teacher and Artifacts and Teacher and Students. Some participants expressed in drawings the significance of subject knowledge in a direct way, such as in Figure 1 and Figure 2 in which the teachers consider themselves as knowledgeable, Figure 3 in which the teacher plays a role of 'grammar Nazi' who is a strict grammar user, Figure 5 and Figure 6 in which the teacher believes that English knowledge is an integrated part of professionalism. Subject knowledge is an essential component of the professional standards for teachers in China (Yang, Kaiser, König, & Blömeke, 2018), and the overall education context in China where a student's mastery of English knowledge and performance in English assessment tasks are the principal indicator of student language proficiency and teaching efficiency (Wei, 2016) may well explain why subject knowledge proficiency is regarded as a key standard for English teachers. In other words, the examination-oriented educational context that prioritizes knowledge is the driven force that shapes Chinese English teachers' principal role identities as knowledge transmitter.

Basically, in educational contexts, technical knowledge or ICT skills stand for the capabilities of an individual to utilize ICT system and devices at workplace, and a teacher's ICT skills are important teacher capital closely linked with their teacher identity, especially for a language teacher (Son, 2018). Demonstrated in a number of collected pictures, it is noticeable that apart from subject knowledge, many participants regard themselves as proficient ICT users as a part of their professional identity. This can be particularly seen from the largest category of drawings (Teacher, Students and Artifacts category), which depict the English teachers who are good at using ICT, such as electronic devices, software and applications, to assist lesson planning and language teaching. In recent years, the rapid development of ICT has changed the traditional modes of education as well as pedagogical approaches. This can be described as a revolution of language teaching under the broad situation of world of communication that is central to both language teachers and learners. In China, the development of ICT use in education started from the 1990s, and significant achievement has been made "with respect to infrastructure construction, production of resources, academic education", teaching innovation, education management and so on (Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2018, p. 195). For English or TESOL teachers, particularly, it is vital for them "to use ICT in the teaching and learning process in order to help students to achieve a high quality of English subjects" because of the authentic context that ICT can provide and in which language acquisition can usually effectively occur (Alkaromah, Fauziati, & Asib, 2020, p. 122). In this sense, a TESOL teacher should understand the relationship between English teaching and ICT use and skills, utilize their subject knowledge to screen and choose proper ICT resources and formats to help achieve language teaching and learning goals, know how to use ICT to design lessons that can develop students' language proficiency and expand their understanding, know how to deliver and organize lessons with the assistance of ICT, and be confident of employing ICT and technical knowledge into profession. Through our research, it is inspiring to see that many participants have the attributes or abilities to plan for and organize ICT-supported English teaching, and ICT has become an integrated part of their daily practices at workplace. It should be mentioned that proficient ICT user, as some of the participants' role identity, is not contradictory to the aforementioned role identity as English knowledge transmitter. Instead, most participants regard these two identities as supplementary to each other, which can be seen from the largest category of drawings that depict English teachers who use ICT in lesson planning and teaching. This reflects that in the world of communication, English teaching has been closely connected with and shaped by ICT utilization, and ICT has been an integrated part of

a number of Chinese English teachers' professional practices.

Teaching is a complex issue, and it requires a range of skills and techniques to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. In other words, teachers should know how to teach and use pedagogical content knowledge to maximize student learning outcome, and this is recognized in TESOL (Flynn, 2007) as well as in China at official and local level (Yang et al., 2018). Various professional teaching skills are presented by research participants in their drawings connected with their teacher identities, and it must be recognized that pedagogical knowledge, as an integrated part of human capital, plays an important role in shaping a teacher's professional identity. The second largest category of drawings, namely Teacher Only one, presents the participants' understanding of pedagogical knowledge in an explicit manner. For instance, according to Figure 3, the participant believes that he plays a range of roles in his profession as 'jack-of-all-trades'. Although there is not much information explicating how each role the participant plays functions in English teaching, it can be still noted that his teacher identity is not only about teaching English but also about how to teach as well as how to function at workplace. Figure 4 presents the participant's understanding of the application of pedagogical approaches in a more direct way. The profile of a teacher who teaches English through storytelling, singing and playing games reflects various pedagogical approaches commonly used in language teaching, such as music-based learning that can develop learners' multiple intelligences, dance and language-integrated learning that can benefit students cognitively, linguistically and culturally, and game-based learning that allows students to engage into learning in an interactive and dynamic way.

In China, schooling is usually criticized to be teacher-centered and dominant without truly engaging students who are normally regarded as the passive receipts of knowledge (Wang, 2006). Although educational reformation has been witnessed and called upon in recent years for the transition from the view of teacher as the center to students as the center, the fact is that teacher-centered situation is still quite commonplace in China, which can be also seen in this research. A number of participants assume that their major responsibility as English teachers is to teach this specific language as knowledge transmitter. Although their drawings present different elements, a main similarity is that they put themselves at the center of teaching. However, it must be mentioned that a few participants' drawings dispel the teacher-centered situation and present a scene that involves students, colleagues, families and other stakeholders into their profession, such as Figure 10 in the category of Teacher, Students and other Stakeholders. As mentioned above, teaching is a complicated issue. There are not only specific questions related to English teaching itself, such as the aforementioned subject knowledge and teaching strategies, but also some general questions with respect to education and schooling. The category of Teacher, Students and other Stakeholders illustrates that some English teachers believe that their profession involves the cooperation of students, colleagues, family members and other stakeholders in a synergizing way, which is in line with the concept of collaboration paradigm in which both parties are included into schooling in a joint endeavor so that student learning outcomes could be maximized. This research finding is rather inspiring, because this is contradictory to a separation paradigm that puts teachers at the center and views the engagement of other stakeholders invalid and useless (Amatea, 2013) and to the Chinese-style schooling criticized to be teacher-centered and dominant. According to Wang and Du (2014), a teacher's identity development is tightly linked with how they cope with interpersonal relationships at workplace. This

skill of working with students, colleagues, family members and other stakeholders reflects an English teacher's role identity as participant, facilitator, organizer and instructor of language learning process to achieve language proficiency (Wei, 2016), and this transition from a teacher-centered English language classroom to an inclusive and student-centered whole school environment that engages every potential stakeholder is what is being looked for but has not been achieved yet.

Emotional Capital

As defined by Cottingham (2016), emotional capital generally refers to "the emotion-specific…resources that individuals activate and embody in distinct fields" (p. 451). For teachers, this term can be used to describe their emotion norms and capacity that can meet "the practical and interactional demands" at schools (Cottingham, 2017, p. 273). There is no strict standard with respect to what kind of emotions a teacher in China should have, whereas a majority of the participant teachers in this research presented an emotionally positive profile, and some pictures were also labeled with explanative language, indicating a teacher's positive emotions in teaching, such as happiness, friendliness, confidence, dedication, etc. This can be noticed from all the categories of paintings except the last one. For example, in Figure 1 (Teacher, Students and Artifacts category), the teacher shows a high level of dedication to her profession through thorough lesson planning, conscientious class delivery and student scaffolding; in Figure 3 and Figure 4 (Teacher only category), the motivated teachers seem to be committed to their professional development; in Figure 5 and Figure 6 (Teacher and Artifacts category), the participants think that a teacher should friendly, kind, happy and smiling; in Figure 7 (Metaphor category), the participant regard themselves as a candle that is the embodiment of a sense of commitment and responsibility. All these key words and elements from the picture samples demonstrate that the participant teachers enjoy their profession with different types of positive emotions. Undoubtedly, "a conducive environment coupled with positive emotions create a good platform for teaching and learning", and a teacher's positive emotion in profession can enhance the teaching effects as well as improve the classroom environment and atmosphere (Makhwathana, Mudzielwana, Mulovhedzi, & Mudau, 2017, p. 28). In China's educational context, a teacher's positive emotions are being emphasised in official and daily discourses aimed at "achieving instructional goals, decreasing the negative impact of emotions on student learning, confirming the professional and ethical norms, maintaining teachers' and students' mental health, keeping positive emotional images, and nurturing good teacher-student relationships" (Gong, Chai, Duan, Zhong, & Jiao, 2013, p. 870). As language teaching is a highly social-interactive activity, a teacher's positive emotions are particularly important to ensure that academic achievements can be made, communication and interaction in class are quality, learner motivation can be increased, and classroom management is effective (Cubukcu, 2013). Although the participants expressed their positive emotions in profession in different ways, whether that being explicit or implicit, it can be concluded that they have a sound affection with their profession and regard teaching English as an enjoyable and productive process.

As mentioned above, teacher identity is fluid and keeps being shaped subject to various factors. Similarly, emotional capital is dynamic and can change "over the course of occupational experiences…in social practice" (Cottingham, 2016, p. 446). It must be acknowledged that potential career challenges may weaken teachers'

positive emotions in the reality of teaching and that negative emotions arising from workplace practices are evitable (Pillen et al., 2013). Different from previous research conducted with pre-service teachers or novice teachers who solely presented positive emotions in teaching profession (e.g. Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015), the study presented in this paper shows that in-service teachers may have negative emotions arising from their profession. Specifically, although most participants have expressed a positive attitude towards their professional identities, it cannot be neglected that some participants are unsatisfied with their profession, especially with their socioeconomic status or business value. This can be seen in the last category of collected drawings with an example shown in Figure 11.

This research finding is rather different from previous ones that Chinese English teachers' negative view of their professional identities are linked with lack of confidence in language proficiency and pedagogical skills (Xiong & Xiong, 2017), tensions between teachers and institutions (Tao & Bao, 2018), to name but a few. As can be seen from the aforementioned last category of pictures, some English teachers assume that they have to undertake heavy workload but are usually less paid. Although only a small number of participants are dissatisfied with their socioeconomic status in this research, it is safe to say that it actually corresponds to the situation that English teachers in China are given high demands (Wei, 2016) and reflects the broad picture that there exists a gap between Chinese teachers' workload and salary, which is the case for teachers of all disciplines, not only in English. According to the research done by the National Institute of Education Sciences (2014), in China, primary and secondary school teachers' average workload is much heavier than that of other OECD countries, but their average salary is significantly below the global level. Elmer and Crothall (2016) explore the issue of Chinese teachers' socioeconomic status from the perspective of national and local policies and find out that even though there is an explicit state system that clarifies a teacher's wage should include basic salary, performance pay, benefits, bonuses and subsidies to increase their wage, vague standards and arbitrary enforcement of these standards by schools and local governments mean that many teachers have not got any wage increases equivalent to their workload. In this case, it is understandable and acceptable that some research participants do not feel content with their socioeconomic status as English teachers. As mentioned earlier, a teacher's emotion displayed in profession may affect their working efficiency and teaching and learning outcome. Although how the participants' negative emotions could influence their work is not explored in this research, other researchers' works have spotlighted why it is necessary to address teachers' negative feelings and pay attention to their emotional labor, such as Stanley's (1999) research that indicates the negative effects of TESOL teachers' negative emotions on instructional practices, Tejeda, de González and de Jesús López Martínez's investigation (2016) that shows removing EFL teachers' negative emotions in profession could largely improve student academic success, Pishghadam, Zabetipour and Aminzadeh's (2016) study that reveals EFL teachers' negative feelings may influence teacher-student relationship and student learning motivation, Toraby and Modarresi's (2018) examination that discloses disclosing that EFL teachers' negative emotions may affect their pedagogical success and teaching outcome, to name but a few. In this sense, it must be admitted that in order to formulate teachers' positive emotional identity of their profession which can further facilitate teaching and learning, there exists a long-running battle of China's teachers for more decent work, emotional wellbeing and the remedy of overworked but underpaid profession. This requires the close cooperation of the leading sectors, education institutions, teachers and other stakeholders as well as the construction of systematic

emotional regulation mechanics that seem to be missing in China for teachers.

Limitations and Implications

A major limitation of this study lies in its insufficient data with regard to the participants' gender, education background, age and other information, the analysis of which might lead to richer and deeper research findings. As discussed above, identity is a complicated issue, and the construction and reconstruction of TESOL teachers' role identities are usually affected by various contexts. Since the intersection of these factors may influence a language teacher's professional identity, researchers could focus more on how in-service English teachers' identities are influenced and shaped by these factors or on the relationships between their identities and the various contexts they have been exposed to. Besides, a teacher's perception of professional identity can determine their teaching practices as well as teaching proficiency. The research presented in this paper leaves a gap that little insight is drawn regarding how effective the participant English teachers' teaching is or the teaching efficiency of the English teachers who have different role identities. Future research may focus on this so that more valuable insight could be drawn for teacher development.

Another non-negligible limitation of this study is about the data collection method. Although drawing has an advantage over other research methods in the manner that it could explore the subjects' perceptions more deeply, chances are that people may read the same picture in different ways and thus generate differing views due to the subjectivity of drawing itself. In this case, in future application of drawing as a research method, despite of the requirement of verbal explanation for the analysis accuracy of drawings and the content analysis used in this study to minimize the subjectivity and make certain the result validity, researchers may need to take into consideration the discussion of the pictures with the participants during data collection and analysis process in order to better understand the formulation of drawings subject to "the conversation that occurred around them and what context brought them into being" (Woodhouse, 2012, as cited in Horne, Masley, & Allison-Love, 2017, slide 16).

Conclusion

The charm of teacher identity lies in its flexibility and diversity. In this study, by using drawings to depict understanding of teaching English in China, the English teachers who were at their mid-career stage presented a range of professional identities. Generally, they considered their teacher selves positive, capable and versatile, and their professional identities were related to a knowledge transmitter whose main responsibility was to teach English by utilizing ICT and pedagogical skills. This somehow reflects a traditional teacher role in China. However, it is interesting and even inspiring to note that some teachers have gradually developed a sense of cooperation, which invites the participation of students, colleagues, family members and other stakeholders and moves towards a student-centered mindset that is different from the traditional teacher identity that is the dominant knowledge transmitter, which shows the diversity of attributes and role identities English teachers have. Despite the positive teacher identities that most participants have conveyed and are often discussed in literature and official discourses, some English teachers have also expressed their negative feelings with their

profession, especially with their little economic value. Professional identity is shaped by various factors, whether that being personal or contextual. It must be acknowledged that potential career challenges may weaken teachers' positive emotions in the reality of teaching as they encounter challenges and difficulties at workplace. This research reveals that some in-service teachers may be burdened with negative feelings as teachers encounter different practices in schools and professional development. This does shed light on the necessity in China of emotional positive change from a teacher, which is "the empowerment of harmony to achieve the homeostasis of the teacher's teaching system, an educational practice based in the handling of emotions from the acknowledgement of one self" (Flores, 2015, n.p.) so that they can promote learning and positive emotional status in their profession. This, along with teacher professional development, will be a continuous process that requires the close cooperation of various stakeholders.

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Author Information

Hengzhi Hu

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5232-913X

National University of Malaysia

43600 UKM, 43600 Bangi, Selangor

Malaysia

Contact e-mail: *p108937@siswa.ukm.edu.my*

Feifei Huang

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8209-7018

Monash University

Wellington Rd, Clayton VIC 3800

Australia

Ying He

iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3051-1891

Monash University

Wellington Rd, Clayton VIC 3800

Australia